

Epistle from the FWCC Europe and Middle East Section Annual Meeting

held at Åsane Folkehøgskole, Hylkje, overlooking Sørfjorden just north of Bergen, Norway
21 – 24 June 2018

A New Heaven and a New Earth (Revelation 21:1): Finding New Light in turbulent times

To Friends everywhere: dear friends, kjære venner, chers amis, liebe Freunde, liebe vrienden, queridos amigos, cari amici, kära vänner, kære venner, rakkaat ystävät, kallid sõbrad, draží přátelé, dārgie draugi, Kedves Barátaim, drodzy przyjaciele, a chairde, Salamaat Asdiqa, greetings.

On the longest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere, nearly 90 friends from 17 countries gathered to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Europe and Middle East Section (EMES) of Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) and to support Norwegians in their 200th anniversary celebration of Quakers in Norway. Participating were former EMES executive secretaries Franco Perna (1983-1993), Hans Weening (1993-1998), Tony Fitt (1998-2002), and clerks Marianne IJspeert and Rachel Bewley-Bateman who served before, during, and after the widespread use of the Internet.

We recalled conditions in Europe and the Middle East in 1938 when EMES began and how Quakers brought peaceful alternatives through their faith and action throughout the years despite totalitarianism then and growing populism today. We acknowledged the challenge of maintaining Friends decision-making processes in face of the realities brought us today by electronic communications, social media and the Internet.

Per Ingvar Haukeland, a published Norwegian eco-philosopher and teacher, of Norway Yearly Meeting gave the keynote presentation *Heavenearth in the Light of all things new*. He stressed the significance of this gathering being held at a Folkehøgshole (folk high school) of life-long learning. He believes sustainability is the most important Quaker value combining all Quaker testimonies. In a wide-ranging talk he cited philosophers, poets, civil rights pioneers, and Quaker authors on subjects such as darkness and light and the importance of the earth within and around us.

The proposed 2020 – 2030 EMES Strategic Plan was then presented in plenary session and 9 focus groups were formed to meet so that participants could share their perspectives on the plan's strengths, gaps, priorities, and how each of us want to contribute to carrying out the plan. The key intention of the Strategy plan is to ensure a sustainable framework for Friends to find each other, to meet and to share with each other on whatever the Spirit calls us to work on. Following further discernment, the plan was accepted the following morning.

Special interest groups on Friday afternoon were the EMEYF (Europe and Middle East Young Friends) ongoing Living Archives project in which over 30 years of EMEYF material in Quaker House Brussels were offered to spark conversation about our journey from the past to the present, and our path forward to the future; QCEA (Quaker Council for European Affairs) action on Peace and Human Rights today; and Experiment with Light in Nature in which participants gathering outside awakened their senses, widened their vision, literally 'came to their senses', and connected with heaven and earth.

An evening creative workshop followed with participants producing works of art with ingredients from nature organized to express deeper meaning. There was also a workshop on the Book of

Revelations, while some able and willing Friends took a step further, taking spiritually nourishing plunges into the fjord at various points! Afterwards friends sat in small groups in long and deep conversations in the northern light that lasted until midnight and beyond.

In plenary session the next morning, this theme of connection to our earth continued as we heard from Susanna Mattingly, Sustainability Communications Officer, FWCC World Office, London on *Sustainability Matters: Every Action Matters*, how Quakers worldwide are working to sustain life on earth. <http://fwcc.world/sustainability>

Facebook: [@fwccworldoffice](https://www.facebook.com/fwccworldoffice) She cited a new resource, the QUNO (Quaker United Nations Office) publication: *A Negotiators Toolkit, Second Edition* (April 2018) on climate change. <http://www.quno.org/resources>

Saturday afternoon offered four excursions: walking tour of Bergen city centre, tour of Bergen museums, long hike in the hills near the school, and a short hike. Special interest groups followed: a fascinating History of Norway Yearly Meeting; more discussion on Sustainability; more on EMEYF ongoing Living Archive Project; the challenge of the EMES Nomination process; and this year's Quaker protests at the Eurosatory Arms Fair in Paris. The workshops were followed by a much-appreciated musical evening of Norwegian fiddle playing, folk dance, and singing.

Fifteen-minute Epilogues closed out each day: loving circles from within outward on the first evening; and then a sample of programmed worship from Kenya with singing, dancing, and pastoral ministry on the second and third evenings.

Presentations and ministry throughout the weekend all emphasized that *every action matters* in finding a new Heaven, a new Earth, and new Light.

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

Signed on behalf of EMES
Saskia Kuhlmann and Lee Taylor
Co-Clerks