

EMEYF Spring Gathering 2017 – Epistle

To all Friends everywhere,

Thirty-three Young Friends, including five children, gathered in Marszewiec, Poland, from 10–17 April 2017, to experience fellowship, consider business, and explore together our theme of sustainability.

Our journeys from nine European countries to an agrotourism farm near Poznań have involved plane, train, bus, car, boat, tram, bike and foot, and have helped us begin to consider what it means to be sustainable – as a community, as beings within the natural world, and in our human relationships.

You're welcome to join us;
regardless of whether
we speak the same language,
love brings us together.

This year's Spring Gathering community was large and as we came together in the first days we found an overarching sense of seeking – and finding – a spiritual community. We have had a good time sharing silence, emotions, and actions, and we looked after ourselves and our community by joining hands in the kitchen, by sharing spiritual warmth, and by bridging language and other barriers through patience, enthusiasm, and song.

Sing with me, play with me, doodle or talk.
I'll give you a hug and we'll go for a walk.

Although we did not manage to reach out to young Friends in Poland as much as we had hoped, we were able to connect to our surroundings through trips to the local markets, through games of hide and seek and cycling on the farm grounds, and through a day spent exploring Poznań. We sought to be a creative community; finding solutions, adapting to change, and accommodating our differing needs as they arose, as well as creating art together, sharing songs and playing games.

To be aware enough to tell
just how you are, and what's not well;
our silence gives us space to grow;
what will come up, you never know.

In responding to the World Plenary meeting in Peru we asked what sustainability means to us and thought about what concrete things EMEYF can do to be a sustainable Quaker community. We struggled with this, as our diversity brought to mind how varied the preconditions and possibilities can be when seeking sustainability, and how living in sustainable ways can look quite different in different circumstances.

Beyond EMEYF, as individuals and as members of other communities, we have a range of roles to fulfill and a range of challenges to face. The tension between these different aspects has led us to continue questioning what practical steps we can take, individually and collectively. How can we interact with people? How can we sustain our structures and our community? How do we use resources?

Sustainability is relevant to our lives; it is political, social, and economic, it is important in our personal relationships, and we face the global challenge of working towards environmental sustainability. We have tried to make sure that sustainability is reflected in how we do things, now and in the future – testing ideas and solutions within our community. This included cooking vegetarian and vegan meals, buying local vegetables when possible, as well as reusing cups, planting trees, and upcycling our milk and juice cartons.

The theme was present throughout the gathering, including in our Meetings for Worship to consider business, which touched upon questions of sustaining our community. This meant challenging ourselves – both in the decisions that we made, and in the process we went through while making them. We found strength in the understanding that, in some matters, “every generation has to ask the same questions for themselves”.

Business takes up large parts of our time;
intense but rewarding; obstacles to climb.
We struggle in making our problems quite clear,
discerning the answers we need now and here.

Throughout our struggles in business, and the difficulty in maintaining a balance between work, play, the outside world, and sleep, we made sure to ask how our friends were feeling, being ready to give them a hug and offer support. The range of weather at the gathering reflected the range of emotions, with the week including sun, hail, wind, rain and rainbows.

Our workshops and discussions allowed us to try new things for our daily lives that can help us develop as humans. We cannot yet know whether this gathering will have the impact that we hope for. It may have an effect beyond our community, but

like a pebble thrown into a lake,
we cannot see the ripples we make.

This week’s experience of living in a loving and purposeful community has drawn us closer together, even during difficult times. We leave, closer in the Light, and with new and strengthened friendships.