

VÄNNERNAS SAMFUND I SVERIGE

The Religious Society of Friends in Sweden

To Friends everywhere

For our 82nd Yearly Meeting, some forty participants from Sweden, Finland, Gambia, Norway, Great Britain and Austria met at Svartbäcken amongst the wood anemones and trees bursting into leaf. In different discussion fora, as well as musical dissonance games and role-play, we have worked with our theme: “Non-violence: Possibilities and Limitations”.

Rather than non-violence, our invited guest, Jalka, from Austria, talked about learning to quarrel, so that we meet in the conflict and become more human – “This is just as important as learning to brush your teeth”. She said that Quakers often equate conflict with violence, but that avoiding confrontation is also a form of violence. Instead we can be more real for each other by saying how things are, listening to ourselves and understanding “the other”.

The annual report of our activities has given us insights into the work that Swedish Quakers are engaged in nationally and internationally. Quaker Service Sweden facilitates the planting of trees to protect crops and the building of bridges between people. The Swedish Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Israel and Palestine, where Swedish Quakers are included in the steering group, is active in these two areas and supports both sides in the work for peace. EMES is oriented towards “finding hidden Quakers” in Central Europe, so that they in turn find the Religious Society of Friends.

For every year that passes we get better at making the content more accessible and the meeting more inclusive. This year we had a hearing loop for the first time. At the same time as we reminded each other about breaks in the circuit and distance from the microphone, we “quarrelled” about our own and others’ needs, so that they would not be overlooked. Children and adults took part together, in mixed groups, in the work with the theme. The children also had their own programme, which reflected their own wishes, and included everything from grilled marshmallows to improvised song lyrics.

It was unusual to have as many Attenders as Friends with us. It signalled a vitalisation and led to even more shared experiences. We could not lapse into Quaker jargon, but introduced our methods in a spirit of mutually care between clerks and participants. The meetings for worship for business were disciplined, engaged and at times filled with laughter.

We were glad to hear about the World Plenary Meeting in Peru, where participants from different Quaker traditions found a kinship beyond outward forms. A word that recurred during our yearly meeting was transformation. Making the most of change, renewal, and young Friends. The generations working together.

The threshing session on members’ financial contributions to the Society gave us an opportunity to discuss the subject openly in groups in an atmosphere of trust. In safety, we could share feelings, ideas and experiences – and even quarrel a bit.

We are grateful for the energies that have created both the meeting we have just taken part in and other forms of meetings the world over. At the same time, we see how ambitious activities sometimes collide with materialistic economic circumstances, where one of the questions is how we, with our Quaker ideas as the starting point, should manage our finances in the world of which we are a part.

At the same time as we have met in the spring sunshine and warmth, a humanitarian crisis is taking place, where people in flight are deprived of their human rights. We realise, with pain, how difficult it is to make a real difference in such a situation. We unite with what is expressed in the letter of greetings from Britain Yearly Meeting. The importance of joining together and welcoming refugees, not just in words, but also in practice.

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