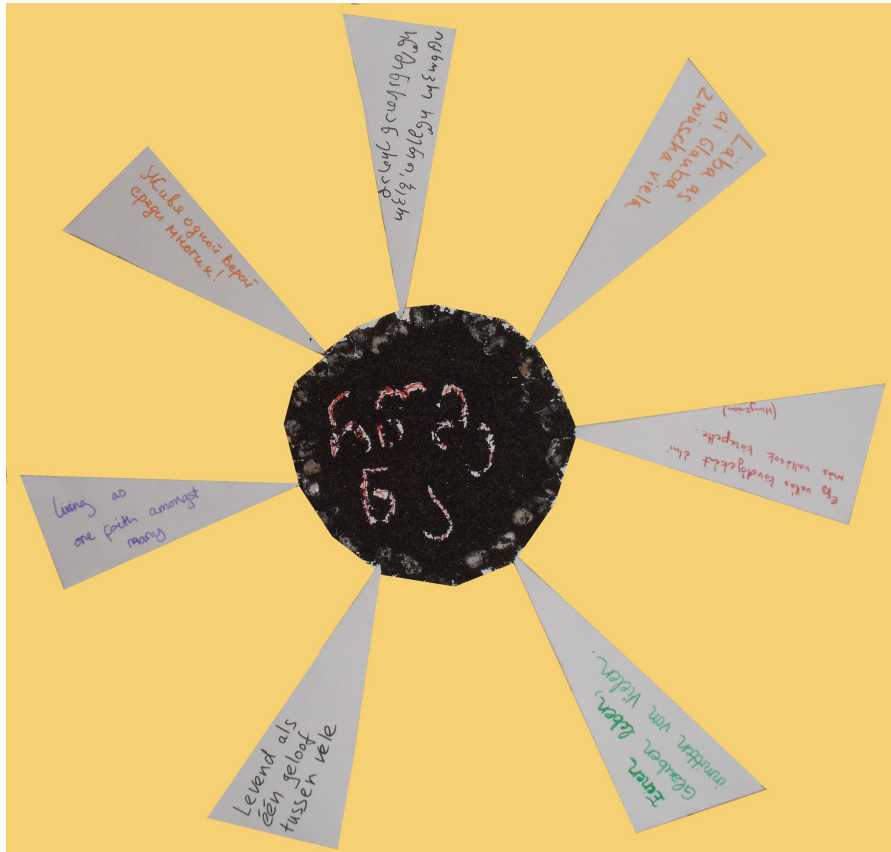


EMEYF Spring Gathering 2015 --- Ureki/Georgia, 4.-11. April 2015 --- EPISTLE



This year's EMEYF Spring Gathering took place in Georgia, after several Georgian Friends could not get visas to join us at past events. This was the start of a long journey that ended with us arriving in Ureki on Saturday 4th April for a week full of surprises. Our community came into being while huddled under blankets at our very first Meeting for Worship, as it poured with rain outside.

If anything, Georgia is a land filled with contrasts: blankets and sunburn, mountains and the black sea and the old mingled with the new. Our theme "Living as one faith amongst many" was present throughout the week. All around us we faced the uncertainty of being in a different culture, experiencing language barriers even within our group; yet feeling the certainty of the community we built, as a rock in the storm. We had several opportunities for worship sharing, starting with our personal spiritual journeys and ending with our various theological views. Many other conversations happened, while we were waiting for the gas cookers to slowly heat up our inventive concoctions that we prepared together. We heard the cows, which wandered freely around the village, moo-ing during Meeting for Worship for Business and felt joy as Saskia played football with locals and Peter played football with us, even in the train station.

There are many other moments that strengthened our community: driving up the mountains and walking in the snow, laughing with the Quaker Hulk, going swimming in the Black Sea, singing in epilogue, experiencing Georgian driving, trying the famous Nabeghlavi spring water and eating many khachapuri.

In our sessions we explored our own cultural and religious identities as well as ideas and thoughts about conflict resolution. We learned about Georgian culture from a guest speaker and held our own session on linguistics and the Georgian alphabet. One of our Georgian Friends told us about the conflicts that have shaped the country's recent history.

We experienced first hand the generosity of welcome in Georgia for example as we visited the mosque in Batumi, received traditional beans and bread from the owner of our hostel along with many offers of chacha and wine and friendly greetings. Although there were cultural differences between us, which caused confusion and called for patience and understanding at times, we were all left with an impression of warmth. This was often particularly obvious when little Peter, our youngest participant aged 2, was met with smiles and affection wherever we went.

We are very excited about the All Age Gathering we are planning for the summer of next year as part of the celebration for the 30ish anniversary of EMEYF. We hope that the bonds we have either renewed or formed will only grow stronger at our next gathering. As we go back to our communities, we hold each other in the light, enriched by our week together, taking with us the spirit of embracing uncertainty and living adventurously.