

Epistle of the QCEA General Assembly, 12-13 November 2021

To all Friends everywhere,

The QCEA General Assembly has met for the first time in a hybrid format with some Friends gathering in person at Quaker House and others joining virtually. While everyone felt a strong spirit of worship, the opportunity to meet in the same room has been greatly appreciated by those who could attend in person.

The reports that we have heard made it clear that the past months have on many levels been a difficult time. The Covid-19 pandemic continues to present a challenge for the work of organisations such as QCEA. It also continues to add a level of stress to our personal and professional lives. At the same time, Europe and its residents have been facing a number of difficulties, such as Brexit, increased militarization, an inadequate response to the climate crisis and the inhuman treatment of refugees, all of which have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

In addition to these broader challenges, many members of our community have been challenged mentally, emotionally and spiritually by a recent multi-layered and complex organizational conflict as well as the sincere, continuous struggle to find a resolution. The statements that were confidentially shared with the Assembly have brought into the light a considerable amount of hurt, anger, and layers of sadness.

We reaffirm our trust in the Executive Committee and appreciate the care and dedication with which they have carried out the work entrusted to them. At the same time, we collectively recognise the need to reflect in depth on the events of the past months, and to enter into a process of healing and rebuilding trust. We are aware that the task before us is crucial for the future of QCEA, and it is a challenge that we can only face together.

Despite the challenging nature of the exchange around these topics, it also became clear that the well-being of QCEA is a matter very close to all our hearts. Over the course of our Meeting, we affirmed our commitment to our shared values, to the work and the people of QCEA, and to an honest and open process that will allow us to learn and move forward from the events that are still weighing heavy on our hearts and minds today. We continue to be inspired by the important work QCEA do on Peace and Human Rights. We agree on the value and potential of work that takes a holistic approach and is rooted in Quaker values and practices. We are united in our firm belief in QCEA's vital contribution to our witness as Quakers at this time in history.

The conclusion of our Assembly marks the beginning of a new path we are embarking on together. Will we manage to move on from past events with grace and without causing further harm to anyone presently or formerly involved with QCEA? Will our commitment to QCEA and to our shared values sustain us through the long and arduous process of rebuilding mutual trust?

We hope so.