



Friends World Committee
for Consultation
EUROPE & MIDDLE EAST SECTION

Annual Meeting 2020 Summary

The Friends World Committee for Consultation Europe and Middle East Section held its annual meeting online on 1 and 2 May 2020. Originally planned to be held in Paris, plans changed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Instead of producing an epistle approved by the annual meeting this year we have produced this summary document which together with the minutes we hope will give a sense of the spirit of the annual meeting.

In planning the online event we tried to replicate previous annual meetings, so included business sessions, invited speakers, home groups, a workshop involving art, a social evening and epilogues at the end of the day.

The theme was *Heeding the prophecy of our sons and daughters, daring to dream dreams and see visions (Joel 2,28).*

In recent years it has been difficult for Friends from the Middle East to join our annual meetings, but this time we were blessed by the presence of a Friend from Brummana Monthly Meeting (Lebanon) joining over 60 Friends, largely from across Europe but also from Africa, Asia West Pacific and the Americas (the other Sections of the FWCC family). We were delighted that more Friends from further afield than usual were able to join us. We were reminded, however, that just as meetings in person have barriers to entry such as cost and visas, meetings online bring new technological challenges as well as advantages.

Highlights of the business sessions included appointing a new executive secretary, Michael Eccles, and noting the appointment of Jez Smith as the new assistant secretary. We appointed a new assistant treasurer, Peter Spreij (Netherlands YM), to begin service immediately and appointed Will Haire (Ireland YM) to begin service on the EMES executive committee in January 2021. The annual meeting noted the 2019 accounts and approved a revised budget for 2020. We also received the 2019 annual report and Friends were updated on the work planned for the next year or so; of course, much of this is deeply affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

During the meeting we had three speaker sessions and heard updates from five Quaker organisations in Europe - more details of these sessions are included below.

We had a social evening where we said farewell to Marisa Johnson who retired after 12 years service as the executive secretary and Julia Ryberg who has retired from her role as Ministry and Outreach coordinator.

Our annual meeting was not just planned to be a celebration and time to centre; it was also a catalyst for action. We heard prepared ministry from speakers on our theme who challenged us and inspired us.

Links:

- [Presentation about the EMES work plan](#)
- [EMES annual report](#)
- [Annual Meeting presentation about the 2019 annual report](#)
- [Among Friends issue 147](#)
- [Annual Meeting group photo](#)
- [Annual Meeting 2020 minutes](#)

[EMES Spiritual Growth Fund](#)

A reminder that this fund is there for your meetings to use. We particularly encourage you to consider applying at the moment and to think about whether there are ways that additional funding would help your meeting/s to connect online.

Speaker sessions

We had three speaker sessions during the annual meeting. The minute about each presentation is set out below with complementary links.

Faith Biddle and FWCC World Office work on sustainability

We have had a presentation by Faith Biddle, Sustainability and Communications Support Officer, FWCC World Office. Faith has reminded us of the timeline of the discernment and work on sustainability that FWCC has undertaken since 2007, including the world gatherings and the recent global online Sustainability Conference. She shared a video message from Gretchen Castle, FWCC General Secretary, and encouraged Friends to reread the statement from the online Conference. Faith has identified some of the next steps for this work. FWCC world office is building a network of Young Friends to host a webinar series where young Quakers around the world can share climate stories, build a community, and discover how to move forward together.

FWCC has produced a toolkit to help each Meeting to find a common language around sustainability and to answer the question 'How does God call us to act to build a more sustainable future?' We can all make space to acknowledge where we are, and to listen for the answers. Tackling these issues will demand creative solutions. With the aim of learning from each other, Faith has invited us to get involved in this crucial work, and to share our stories with FWCC World Office.

[Link to Faith's presentation](#)

Links:

- [Map of Friends worldwide](#)

- [World Quaker Day 2019, Africa](#)
- [Sustainability timeline](#)
- [Sustainability Resources](#)
- [Sustainability Statements](#)
- [How to get involved](#)

Loving Earth Project

Maud Grainger, Faith in Action Co-ordinator at Woodbrooke, UK, has presented the Loving Earth Project which adopts a creative approach to learning and reflecting to help us take action to care for what we love, and to be good ancestors. It helps us to celebrate people, places, creatures and other things that we love but which are threatened by growing environmental breakdown.

Maud has led us in a guided meditation to consider three questions:

- What/ Who/Which place do you love that is threatened by environmental breakdown?
- How might you yourself be contributing to that threat?
- What more could you do to be part of the solution?

We have taken part in small group creative activities on this theme; we have shared some of our reflections, and our creations on paper.

Links:

- [Learn more about the project, which includes the guided meditation that Maud led us through at the annual meeting](#)
- Send photos of your finished panels and any offers from volunteers to help translate the panel texts into different languages to lovingearthproject@gmail.com
- Tag your images on social media with [@lovingearthproject](#)

“Climate Change, Covid-19, Courage and Compassion”, a presentation by Lindsey Fielder Cook of the Quaker United Nations Office, Geneva

Lindsey Fielder Cook, the QUNO Geneva Representative on Climate Change has spoken to us on the theme ‘Daring to dream the dreams, see visions, and learn from the four C’s – climate change, coronavirus, courage and compassion’.

Lindsey shared insights from her work on climate change, which she sees as a symptom of a greater challenge: how to live sustainably and justly on earth. She spoke of the prophecies from our sons and daughters, who are helping their older generations to better understand the urgency of the moral call before us. Recognizing current suffering over the loss of life and livelihoods in this Covid-19 period, she noted how this pandemic experience is a microcosm for climate change, and spoke of the many wisdoms we can gain from it.

Lindsey invited us to ‘dare the dreams with courage and compassion, rather than fear and cynicism’. She encouraged us to have compassion for ourselves and our imperfections, for though we cannot solve this alone, yet our lives can speak and inspire others.

[Link to Lindsey’s presentation](#)

Links:

- Write to Lindsey at lfcook@quno.ch including if you would like to be added to her mailing list to stay in touch with her work.
- [Worldwide Quaker work on climate change](#)
- [A Government Official's Toolkit – 2020 Edition](#)
- [Climate Justice](#)
- [Quaker Statement on Climate Change \(2014-2017\)](#)
- [Call to Conscience \(2014\)](#)

Reports from Quaker organisations

We heard updates from the following organisations:

- Europe and Middle East Young Friends
- Friends World Committee for Consultation World Office
- Quaker Council for European Affairs
- Quaker United Nations Office - Geneva
- Woodbrooke

A minute was recorded in relation to each presentation and is included below along with complementary links concerning each minute.

Europe and Middle East Young Friends (EMEYF)

Liam Brighton (Britain YM), the EMEYF representative to EMES, reported on the recent activities of EMEYF, including:

- The EMEYF Annual Meeting held 14 -17 November 2019 at Quaker House, Brussels,
- The Living Archives Project (LAP) to digitise EMEYF historic records and photos, supported by EMES spiritual growth fund
- The online EMEYF Newsletter, [Willy and Penn](#)
- The hope that the planned EMEYF summer gathering, on the theme of 'Nature and Spirituality' will take place in July 2020 (under review given the Covid-19 situation).

The question about another All Age/family European gathering was raised, and this has been part of discussion between EMES and EMEYF about future events focussed on children and young people.

Links:

- [EMEYF website](#)

Friends World Committee for Consultation World Office

The FWCC General Secretary, Gretchen Castle, has talked about her role and has reported on the wider work of the World Office including:

- Supporting Section work, and making connections across all four Sections
- Bringing Friends together in multiple ways

- Generating profound diversity work
- Representing Quakers at world level (QUNO, World Communion, World Council of Churches)
- Amplifying the Quaker voice through strengthened networks
- Through 'Quakers helping Quakers' - particularly noting the Africa collaborative appeal - and caring for each other and our world
- Creating a Quaker theological discussion group
- Conversations about the kind of better world we envisage after the pandemic

We note that the next World Plenary has been postponed from 2023 to 2024 or beyond.

[Link to Gretchen's presentation](#)

Links:

- [FWCC World Office](#)

Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA)

Andrew Lane, Director, updated Friends on the current work of the Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) to promote a vision based on the Quaker commitment to peace, justice and equality to Europe and its institutions. QCEA is trying both to engage policymakers in considering nonviolent peacebuilding policies rather than those orientated towards military force, and to influence the way European governments understand human rights in ways that are more radical and more accessible. QCEA hopes this will reduce the violence experienced by people (especially people at risk of military violence and people seeking sanctuary in Europe).

He talked about several of the events and activities undertaken by QCEA in the past year, and signposted the QCEA website, YouTube presence and publications, including the anti-hate speech '[Choose Respect](#)' initiative available in 10 languages.

QCEA is also considering how the Covid-19 pandemic might change the context for Quaker work in Europe. Andrew invited Friends to join a collective research effort to ensure that communities and individuals in Europe are not further marginalised by responses to the pandemic ([see this link](#)).

Andrew spoke about the very major questions that will be arising, after Covid-19, around migration, hunger and conflict and drew attention to upcoming QCEA events.

Links:

- [Human dignity in government responses to Covid-19](#)
- [The world we want to see after Covid-19](#)
- [QCEA Annual report for 2019](#)
- [QCEA series of videos on peace and human rights](#)

Quaker United Nations Office - Geneva (QUNO)

Lindsey Fielder Cook, Representative for Climate Change at the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) in Geneva, gave us an overview of QUNO's work. She spoke of the history of QUNO in New York and Geneva, and how its presence at the UN, and governance, is grounded in Friends World Committee for Consultation. She then described the work of QUNO Geneva's four programmes, which include Human Rights and Refugees, Peace and Disarmament, the Human Impact of Climate Change, and Sustainable and Just Economic Systems. The Geneva Summer School will be held virtually in 2020. She underlined how important Friends' spiritual and financial support are to QUNO's ability to exist and do its work.

Links:

- [Human impacts of climate change](#)
- [Peace and disarmament](#)
- [Human rights and refugees](#)
- [Sustainable and just economic systems](#)

Woodbrooke

Simon Best, Head of Learning at Woodbrooke has shared with us the work of Woodbrooke over the past year and in particular the ways Woodbrooke has been responding to the current Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown in various countries across the Section. Woodbrooke now offers online worship eleven times a week, in partnership with EMES, and has helped groups to establish their own online meetings for worship. Woodbrooke continues to offer learning for individuals and meetings and has recently launched a new programme of online workshops and courses, both for individuals and for Meetings which is seen as a way for Woodbrooke to expand learning in different ways.

As we move out of Covid-19, Woodbrooke hopes to offer learning opportunities on what kind of world we want to live in, and what contribution Quakers can make.

Simon emphasised the planned major focus on sustainability and climate change in the future, both spiritually and practically.

Links:

- [Woodbrooke](#)
- [Online meeting for worship](#)
- [Woodbrooke courses](#)
- Contact Simon Best simon.best@woodbrooke.org.uk

Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust

The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust shared a minute with us concerning the retirement of Marisa Johnson (referenced in the EMES minute AM 2020/23).

Minute 20.20 b) Europe and Middle East Section

Marisa Johnson, EMES Executive Secretary since 2008, retires after the Annual Meeting in Paris at the end of April. Marisa has played a crucial role in steering EMES over this last decade, strengthening the Ministry and Outreach work, supporting small and fragile meetings across this region, and facilitating networks of Friends. Marisa has emphasised engaging in dialogue with evangelical Friends and has worked to establish unity across a broad and diverse range of Meetings. More recently, under her leadership, EMES has delivered a spiritual growth fund for Quakers across Europe, with support from the Trust, an expanded programme of online learning and travelling in the Ministry.

In characteristic fashion, Marisa has planned and executed her departure with great care. She was thrilled at the appointment of Michael Eccles who will step into her role.

Susan was to have represented the Trust at the Paris Annual Meeting. She agreed to share with Marisa our appreciation of her service, and her work to nurture and care for Quaker communities in Europe and the Middle East.

Closing minute EMES/AM 2020/24

The success of this annual meeting was not about the food, the weather or working computers; it was in the open hearts of all who participated.

We are aware of the suffering around us caused by Covid-19, the virus without borders, and we realise that we have been privileged to be able to connect online and come together as a community of Friends throughout these two days.

In these uncertain times, with ongoing concerns about people, planet, all of God's creation, let us dare to dream with courage and compassion, allowing ourselves to be swept forward in God's grace.

Stay in touch with the FWCC-Europe & Middle East Section

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