

Epistle from the FWCC Europe and Middle East Section Annual Meeting held Online, 7 – 9 May 2021

And truth flourishes as the rose, and the lilies do grow among the thorns... for the seed Christ is over all (George Fox, 1663):

Discerning how we rebuild and grow with hope

To Friends everywhere, greetings:

Dear friends, kjære venner, chers amis, liebe Freunde, lieve vrienden, queridos amigos, cari amici, kära vänner, kære venner, rakkaat ystävät, kallid sõbrad, drazí přátelé, dārgie draugi, dragi prijatelji, Kedves Barátaim, drodzy przyjaciele, a chairde, Salamaat Asdiqa.

One hundred and two Friends from all corners of Europe, the Middle East and further afield met together online from 7-9 May 2021 to share and worship together. We spent our time thinking more deeply about what the future holds for Friends in our Section. We welcomed Friends visiting from all other sections of FWCC as well as many speakers, who enriched our meeting with their valuable insight into Quaker work taking place within the Section and the role that EMES plays within it.

As Friends, we rely on each other to serve and further the work of our Society. Service connects us with each other and nurtures our spiritual growth. Many of our meetings have faced challenges in maintaining community in a pandemic, and we heard how EMES has helped isolated Friends to connect, creating space for Quakerism within a new and enthusiastic community. We wondered how to take advantage of this technology, without leaving behind those Friends who don't connect online. We struggled with the paradox of opportunities offered by online meetings while acknowledging the absence that remains when we hold our meetings online.

The pandemic has also created challenges for Quaker work that relies on holding space for private discussions, for example at QUNO and QCEA. It has strained the links between organisations working beyond the borders of Europe. The events of the past year have shown how such insights can offer important support for efforts to tackle the global climate & health crises we find ourselves in.

During our sessions, we were reminded of those specific experiences the Quaker community has long held as true and central to our service: experiences such as the need for a levelling of hierarchies, or the need for dialogue and building bridges. Woodbrooke showed us how they responded to a year of challenges and changed plans, by offering increased access to online courses and worship to Friends throughout Europe. Young Friends showed us a video of how they used jit.si technology to build and maintain community during lockdown, and we heard about international Quaker work linking climate policies with peace and human rights concerns.

The FWCC World Office shared their work addressing issues of sustainability, connectivity and diversity. The FWCC World Office and QUNO will attend the UN Climate talks taking place in Glasgow in 2021, liaising with others to put our faith into action. The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust described how they have responded to the powerful surge of calls for social justice in the course of 2020. They have

acknowledged past involvement in slavery and colonialism, opening a path to an apology and a commitment to action.

Speakers from Brummana and Ramallah reminded us that lilies do grow among the thorns of conflict. Brummana High School continues to live out Quaker values, touching the lives of its students and their families intellectually and spiritually, whilst holding space for community in the midst of the profound challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and Lebanon's political stalemate and economic collapse. Ramallah Friends Meeting told us how they are dealing with the combined pressures of dwindling attendance and the pandemic in the face of persistent conflict. They asked us to consider the relationship between charity which alleviates suffering, and social justice which addresses its causes. We were deeply moved by the plight of our friends in the Middle East and have discussed how we might best support them as we continue to hold them in the Light.

We have been challenged and encouraged to identify the seeds of hope and change and how we can nurture them and make changes in our own lives. We recognise the privileges that many of us have in Europe & endeavour to think & act as true fellow citizens taking a global view, sharing each other's burdens and not just protecting ourselves. We have been reminded of the powerful tradition of Friends to take radical action in advance of society around them. Letting their lives be examples at moments of transition in the world.

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised, is faithful. Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."
Hebrews 10, 23 & 24

In Friendship, i vennskap, i vänskap, i venskab, ystävydessä, bien amicalement, in Freundschaft, in Vriendschap, en amistad, in amicizia, v přátelství, u priateljstvu, draudzība, a barátságban, sōpruses, w przyjaźni, le cairdeas, fi alsadaqa.

Signed
Ethel Livermore
Clerk FWCC-EMES