

Among Friends

No 114: Spring 2009

Published by the Europe and Middle East Section of Friends World Committee for Consultation
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Dear Friends,

It is said that travel broadens the mind – and what a lot of travel we Quakers seem to do. Much of this issue is devoted to tales of travel, gatherings and the learning we derive from them. None of us feels entirely at ease with the carbon foot-print we are collectively accumulating, and a few Friends set an example arriving at Moyallon, in Northern Ireland, by train and boat to avoid flying. Some young Friends travelled from Istanbul to Damascus rather than flying all the way. I was hoping to go to Nordic Yearly Meeting at the end of June by boat from the North of England, but discovered to my great disappointment that ferries between Newcastle and Göteborg were discontinued in 2006.

A concern with the future of our planet is very alive among Friends, and we are all interested in contributing to the debate and the decisions that will emerge from the Copenhagen conference in December. What do Quakers have to say that is distinctive, even prophetic? We need to co-ordinate our efforts and our message, see the call to connect on this issue on page 3.

There are other ways that we can influence decision-making. As Anya Whiteside, Programme Assistant at QCEA, reminds us, many of us have an opportunity to vote for the European Parliament in June. Which concerns should Friends raise with those who are asking for our vote?

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Rainbow over Moyallon Meeting House

We are seeking to improve the way we communicate with one another across the Section to limit the number of face-to-face meetings that are necessary, and to improve the effectiveness of the meetings we still have. EMES' new website, currently under construction at www.fwcc-emes.com, is almost complete and we are making increased use of web-based groups to exchange information and ideas.

But it is hard to replace the sheer joy of face-to-face encounters with f/Friends, and the impact on our spiritual growth of encounters with "the Other" – whether the Other is another faith, or another Quaker tradition.

Marisa Johnson, Executive Secretary

5th Swiss–German Crossing the Border Meeting Lindenberg 2009

Kerstin Mangels wrote about this gathering in
German. Translation by Brigitte Seger

Aren't there enough meetings to attend, as for worship, for business, Yearly Meetings and group meetings? In those regular meetings often there is not enough time to get deeper into a subject and to open up more personally. So this is exactly what the „Grenztreffen“ is meant for. George Fox said “Friends, get together and get to know each other in what is eternal and in what was before the world existed.”

We could feel “that of God” over the first March weekend in the Black Forest. It was “Forgiveness” that had motivated 18 friends from Switzerland and Germany to join in a guesthouse of Franciscan nuns in Lindenberg. Their friendly hospitality and the snow-covered mountains – in addition to the heavy subject - made it a memorable and moving stay. It surely was outstanding!

Crossing the Border Meetings since 2004

Grenztreffen is a rather young tradition of German speaking Friends that started in 2004 with the subject Prayer, followed by Our Father, the Inner Light and Money. It usually is structured by short lectures, periods of silent worship, exchange of thoughts in smaller groups and in the plenaries, circle dances, walks etc.

One step towards Forgiveness

This year a group of friends had prepared ideas and material about Forgiveness : it started with the recitation of C.F. Meyer's famous poem Die Füße im Feuer. In it a nobleman gives shelter to a knight whom he later recognises as torturer and murderer of his wife. During the night the knight realises their disastrous past encounter as well and he expects to be killed. In the end the host leaves the revenge to God, and his inner struggle becomes obvious as his hair turns grey overnight.

A personal contribution

Wilhelm Prasse gave us a personal talk about the essence of his experience in different periods of his life and in different roles, both as a private person, and as a professional. Wilhelm's lecture is too intense and subtle



Dancing at Lindenberg – photo by Kerstin Mangels

to be summarized here, but he is willing to forward it to interested Friends.

Freedom through Forgiveness

Denise Vosseler from the Zürich Group showed us excerpts from the film *Forgiving Dr. Mengele*. Eva Kor, now a US citizen, calls herself a guinea pig of the ill-famed Nazi doctor M., who made obscure experiments on twin children in Auschwitz. Eva Kor wanted to know more about the aims of those experiments and made contact with another German doctor who, at the time, was assisting Dr. Mengele. It startled her that this man was open to her enquiries and – most striking of all – has been suffering from nightmares to this day.

So these two finally met at a point where each could understand the other. Eva Kor felt the grace of forgiving this doctor. Most of her fellow victims, however, reject her conciliatory attitude and so she actually moves in a vacuum between victims and offenders. There might be a certain loneliness in not being understood by her fellow-sufferers. But from the expression on her face one could tell that she had let go her role as victim and has achieved a new kind of freedom.

Overcoming boundaries

All of us are offenders and victims. All of us know guilt feelings and how difficult it is to ask for forgiveness. And all of us know how it feels being the innocent victim. And we all know that it does not help to abide in feelings of hate, and revenge. All of us are more or less trapped

within our boundaries . We shared our experiences of pain, resentment, shame, disappointment, mourning and relief. Some of us dipped into our deepest feelings and had the confidence to share them with Friends. And, I am sure, some boundaries have broadened or have started to do so.....

News in brief

BE-DE-FR-LU-NL Border Meeting 2009

The Belgium and Luxembourg Monthly is hosting this year's Border Meeting at the Oude Abdij Kortenberg near Brussels in Belgium 18-20 September. As they should be, the borders are interpreted fluidly and you are welcome.

The purpose of the weekend is to look at the relationship of Quakerism to other faiths - including Christianity - in the light of our individual spiritual journeys and our corporate discoveries. This will obviously include areas such as Buddhism, Vedanta and Sufism, where there is a natural harmony with Quakerism, but also those faiths that may appear to conflict with Quaker Testimonies. We will examine ways in which Quakers can work to bring harmony where there is potential for conflict. The content will include talks and dialogue, meditation, physical movement and relaxation, and possibly music and/or chanting.

The Meeting will be guided by Jim Pym.

Go to <http://www.oudeabdijkortenberg.be/> for the venue.

Contact border.meeting@telenet.be for more details.

Calling all Quakers who will be in Copenhagen in December 2009

This is a call to coordinate – the Climate Summit in December 2009 in Copenhagen will attract a large number of people for different reasons – some will be there to represent their governments, some will represent intergovernmental organizations, yet other will be there as NGO representatives or simply to be there.

There will be Quakers among them (we assume); FWCC/QPSW/QCEA are trying to find a way of assessing whether there is any scope/interest/enthusiasm for a Quaker presence and a Quaker voice.

The next Grenztreffen (that usually also includes German speaking French Friends) will be from March 19 to 21, 2010.

To discern the scope for this, we need to know who among Friends is going to be there and what you are willing to participate in. Ideas that have been thrown into the ring are: an official presence under the FWCC banner (depends on whether we can agree on what we would say if we got the chance to say something), a worship sharing event as a side event for delegates to raise our concerns in a Quaker context.

Please help us with coordination:

If you are going to Copenhagen, please tell us the following:

Your name

Your contact details

Your Meeting/YM/other Q body you belong to

Your role in Copenhagen – who are you going for/with

Would you be willing/able to participate in some Quaker presence in Copenhagen?

Would you be willing/able to uphold a worship sharing event?

Please send your response to Martina Weitsch at QCEA - mweitsch@qcea.org

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+44 (0)121 472 5171
b.p.dandelion@bham.ac.uk
www.woodbrooke.org.uk






THE UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre

The European Parliament, Our stake in the system

Anya Whiteside, *Programme Assistant at QCEA, invites Friends to play their part in the forthcoming elections to the European Parliament*

The European Parliament directly represents almost 500 million European citizens in the EU. European people have their daily lives affected, from the price of their mobile phone charges to their ability to work freely across Europe, by the European Parliament's decisions. The European Parliament is the voice of Europeans in the EU.

All over the world people living outside the EU's borders are also directly affected by EU decisions. The EU is the largest donor of international aid worldwide, it is a leading figure in negotiating multilateral CO2 cuts and provides one of the most comprehensive trade blocks in the world.

So why are the European Parliament elections not followed with anywhere near the anticipation or interest of national elections? One of the reasons is that the European Parliament is only one part of the complex machinery that makes up the EU. Who and how EU decisions get made is horrendously complicated. The two main decision making powers are the European Parliament, elected by the citizens of the EU and the Council of the EU, made up of the governments of all the EU member states. Two thirds of EU decisions are made jointly by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU while the others (and admittedly some of the most important decisions) are made predominantly by the Council of the EU. This means our national governments have a surprising amount of power to influence EU decisions, despite the frequent 'blame it on Brussels' attitude some of them may adopt.

Despite its limitations, some of which the Lisbon treaty will try to address, the European Parliament has a considerable amount of influence on EU policy. Despite this, voter turnout has been steadily dropping in the European Parliament elections ever since direct elections were introduced in 1979. Within Europe we appear to be taking our responsibility and opportunity for democratic involvement less and less seriously, throwing away our limited voice in EU affairs. It is also worth remembering that not voting is not just an abstinence from a political system we know little about, but may actively aid other parties whose values we may be fundamentally opposed to.



EU buildings – photo supplied by QCEA

What does our falling voter turnout mean? Does it mean Europeans no longer believe in democracy? That we are happy to allow politicians to make our laws without any input from ourselves? That we believe that European cooperation should be done away with? This seems unlikely. What seems more plausible is that within a busy, stressful world where we are constantly bombarded with different messages most of us don't feel we have the time or the energy to really engage with the debates happening at a European level. We feel incapable and disempowered to take part in debates, despite the fact that they affect our daily lives. This coupled with the EU and European Parliaments inability to provide understandable, accessible information about what it does and how it does it leaves us in a sad situation where interest in European affairs is low and voter turnout falling.

Advices and Queries no. 34 asks us to 'Remember your responsibilities as a citizen for the conduct of local, national and international affairs'. To move out of a situation where we turn our backs on democratic involvement in the EU we need to engage with European issues. We also need to demand that the issues are presented to us in a way that we can understand, dissecting the acronyms and 'Eurospeak' so that we have a European Union in which Europeans can truly participate in. But most importantly we must take advantage of the democratic opportunities that are open to us and vote in the election this June.

Want to find out more?

Visit QCEA's European Parliament election page:
<http://www.quaker.org/qcea/elections/index.htm> for

more information on the election process, upcoming issues and ideas for what to ask your local MEP candidate.

A vision for the Appointed Time

Marisa Johnson *reflects on the theme of the Section of the Americas Annual Meeting in Canby, Oregon, which she attended in March.*

“For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie” (Habakkuk 2-3), not a text I knew well, was the theme explored during the Section of the Americas Annual Meeting.

This was a trip to unfamiliar territory for me. I had only visited the States once before, in July 08, when we did a house-swap with a Friend from Baltimore, so I had already seen one shining sea, and now I found myself tantalizing close to the other one.

I arrived a few days ahead of the Annual Meeting, and was met at the airport by Anna and Keith Baker, who live in Newberg, Oregon, and are members of Northwest Yearly Meeting. I enjoyed lovely hospitality in their home, and Anna, who had been in the past a Fieldworker for the Section of the Americas, introduced me to the area (including a wonderful trip to the coast), and to local Friends' Churches. Northwest Yearly Meeting is home to Evangelical Friends, in the programmed tradition. Another Yearly Meeting, North Pacific, brings unprogrammed Friends together over roughly the same territory.

Anna guided me very gently through this introduction knowing, for having made the same journey herself in the opposite direction, that it could be bewildering, even painful. There are teachings of some Evangelical Meetings that I cannot accept easily. Yet I can see that it is very challenging for some Evangelical Friends that I should call myself a Christian at all, not having a belief in the divinity of Christ or regard Him as my Lord and Saviour.

I asked myself: “What can I learn from these Friends”? I learned that they take the study of the Bible and “coming to worship with hearts and minds prepared” advice very seriously, that their programmed worship can be very diverse indeed, and often includes silence, and that Meetings for Worship for Business are



*Anna Baker (right) & Elenita Bales at Canby
 Photo by Margaret Fraser*

conducted and carefully minuted in a most authentic Quaker spirit.

One evening Anna and I watched on television a fascinating in-depth interview with Karen Armstrong (surprising for me, who had a prejudiced view of American TV, in spite of my extremely limited experience of it!). The British former nun and author of books on religion has recently set up an ecumenical and inter-faith initiative to formulate a “Charter for Compassion” (<http://charterforcompassion.com/>), on the basis of the golden rule “That which is hateful to you do not do to others”, which she believes is at the heart of every major world faith. Our Friend Jean Zaru, Clerk of Ramallah Monthly Meeting is involved in this initiative.

As we explored the theme in the context of FWCC being the only international Quaker network that brings together Friends of all traditions, the relevance of the Golden Rule and of Compassion came to the fore for me. Unity based not on uniformity of belief or practice, but willingness to affirm each other in our diversity. It is my deepest hope that we can make this our Quaker Vision for this time and bear witness to it in the wider Christian family and in the world.



European and Middle East Young Friends

<http://emeyf.quaker.eu.org>

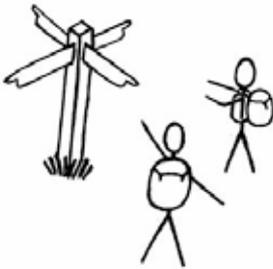
EMEYF Events

Annual Meeting

Venue:
Brussels, Belgium

Dates:
6-8 November 2009

Contact:



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EMEYF Spring Gathering in Syria

Hayley Gullen writes about a very special experience

The EMEYF (Europe and Middle East Young Friends) 2009 Spring Gathering in Syria was a week of new encounters for me: a new country, new friends, and a new way of exploring my faith: in an Islamic setting. The theme of the Gathering was 'Faith, the Divine and the Other' and the focus on Islam was one of the main methods by which we considered what the 'Other' meant to us and how we reacted to its presence.

The Umayyad Mosque, one of the holiest sites in Islam, was particularly striking because of its contrast to my usual context for worship, in Quaker meetings. Children were playing happily on its shining floor while adults stood or sat around in small groups, talking or taking in the atmosphere. Yet despite the noise and activity there was a tangible sense of deep peace and sitting there quietly I realised that listening to God was just as easy here as in Meeting for Worship. This was highlighted even more when we had a Meeting inside the mosque and felt a divine presence.

We visited several other religious sites during the week including the monastery of Mar Musa, where we were touched by the monks' generous hospitality and enjoyed the stunning location on a mountain in the desert. On Easter Sunday we went to Mass at a church in Malula, a village whose inhabitants still speak

Aramaic. Social witness played a key part in our trip and we had a talk from a UNHCR (UN High Commission for Refugees) representative who explained the situation facing Iraqi refugees in Damascus. The visit to the Golan Heights was also memorable: the ruined buildings of Golan village, which have been left by the Syrian government as a permanent reminder of Israeli aggression, seemed to me to be a monument to bitterness and continuing conflict.

Throughout the week we had several small group worship and discussion sessions to consider and reflect upon queries based on the theme and our experiences during the week. The issue of women's role in Islamic society was a recurring subject for conversation, and I, along with the other female members of EMEYF, were intrigued by the difference between the public image of women (modest, and covered up) and the uninhibited, relaxed atmosphere that they created in the hammam (baths).

EMEYF Spring Gathering 2009 has helped me explore a new depth to my faith. I was particularly moved by the intensity with which some Islamic worshippers express their own faith and this prompted me to reconsider my own personal relationship with God. The exotic setting, the people I met and the experiences I had opened my mind and helped me to realise, and develop, my relationship with the 'Other'.

Read the Epistle on:

<http://quakerepistles.wordpress.com/>

Förvandlat land

Vi plockar blommor i minfältet
Förvandlar taggtråd till rosenbuskar
och fattar varandras händer
utsträckta tvärs över gränser

The Transformed land

We pick flowers in the mine field
Transform wire fences into wildrose thorn
and take each others open hands
reached out through broken borders

Getting to grips with the Q-cumber

Looking back to our annual meeting in Moyallon



Collages - photo by Fabian Nji Lang

The weather forecast was dire: rain, wind, and more rain were predicted for the few days of our gathering. I sent out many reminders to Friends to bring umbrellas and waterproofs. In the event, we got a lot more sunshine than rain and a spectacular rainbow (see front page), which lifted our spirits and inspired us with hope.

As well as tackling the necessary business items such as accounts and budgets, spending time in worship and having fun together, we explored the story of Martha

and Mary in Luke 10 in different ways, including drama and the making of collages. Martha's condition is described differently in different translations: she is "worried and distracted" (New Revised Standard Version), "upset, worried and troubled" (Good News), "fussing far too much" (The Message). Edward Haasl of Belgium & Luxembourg Monthly Meeting, reminded us that the term used in the King James' version of the Bible was "cumbered", a word rarely used nowadays, but greatly evocative. The first draft of the Epistle exhorted us to "shed the Q-cumber from our lives".



Collages - photo by Fabian Nji Lang



A people gathered - photo by Björn Rohde-Liebanau

The Q was lost in the final draft, but the thought of how I can manage better the Quaker-related cumber in my own life has stayed with me. Ultimately though the choice is not whether I identify either with Martha or Mary, but that I need to "attend to what love requires of me" from moment to moment, which may not be great busyness (but often is!). It is not what I do, but the spirit I do it in that determines whether I feel "cumbered" or profoundly blessed.

Marisa Johnson

Woodbrooke's 2009 course for European Clerks

*More than 20 countries in Europe have a recognised Worship Group, Yearly, Quarterly or Monthly Meeting. Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre in Birmingham first held a training course for new, incoming or potential European Clerks in 2007. In February 2009 the three day course was offered again, facilitated by Judith Roads and Julia Ryberg. 15 Friends from across Europe came together to develop their understanding and knowledge of the Quaker business method and to share ideas about the practical application of this within different cultural contexts. Here **Maija Mäkelä**, Assistant Clerk of Finland Yearly Meeting, writes of her experience.*



European Clerks Gathering - photo by Heather Lundberg Fowler

From what others have said about it, Woodbrooke has shimmered in my mind as a wonderful place, though one that I myself would hardly get to go to. So I felt as if I were on a pilgrimage, but at the same time afraid of disappointment due to my enormous expectations.

When we had arrived it was already dark, so it was as if I were in wonderland on Friday morning when I awoke to birdsong and saw my surroundings: the stately old buildings, the whole place like an oasis in the middle of big city buzz. British refinement and decorum everywhere, but in unassuming moderation.

It was so nice to walk about in the wonderful garden and by the water. The weather was like April/May in Finland, although there was still a little snow about. Even so, the ground was green, snowbells were abundant and daffodils in bud.

Each day started with everyone coming to Worship and closed with Epilogue. Morning Worship was held in a hall with a splendidly historical feel. From three sides there was a view into the wonderful light and greenery of the garden. The room itself seemed to breathe a modest dignity.

There was silent Worship in the evenings too. However the Epilogue began with a planned aural event; a poem, music, or the like. Heather [Clerk of Finland YM] represented our group and her tender singing of

Amazing Grace one evening moved many people to tears.

The course programme was very intensive and rewarding. We had our first couple of hours' session already when we arrived on Thursday evening. On the two following days there were four work sessions as well as two on Sunday.

Amongst other things we studied the Quaker business method, practised discerning and writing minutes, became acquainted with the MOODLE web-course, honed all sorts of Clerking skills, considered the problems which presented themselves within our own groups and heard from each other about different solutions and practices.

Despite my initial high expectations I wasn't disappointed. On the contrary. I got much more than I could have hoped for! Above all I would like to share with you Woodbrooke's respectful, loving and inspiring atmosphere. Shortish courses are held there all the time and the place also functions as a conference venue with accommodation. Friends can go there also for a kind of holiday or to enrol as a visitor using the library.

I have started dreaming of a making a Finnish group trip there. Woodbrooke also takes their courses 'on the road', but I feel that everyone should go to that wonderful place in person, as I was so fortunate to do.

News from Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre



Is it acceptable to knit during Meeting for Business? What about preparing draft minutes ahead of time? What is the spiritual basis of our business method? What didn't George Fox think of when he developed the Quaker decision-making process, not imagining the special needs and characteristics of Quaker Meetings in Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Georgia and other places across Europe in the 21st century?

Nearly 20 European Quaker clerks gathered at Woodbrooke 12-15 February to work on these and many other questions. This was the second **Gathering of European Clerks** to be sponsored by the Corder and Gwen Catchpool Fund. The first was in 2007, and this second time all but one participant were new clerks. The Friend who attended for the second time exclaimed that there is still so much to learn about the service of being a Quaker clerk! For many of the participants it was the first visit to Woodbrooke. Daily worship, time in the library and interaction with Friends over meals can be especially meaningful to Friends who are isolated or come from small groups.

The tutors, Judith Roads and Julia Ryberg, enjoyed working together again. Judith presented the Quaker business method as it is often practiced in British Meetings. Julia led the group in exploration of what kinds of "variations on the theme" that are appropriate and sometimes necessary in various European contexts. Friends enjoyed serious play and energetic discussion in the Boundaries game, where they explored appropriate and not-so-appropriate practice of the Quaker business method. Participants practiced writing minutes after a role play in small groups. It was an added joy for the group to have Marisa Johnson, Executive Secretary of EMES, with them for several sessions.

Britain Yearly Meeting's Quaker World Relations Committee scheduled its meeting for the same weekend at Woodbrooke, just as was done two years ago, so Friends from Britain and wider Europe could meet

for an evening of sharing, including some Georgian treats for late evening refreshments. Participants were able to learn more about the Committee and about developments within Britain Yearly Meeting, the latter shared by Gillian Ashmore, Recording Clerk of BYM.

The **Quaker in Europe** on-line introductory course is now running in Czech, Norwegian, French and Hungarian. It will continue to go live in more languages within the next months, and Italian looks to be the 16th language to be included in the project. Please contact Julia Ryberg if you would like to know more or if you are interested in participating in the course, and you will be put in contact with those Friends who facilitate the course in various languages. It is exciting to see how the fruits of two years of preparation are now being enjoyed, and we hope the energy around on-line learning and fellowship will continue.

Good Lives is a new series of courses, spread over three years, that provide a creative opportunity for Friends and others to bring head, heart and spirit together to equip ourselves for the future – of our own lives, of the planet and of humanity. Visit our website to find out more.

Thinking of attending a course? Catchpool Fund bursaries are readily available if financial help is needed. Contact Julia Ryberg, European Project Co-ordinator, for information on the Catchpool Fund at julia.ryberg@woodbrooke.org.uk or +46 (0) 175-715 30. See www.woodbrooke.org.uk for general information and to request a course brochure.

Eva Koch Scholarship 2010

We are now taking applications for the Eva Koch Scholarship, offering full board and an honorarium of £500. It is tenable for 14 weeks and is to be taken in 2010. We are seeking proposals in any area of Quaker Studies. The majority of the research will take place at Woodbrooke (Birmingham, UK) where recipients will have access to our well stocked library with its major Quaker collection. No postgraduate qualification is necessary. Closing date for applications: 14 September 2009.

Interested? For an application pack contact:
Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre,
1046 Bristol Road, Birmingham, B29 6LJ, UK
Telephone 0121 472 5171
enquiries@woodbrooke.org.uk
www.woodbrooke.org.uk



Opening to change

by Philip Austin

In January I was one of three Friends from Britain YM to attend a peace gathering in Philadelphia entitled 'Heeding God's Call'. Initiated by Philadelphia YM, it was jointly planned by them with the two other largest peace churches, the Mennonites and the Church of the Brethren. It took place at the historic Arch Street Meeting House in the centre of the city and drew in participants from the three main groups as well as from a range of other churches and a small number of Muslim and Jewish observers.

Coming just before the end of the George Bush presidency, there was a sense of change in the air throughout the gathering. It also coincided with what would have been the 80th birthday of Martin Luther King. His writings, life and witness were a powerful thread; made even more so by the presence at the gathering some who had worked with him in the 1960s. For this British Friend from a tradition of unprogrammed worship and fairly liberal theology, the worship at this ecumenical event was both challenging and inspiring. Songs, sermons and rituals were key elements. Silence also featured, but I personally missed the longer periods of silence that I would have experienced at a solely-Quaker event in Britain.



Arch Street Meeting House



HGC Demo – photo by Philip Austin

Inreflecting on the gathering, a key theme for me was that of letting go. I had to let go of my initial reservations about the unfamiliar forms of worship and try to find the source of

inspiration within it that had, after all, brought us all to the gathering. Speakers told us in various ways of letting go of their personal security, and moving out of comfort-zones in order to be do their peace work. We were challenged to let go of our reservations about working alongside marginalised communities, as white peace activists had done when supporting the civil rights movement in 60s.

Another theme was the challenge to take seriously our attempts to work for change. Few seemed in any doubt that the new presidency in the US would need to be reminded and prompted vigorously and regularly about the need to address the needs of the world in a different way. And during the week, participants in the gathering took part in acts of civil disobedience, putting their own liberty on the line in order to challenge the unaccountable sale of the guns that plague the lives of young people in Philadelphia, as in so many other US cities. But amidst the seriousness there was also great joy and celebration. A faith-based approach to peace is grounded in the conviction that there really is another way. That way is about affirming life and affirming the contributions that we can each make. Vincent Harding, who had worked with Martin Luther King, quoted another old friend of his in declaring that 'What human beings have messed up, human beings can fix up.' He and others encouraged us in words and song, helping build a strong sense of going forward together, however long the journey might take.

Faith in Europe – Kosovo

by *Richard Seebom*

I belong to a British church group called Faith in Europe. It meets four times a year, and I normally report back to the BYM Committee on Christian and Interfaith Relations. This sample may interest Among Friends readers.

On 20 November two young academics talked to us about the interaction of faith people with the EU institutions. Much of this was detail, dear to my ex-QCEA heart, but one or two points are worth passing on.

- The European Commission is content to be lobbied and gains by acknowledging inputs. Minority faiths (and other bodies) themselves gain by being heard. The Council is unreceptive, as it houses the jockeying for position on the part of member states. The Parliament is also permeable, via individual MEPs and their staff.
- The Vatican likes the idea of a federal Europe.
- Our view of Islam is hampered by secular concepts; similarly, Islam finds it harder to come to terms with secularism than with other faiths. As for Islamism, 'its methods are more interesting than its agenda'. We mustn't let it be the only voice heard.
- But one cannot home in on a fully representative Muslim voice. German Muslims come from Turkey; the EU is their horizon. British Muslims come from the Raj; they face the outer world and not the EU. (French from the Maghreb are a world of their own.)
- Comparative religion is not transmitted by the (British) schools. In a 3rd year college class taught by one of our speakers, 75 per cent thought that Serbia was Muslim. The Muslims are better at teaching their own than supposedly Christian schools, hung up as they are on denominational and multicultural issues.
- On 15 January a journalist and an academic, both Albanian in origin, talked to us about Kosovo. It is hard to disentangle their story from internet versions which display various allegiances. Again, I shall mention a few points of interest.
- The Albanian/Kosovan brand of Islam inherited from the Ottomans is of the Sufi/Bektashi/Rumi tradition. Since the NATO/Russian/UN 'liberation' in 1999 Saudi (Wahabi) money has poured in to build flamboyant (non-traditional) mosques in villages even when there were none before. But the accompanying propaganda has made little headway, and instead the locals have turned to the Turks, who have instead built schools, teaching business studies, law and English.
- The UNMIK force has now gone, but NATO's KFOR is still there, together with the new face of presumed progress, EULEX, which is a manifestation of the European Security and Defence Policy entitled European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo. We were told that the rule of law was a fact of life in Albania proper but that Kosovo was still a haven of tribal and revenge culture. Kosovo's declaration of independence in early 2008 has been recognised by many EU states but not those worried about their own minorities. The Serbs will never relinquish their historic claims, and there are irritations such as their control of functions like land registration – the religious buildings of all kinds are still strangled by the lack of tenure inherited from communist times.
- The Kosovans take advantage of their kinship with Albania and the Albanians in Macedonia; the borders are open, you go to the shops the other side if they are nearer, but there is no pressure to merge.
- President Rugova, who died of lung cancer in 2006, was a Gandhian exponent of non-violence. He was upstaged in the early days by the terrorist, secular KLA, who had no pragmatic political policies.
- The economy is weak, remittances are understandably falling off, and no EU or other countries will grant visas to young Kosovans, which makes them dangerously isolated. EU money for Albania, when channelled through Greece as the nearest member state, got nowhere except to Greek-speaking enclaves. The subsidised highway from Salonika to the East stops at the Greek border. (The rest of the Kosovans have to look to Rome for an intermediary.)

Diary Dates 2009

We are short of space for full postal addresses and phone numbers. Please contact the EMES Office if you need this information.

22-24 May 2009: Netherlands Yearly Meeting,
Information from secretariaat@dequakers.nl

29 May – 1 June 2009: Central European Gathering, Don Bosco House, Vienna Information from Jalka: jalka@konfliktkultur.at www.donboscohaus.at/

25-28 June 2009: Nordic Yearly Meeting. Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish Friends are holding their Yearly Meetings in the same place and at the same time at Nordiska Folkögskolan, Kungälv (near Gothenburg, Sweden). Contact: kveker@kveker.org

22 – 26th July 2009 Ireland Yearly Meeting
Residential event, to be held in Dublin Contact office@quakers-in-ireland.ie

25 Jul – 1 August 2009 Britain Yearly Meeting Gathering in York A completely new approach to Yearly Meeting, aimed at Building Community. Come and see for yourself! Look up www.ymg.org.uk

20 – 24 August 2009 France Yearly Meeting in Pontamain (Mayenne) Theme: To live the experience of the Light in France today. Contact: [Libby Perkins \(libby@ripserve.com\)](mailto:libby@ripserve.com)

18th – 20th September 2009 2009 Border Meeting
The Border Meeting of Friends from the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, and Germany (and a number from the UK) will be held in Kortenberg,

Belgium (near Brussels). Contact border.meeting@telenet.be for more details.

More dates for 2009 available on the website: www.fwccemes.org Please send items for inclusion in the diary to Marisa Johnson at emes@fwcc.quaker.org

Paint, write and reflect at Assisi in 2009

From Oct 8th to 15th 2009 there is an opportunity to join with Friends for a week's retreat at Assisi - organised by Pax Travel at a guesthouse in the old town of Assisi, and led by two members of the Quaker Retreat Group: Peter Varney and Frances Crampton. For further information and a Pax Travel booking form please contact Peter Varney: 1 Thomas Wyatt Close, Norwich, NR2 2TB, UK or email: QuakerRetreats@waitrose.com

To Friends everywhere... new epistles blog

A new online blog for epistles has been started by a Britain Yearly Meeting Friend. Located at <http://quakerepistles.wordpress.com> or via <http://tinyurl.com/kveker> the blog is intended to provide Friends with a way to both publish their epistles to the world and to find epistles easily. 'I've started it as an experiment', explained Jez Smith, who works for the weekly Quaker magazine, the Friend, 'to see if I can collate a good number of epistles and to see if it fills a need for Friends'. Jez is hoping to receive epistles from everyone from FWCC sections and Yearly Meetings down to small worship groups and other Quaker organisations. 'At the Friend we can't publish in our magazine all the epistles we receive but we can help Friends to get their message out in other ways, such as this', added Jez. Email Jez on jez@thefriend.org if you want an epistle added.

Among Friends is the newsletter of Europe and Middle East Section of Friends World Committee for Consultation. We want Among Friends to reflect the diversity of Quaker life and experience across the Section and welcome articles, photos and news of forthcoming events.

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Deadline for Among Friends 115: 1 August 2009