

To Friends everywhere

Norwegian Quakers, gathered for their 203rd annual meeting June 26-27, 2021, send greetings to Friends everywhere. We are still in the pandemic which prevents us from gathering physically as has been our custom for over 200 years. Even so, this weekend 38 Quakers from all over Norway, of different ages and including guests from Sweden and Finland, gathered in the Spirit to share ideas, meet for business and enjoy song and play. During the past year and a half, we have held most of our meetings digitally, and we are happy that this time technology helped us connect and maintain our sense of community. Unfortunately, we were unable to offer a separate children's program this year. This is the second year running that we have had to hold our annual meeting digitally, and we are looking forward to 2022, when we will be able to join Friends from other Nordic countries in Kungälv, Sweden, for a joint gathering of our annual meetings.

We are grateful that the covid-19 pandemic has not affected us quite as badly as we feared. But our thoughts and compassion go to people in other countries where the situation is much more dramatic. We hold them in the Light, hoping that joint efforts worldwide may overcome this frightful disease. Our privileges as citizens in a peaceful and affluent part of the world, oblige us to work for a more just distribution of resources and more careful management of our common environment and climate.

Through his PhD thesis, Hans Eirik Aarek has examined the development of the Norwegian Society of Friends in the 20th century. His theme for the keynote lecture was: "What is it that maintains the identity of the Society of Friends over time?" Up until about 1970, the Norwegian Society of Friends went through extensive change and modernisation, in tension between being a "sect" and being a more "ordinary" denomination. Aarek found that the Society of Friends has done both – stood firmly on fundamental principles while both influencing and adapting to development in the general society, depending on the issue at hand. This valuable knowledge will help us understand ourselves a little better, as well as our relations to the world around us. We gathered in smaller breakout rooms to explore these perspectives in more detail.

The annual meeting also heard from Quaker Service Norway, which is facing new terms as the Norwegian Government stopped funding them through NORAD*. This will affect projects in Palestine and Great Lakes, Africa, that Quaker Service Norway has supported for many years. The organisation finds itself in a demanding situation of change, adapting to the new, reduced terms.

During the last few years, Norway Yearly Meeting itself has met new demands from Norwegian authorities in the form of increasing requirements regarding reports and structural details. In our business session, we discerned and approved our new constitution which will enable us to meet these requirements without compromising our traditions. Recruitment and work for children and young members remain issues that we return to regularly. We want to strengthen this work to ensure that our community will continue into the future.

We feel refreshed and strengthened in a deep and loving community with one another and with Friends worldwide. Our Society of Friends provides us with a spiritual home in which we can breathe freely and share thoughts and inspiration as well as meet challenges. We acknowledge this with joy and in deep gratitude.

Signed in and on behalf of Norway Yearly Meeting
27th Day of 6th Month, 2021

Hanne Hognestad
Clerk

* NORAD- Norwegian Agency for Development