



Friends World Committee
for Consultation
EUROPE & MIDDLE EAST SECTION

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Epistle from the FWCC Europe and Middle East Section Annual Meeting held at Hotel Walzer, Budapest, Hungary, 2nd – 5th May 2019

Living in a Foreign Land

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

On the day after Labour Day, when the rights of workers are recognised and celebrated in many of our countries, over 50 people from Yearly Meetings, Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups across Europe and also from the Americas met together to consider what it means to live in a foreign land, to welcome people into our own land and, sometimes, feel like foreigners in our own land. Our Section includes our Friends in the Middle East. We miss them and hope they can join us at future gatherings.

We started with reflections from four Friends on how their experience of living in a foreign land influenced their ministry and opened them to new ways of thinking, doing and being. We need to consider our own privilege and seek to understand how we are viewed by others and why. While we are aware of the danger of othering and the discomfort of being ‘othered’, looking for God in everyone can help us get beyond the ‘other’ and understand we are all humans.

Evan Welkin (Olympia Monthly Meeting, North Pacific YM, living in Italy) spoke to us on *Vulnerability as Witness: To be of service in a foreign land*. He spoke honestly and humbly of his experience of growing up in a supportive and fairly closed Quaker community and how his hope for his life and for Quakerism were thrown into doubt by his experiences in Turkey on 11th September 2001 and his realisation of the limitations of Quakers and Quaker institutions. He asked us to consider the ways in which Quakers have done harm as well as good when they have held power, such as through the industrialisation of whaling, the establishment of penitentiaries and the running of boarding schools for Native American children.

How can we be of service through bearing witness to our vulnerabilities and through our experiences of being strangers in a foreign land and welcoming strangers? What would we do if we truly had power in the world? Compared to many, Quakers do have power and privilege, and we must use it mindfully and with humility, aware of our vulnerabilities and limitations.

2019 is a transition year for EMES as we prepare to implement our 10 year strategy (2020 – 2030). Marisa Johnson, our Executive Secretary told us of the work planned to make sure we have the people, governance and resources we need to grow together and contribute fully to the changes we want to see in the world.

In recent months, people across the world, led by young people, have put themselves on the line and called on governments to declare a climate emergency. In Bible Study some of us considered Hebrews (11:15-16) ‘If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one.’ We as Quakers cannot live in

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the past but need to go forward with trust and in faith to address climate change and build a peaceful and sustainable world.

We are part of a larger and very diverse world community. We were pleased to welcome Yulieed Avila of General Meeting of Friends in Mexico and Ashley Weinacht of Northwest Yearly Meeting, USA, travelling as part of the Young Adult Friends Intervisitation Project. They led us in rich programmed worship that gave us an insight into both their worshipping communities. Through talking of her own experience of living in a foreign land, Palestine, and her first experience of unprogrammed worship, Ashley reminded us that learning can be uncomfortable and we need to be attentive to what is important to others in deepening their relationship with God.

We participated in workshops on a variety of topics relevant to our Section including what makes us feel at home in a Quaker meeting, life reflections, the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and how we can best do nominations, Europe & Middle East Young Friends, the Migrants Help Association in Hungary and Borgo Basino – a new model for community sustainability networking in Italy. We heard about the recent work of FWCC, QUNO, QCEA and Woodbrooke. All of these gave us insights and learnings that we take home with us to our respective meetings.

Tony Frei from Evangelical Friends Churches international in Hungary shared with us his experience of building bridges with Friends in East Africa. We were inspired by James Peter, who came to Hungary as a refugee himself and with unshakeable faith and hope took action to address the hopelessness that was causing conflict in the refugee camps by organising non-violence and then computer training. Migrants Help Association (now First Step), the organisation he formed, continues to offer skills courses and builds bridges between the Hungarian and migrant communities.

We would like to thank Vera Varady of Budapest Worship Group for organising the logistics of our visit to her beautiful city. In one of our epilogues we heard about the ‘thin places’ in Celtic folklore, where heaven and earth are closer together and it is easy to slip between the two. Through deep worship and strong community we can create ‘thin places’ wherever we are. We return to our homes reinvigorated and mindful of our responsibility to extend a welcome to everyone who crosses our paths and whose paths we cross and be patterns and examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever we are.

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

Signed on behalf of EMES

Sue

Sue Glover Frykman
Presiding Clerk

Saskia

Saskia Kuhlmann
Assistant Clerk

Dag

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