

Epistle 2015

From the Annual Meeting of the Netherlands Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Netherlands, Bennekom, May 29, 30 and 31, 2015

In a wooded and sunny environment waited us a warm welcome, inspired participants and spontaneous children. We quickly felt at home and supported by peace and quiet. We know we are united in our common faith and we experience unity in our striving for peace. The theme was: "Working for peace, our peace testimony in the 21st century."

We are grateful that young people from neighbouring Yearly Meetings also attended our Annual Meeting. Several Friends shared their experience of working for peace: one of them told us about the inward seeking through silence and meditation. The purpose of this inner journey is to transform towards unity with that of God in each of us. In the Meeting for Worship on Saturday morning we listened to our Friend of the Evangelical Quakers from Hungary. His deep witness and the statement of Isaiah 30:15 was impressive: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in patience and trust your strength!"

Another Friend shared her contribution to peace in the family and in the immediate environment, including through mediation, coaching of and teaching languages to an asylum seeker.

Experiences were shared of the work of Friends abroad, such as the project of the "Wall Museum" at Bethlehem, where stories of Palestinians are made visible on posters on the separation wall. Through QCEA we support the action to prevent violence committed in "hate crime", which is violence against religious or ethnic groups. With great thanks we said goodbye to Alexandra Bosbeer as the representative of QCEA, whose task within QCEA is coming to an end. Our Quaker representative in the Council of Churches told about the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace of the World Council of Churches. In the context of this Pilgrimage a group of young adults from very different member churches came together one weekend. They had very positive reactions and welcome suggestions on how to realise the Pilgrimage. It is especially about initiatives by local churches where religion is the Source for creating social Justice. One activity in the context of the Pilgrimage is a Peace March to the Peace Palace in The Hague on Sunday, September 20. We are also encouraged to demonstrate at the major arms fair (Eurosatory) in Paris in June 2016.

The contributions about the theme of our 2014 Annual Gathering "What moves us as Quakers?" have been brought together in a beautiful magazine.

The responses to the questionnaire about our individual peace building activities will be summarized on the website (www.quakers.nu)

We ask our Monthly Meetings to see how else we can support Peace activities by Dutch Quakers. Contributing to the Quaker Relief Fund is another way to put our Quaker Peace Testimony into practice.

In the base groups we shared experiences about our incentives and motivation and on how to connect this with peace supporting activities. The "50-ways-to-build-peace" indicate how many possibilities there are. Sometimes strong feelings of powerlessness are expressed at the sight of the large numbers of refugees crossing the Mediterranean many of whom drown. In some of the base groups participants put the emphasis on hope, peace and service as the key motivation to work actively for peace worldwide. Some Friends testify about their own experiences with the peace work of Quakers in Kenya and Burundi.

As a group we were led in prayer for peace, which gave us hope and a real opportunity to experience the power of prayer. We sang the song "Prayer for Peace" and this gave us the feeling of being connected with each other in our struggle for non-violence and peace.

Sharing with the young children around a campfire in the woods was a pleasant activity in which we felt at one with them, with each other and with nature.

In the final session of our base groups we formulated firm steps which we can take as individuals and as a group towards inner peace and peace in the world. Sharing these steps supports us, knowing that we are working together to the same goal.

We send our Peace greetings to Friends worldwide.

On behalf of the Friends gathered at the Annual Meeting of Netherlands Yearly Meeting

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