



Friends World Committee
for Consultation

EUROPE & MIDDLE EAST SECTION

Europe & Middle East Section

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Epistle from the FWCC Europe and Middle East Section Annual Meeting held Online

4-7 May 2023

Responding with hope to God's call to cherish creation – and one another

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Jeremiah 29:11 (NRSV)

To Friends everywhere, greetings:

Dear friends, annwyl cyfeillion, kjære venner, chers amis, liebe Freunde, lieve vrienden, queridos amigos, cari amici, kära vänner, kære venner, rakkaat ystävät, kallid sõbrad, drazí přátelé, dārgie draugi, dragi prijatelji, дорогі друзі, дорогие друзья, kedves barátaim, drodzy przyjaciele, Shanovni Droozi, a chairde, Salamaat Asdiqa

Loving greetings to Friends everywhere from the FWCC Europe and Middle East Section Annual Meeting 2023, meeting at Woodbrooke, UK and online.

Our annual meeting this year saw 60 Friends gather together from the Europe and the Middle East Section and further afield. Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic this was our 2nd blended annual meeting together in person with attendees at Woodbrooke and on Zoom. 50 of us met in person and 10 Friends participated through zoom. Alma was our youngest joy at a year and a half old.

We were able to create a rich experience. Cultivating joyful relationships enabled us to do our work. We became a gathered community.

Silence was deep when we commemorated Friends who died last year, we gave thanks for their lives and they will inspire us into the future.

Sandra Berry, Director of Woodbrooke, greeted us and she invited us to share memories of Woodbrooke. From Simon Best we heard about the wide variety of courses and other possibilities to pursue studies on-line and at places we invite Woodbrooke to in the upcoming years.

Personal testimonies and introductions of Finland, France, Netherlands Yearly Meetings also from Poland and FWCC Asia West Pacific Section enriched and inspired us to know more about activities of smaller groups, and cooperation within the YMs and beyond. The situation of the sold properties was explained, as well as figuring out the new normal after the pandemic, and searching for ways of outreach.

Meetings for worship were held, and gathered friends from across the section at Woodbrooke and online. Worship sharings brought us to discern more clearly, giving rise to thoughts and encouragement to bring back home.

In the reports from last year, we heard about activities that made us grateful for the work that had been done, and the efforts Friends put in. We were encouraged to work on sharing content in different languages and to find ways for outreach on social media. During the Meeting for Business we looked at the Accounts, the Budget, making the plans for and working on the discerned and most valued activities in the upcoming year.

Quaker United Nations Office New York and Geneva, Northern Friends Peace Board, Europe & Middle East Young Friends, Quaker Council for European Affairs, Quaker International Educational Trust and the FWCC World Office inspired us with their ongoing work, through means of quiet diplomacy and ways towards human and ecological security. We were reminded that we must keep asking what love requires of us.

Timothy Ashworth opened up the keynote quotations from Jeremiah and world Friends, in the lecture *Sustaining Hope: Faith for Long the Term*. Can the generosity in ourselves be set free to make our partners “glow”, as Bjork sings in her song from *Biofilia*? Our speakers on climate change and Quaker history brought us challenging themes to reflect upon. In our Home Groups we attempted to answer some of the questions we were given:

- Jeremiah`s message was a deeply controversial one in his time, counselling acceptance in the face of dominant power. In our own time of crisis, are we open to a call that prioritises the nurture of our families and communities?
- Are we in a position of creative responsiveness to the biblical story, such that we can share in authentic dialogue with Friends from around the world?
- Both the early Christians and the early Quakers felt they were on the cusp of a breakthrough for humankind. Both groups used words like “yearning” and “longing” for new life to come. In our time, how do we hold in our hearts the hope for that new life even as we are realistic about the risk and pain in our present crises?
- What is our gut reaction to the idea of linking our care for creation with the parts of creation that are closest to us – our most intimate partners in life? What bridges do we need to build towards each other? Can the generosity in ourselves be set free to make our partners “glow”?
- What is the source of an authentic hope that will sustain us ‘woven together in transformative faith and love’? We are a people of faith and follow the eternal Truth of the Spirit, which has many names around the world.
- Do we challenge growth for economic growth’s sake? Early Friends like James Naylor showed great courage in their conviction. Many Friends are doing so now in their stands on the environment.
- How do we convey our epistle to those who name the spirit differently to the Bible?

A personal testimony reminded us that the words we choose to use will limit the way we think and live. All creation, including us humans, goes into the ark before the rainbow. Sustainability is the

watchword. Our dependency on the earth that sustains us, is central to the continuation of our existence.

As part of the new Sustainability Policy 2022, *Among Friends* and other publications have been moved from print to instead be available online. We were considering the climate impact of our events and travel. We need to find a way to reduce the damage of the climate crises – find out what is needed and cooperate with Friends from other Sections. We made a good start and have a road ahead. We need to find the answer for our questions such as: What is the strength of our conviction?

We heard testimony on what it is like to live up to Quaker values in a war situation, help refugees, stand up for the rights of those suffering and the challenges of living up to Quaker values.

Video greetings from Friends in Ukraine and friends in Georgia deeply moved us. Some talked of sustaining hope for peace in the horrible war situation. Others shared their views and different experiences, explaining that you can fight without weapons, with the power of creativity and resistance. Central European Gathering and The Funding for Ukraine Group shared experience of ongoing aid work that's still needed, as well as keeping in touch without humiliating those in need.

We heard about the preparations for the FWCC World Plenary Meeting in 2024 in South-Africa. We are invited to discern the possibilities of creating hubs in our Section / Yearly Meetings / Area Meetings so that we create the environment for Friends from our area to join in the Plenary Meeting and connect to Friends from other Sections of FWCC.

The introduction of the current situation of the Ramallah Friends School in Palestine highlighted the importance of staying committed to Quaker values and the sustenance they can give when everyday activities and tasks have been disrupted or made hard to accomplish in a situation of frequent military onslaught, checkpoints and unequal civil rights. Supporting Friends from this area of our Section and their work is very much needed and appreciated. Sami Cortas from the Quaker meeting in Brummana in Lebanon reminded us of the quiet Quaker way, our peace testimony, seeing that of God in everyone and how they had inspired former pupils of the school with different backgrounds and beliefs. On Sunday morning we joined in Meeting for Worship with Quakers in Kyiv and their supporters around the globe. Our prayers are with all those involved.

Our meeting was worthwhile beyond words. Next year we hope to meet, thanks to online devices, relying only on Zoom. Please do think about joining us.

In Friendship, mewn cyfeillgarwch, i vennskap, i vänskap, i venskab, ystävydessä, bien amicalement, in Freundschaft, in Vriendschap, en amistad, in amicizia, v přátelství, u prijateljstvu, draudzībā, barāti üdvözlettel, sõpruses, w przyjaźni, Zi Droozhnim privitom, в дружбі, в дружбе, le cairdeas, fi alsadaqa.

Signed on behalf of FWCC Europe & Middle East Section
Ethel Livermore
Clerk