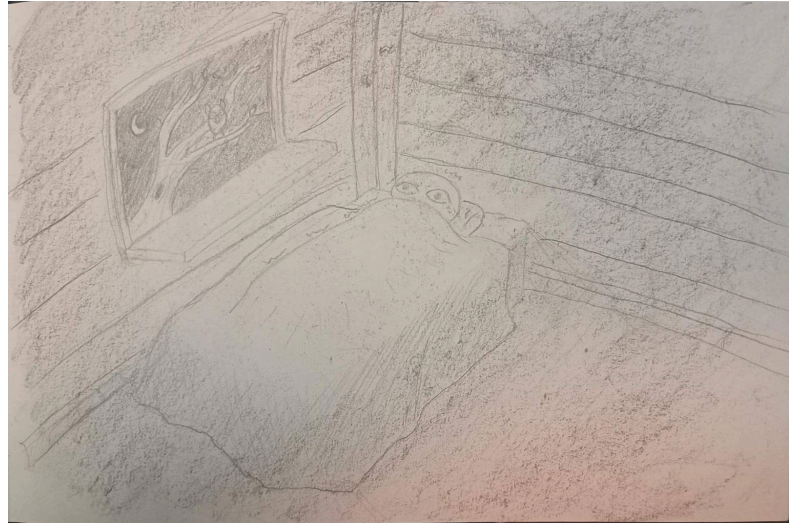


EMEYF Spring Gathering 2026 Epistle

From the 28th March 2026, over 50 young friends from across Europe gathered together for a week, in person and online, at this year's European and Middle Eastern Young Friends (EMEYF) Spring Gathering. We arrived in Janowice Wielkie, south-western Poland hailing from Germany, Czechia, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, France, the UK, the US, Ireland, Poland and (traditionally, by Eurovision rules) Australia.

While the temperatures dipped a call came for warmth - more firewood, hot water bottles, stews, blankets for our frozen rooms and communal areas. And with the call they appeared. As the physical warmth grew so too did the worship, community and connection. After many nights of rain came bonfires where talks and songs drifted from political cries to Quaker parodies and personal histories.



The gathering theme this year was Witnessing Borders: Faith, Identity and Conscience. During the week, we approached the topic from many different angles and contexts.



We witnessed borders as dangerous obstacles causing death, suffering and sorrow. The refugee crisis on the European borders came often into the centre of debates and reflections.

However, we also witnessed that many people - including Friends from EMEYF and beyond - try their best to bring a spark of light to the darkness. Namely, a German Friend Katja from CompassCollective shared her work, aiding people crossing the Mediterranean sea. Moreover, we

learned about the refugee crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border and the effort to mitigate the worst outcomes by numerous initiatives, including the We Monitor Collective. We also learned about a Peace initiative led by German Friends to help war refugees and deserters.

In this context, those of us attending in person were grateful we were able to cross borders safely, and were mindful of those who do not have that privilege across the world, and holding

absent friends in the light. We were thankful to be joined online by our friend Muhammad from Gaza who shared his experiences with borders, how they have been violently enforced and how spirituality can reach him. His presence allowed us to truly become European and Middle Eastern Young Friends.

We approached multiple ways of identifying and overcoming borders in and by our Quaker faith and practice. In the session on welcoming community, we were able to hold each other through difficult questions and suffering. Being around children can bring joy, but also complicated emotions for many, and we were grateful for the space where these vulnerable feelings were able to be shared, and deeply heard.

In a post-worship workshop 'What do we believe in?', we had a fruitful sharing of our various views and perspectives on the Quaker's faith and identity. The workshop's outcome turned into a true spiritual renewal and also a little celebration of diversity within Quakerism.

Building a community takes time and effort and often mistakes are made. We are left feeling nourished that we created a space that friends felt able to share with each other individually and through ministry. With new light in our hearts we are going back to our homes and lives, feeling encouraged to live our faith in practice, already looking forward to our next meeting.



Artworks provided by Epistle Committee to accompany the Epistle.