

Epistle 2023 from Friends in Italy at Borgo Basino, Italy

Dear Friends,

Friends in Italy gathered at Borgo Basino in Cursecoli, Emilia-Romagna 3rd-5th November, 2023.

This Annual Gathering of Quakers in Italy brought together 12 Friends and 5 children to the farm where we have met for the last seven years, to share fellowship, find inspiration and discern business of Quakers across Italy.

We were delighted to be joined in person by Michael Eccles, Secretary EMES, who brought greetings from the Section. We were glad to receive an inspiring message from Hezron Masitsa, Secretary of Justice and Peace Section FWCC.

Michael Eccles introduced the theme of the World Plenary Meeting in August 2024 in South Africa, which will be “Ubuntu”, with focus on Peace, Climate Change and Historical and Continuing Injustice. This prompted us to reflect on what it might mean to us as a Quaker community in Italy.

We shared our spiritual stories and personal journeys, of which the common thread was finding or rediscovering Quakerism. We are a dispersed community gathering from two worship groups in Florence and Bologna, as well as isolated members from the Lombardy and Piedmont regions. As a first step in discovering, together, Ubuntu (“*I am because you are*”) we realised that we need other Quakers to be Quaker.

There were a variety of concerns which emerged from our reflections on Ubuntu. The aim of the eco village is create a community that is self-sufficient in food and energy. Friends shared their experiences creating eco village communities. One is at the foot of Monte Rosa (*Comunità Rigenerativa*) and the other our venue for Annual Gathering (*Borgo Basino*.)

We were involved in a deeply moving session on the basics of Marshall Rosenberg’s nonviolent communication, and how these principles maybe applied to conflict in our daily lives. We learnt how we can connect to the humanity of ourselves and others, through listening. We ultimately have a choice in how we respond every time, avoiding judgmental language or aggressive communication through empathy.

We heard the individual efforts of Friends to do their best in the face of challenging times. Some Friends have experienced the destructive power of climate change, during May’s flooding in Emilia Romagna. While many of us shared a sense of powerlessness and fatigue, some Friends pointed to how our Faith is leading us onwards.

Our representative in the Peace and Service Network, EMES, reported on efforts to support conscientious objectors including Yurii in Ukraine. The Meeting agreed to sign the official EMES letter in his support.

We appreciated the beautifully home-grown and prepared vegetarian food.

We welcomed a new International Member, Jeannette, celebrating with an icecream cake!

Children made stick bread over the fire, and brought noise and energy to our event.

In one session we examined the written Italian constitution, which was the collaboration of elected communists, catholics and socialists coming together in the postwar period, and published in 1948. It envisages a republic founded on economic, social and political solidarity. It reminds us that democracy is something we must collectively labour towards, and contribute to, while not forgetting marginalized groups including migrants, refugees and children. It provides for the removal of obstacles that prevent people from developing their full human potential.

During the last Epilogue we remembered Italian Quaker Pierre Cesare Bori, who was a professor of moral philosophy, an Amnesty International activist, and a learned and caring person. He founded the Quaker Worship Group in Bologna in 1991, and many of the current Italian Friends were introduced to Quakerism to him personally and by his writings. Saturday 4th November marked the 11th anniversary of his death. We also remembered with much affection Dino Buzzetti one of the founding members of the Bologna Worship Group and a much respected professor of classical philosophy and activist for social justice. He died on 23rd April 2023 quite suddenly.

We leave this year's annual gathering with a renewed strength and patience, ready to connect with the light inside and the light in others.

This epistle was read and approved by Meeting for Business, during Annual Gathering.

In peace and Friendship,

Lucia Biondelli
Clerk, Annual Gathering Italy

Quakers in Italy

5 Novembre 2023, Borgo Basino, Cusercoli