

EMEYF Spring Gathering 2023 Epistle

Why, I ask myself, did I go to worship with those rather small and not very distinguished groups of people? – 10.32 Quaker Faith and Practice

To all Friends everywhere,

Around 30 members of the European and Middle East Young Friends (EMEYF) community gathered at Maison Quaker in Congénies, France, where we enjoyed the warmth of the sunshine and revelled in the beauty of the gardens first blossoming for spring.

Our theme for this spring gathering was “rekindling the light”; chosen to demonstrate the renewal of our community ties as we gather together following the pandemic.

Arriving on a beautiful and bright day, we were greeted by the resident tortoise, Letu, emerging from hibernation for the first time this year. This fit well with the themes of rekindling, re-emerging and resurrecting which surfaced during our meeting for worship with local Friends.



*What role does **place** play in your spirituality?*

We considered the importance of place in our spiritual lives, reflecting on our connections to meetinghouses, nature, and even the night sky. Local Friends shared the history of Congénies and the Maison Quaker, highlighting the different communities that shaped the place we were in.



*What does it mean to be part of an international **community** to you?*

During the week, we felt the full spectrum of experiences of living together in community. This included tensions and joy, and all the mundane experiences in between. The practicalities of living together gave us the opportunity to tend to one another. Eating together, cooking for each other, and cleaning up with one another.



*How do we attend to what **love** requires of us? – adapted from Advices and Queries*

We considered ways in which we include or exclude different people from our gatherings. A session on learning the unwritten rules of community provoked thoughts on what rules we follow as a community and what hurdles attendees face. We questioned what belonging to EMEYF means to each of us. Reconciling with the fact that many people have vastly different experiences of this community, we are continuing to consider ways forward, growing together and strengthening our sense of belonging.



Sharing worship, lunch, gardening, and conversations with local Friends enriched our experience here, allowing us to further reflect on what being in community means.

*There is **inspiration** to be found all around us [...]. Are you open to new light from whatever source it may come? - Advices and Queries*

We explored the town of Congénies, the surrounding countryside, Nîmes, and Sommieres. We experienced forms of artistic expression: creating harmless art from found materials, making friendship bracelets, painting, playing music, and dancing reels in the rain. The joy of life was present throughout our time here in lively and quiet moments.

*How do you take your **experience** of Quaker events into your daily life?*

We have been ruminating on the spark of hope this gathering has lit for many of us. We aim to carry this forward in our daily lives, but also as a community – hoping to connect again throughout the year and at our next in person event.

