

Epistle of the 26th Central European Gathering / 1st CEYM 2023

25th-28th May 2023 in the Rzemieslnik Hotel, Gdansk, Poland

Dear Friends,

We are writing to you from the shores of the Baltic Sea, where we had our gathering, in beautiful weather. We were more than 50 friends from 9 countries from Europe (Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom) and Australia, in person and online.

We received greetings from EMES, the Scottish General Meeting, German and Swedish Yearly Meetings and the Manchester and Alton Area Meetings. We felt held in the light by friends spiritually supporting us from afar.

We can say, without exaggeration, that Quaker history was written here. As we put it in our minute at the end of the second day of the gathering: "On this 26th day of May 2023, the CEG became the Central European Yearly Meeting."

"Diversity is our strength" was the theme of the weekend and on the first evening we found inspiration from our thoughts on diversity shared during a special Meeting for worship.

A Friend came up with a metaphor of threads of different colours being woven into one cord which binds all of us together.

In between the Meetings there were plenty of opportunities to get to know each other, including music and singing. Walking in silence along the beach offered a new method of Meeting for worship.

On Saturday our main event was a public Meeting for worship for peace in Gdansk Old Town. It took place in front of a medieval prison where Quakers had been incarcerated in the 17th century. We were delighted to see members of the public not only taking notice but also joining us for some time.

On Sunday, during a meeting to reflect on how we can support newcomers, the thought came up that we should nurture the idea of Awakening to Quakership – in other words, people who show up at our Meetings already are Quakers without knowing it.

Among the presentations, we heard a report on our efforts to support refugees from Ukraine. We appreciate the generous donations that have been received from around the world for this important work.

The Gathering was held bilingually with very good translations.

Two of the most visible members of non-human species present in our gathering were Arturo the parrot and Dexter the dog, who, thankfully, observed our rules of silence at all times.

We are looking forward to meeting again in Budapest in 2024.