

Epistle 2026 from Quakers in Italy - Annual Gathering

To all Friends everywhere,
Greetings from Quakers in Italy!

The Friends and friends of Friends in Italy gathered at La Guscella, Camugnano (in the hills of Bologna, Emilia-Romagna, Italy), from Friday, July 24th to Sunday, July 26th, 2026.

We gathered with 11 international Quaker members and "inquirers" (we were also delighted by the presence of one of our members' six-month-old granddaughter) at the historic farmhouse where we met last year to reflect on the theme:

"Transforming Conflicts, Learning to Care"

Michael Eccles, EMES Secretary, attended the entire meeting and beforehand, in Bologna, he also visited the facilities and discussed logistics for the next EMES Annual Meeting in Italy, from Thursday, May 6 to Sunday, May 9, 2027.

We conducted our activities in a mix of Italian and English.

Our first session, on Saturday morning, was led by Friend Fabian Lang, who brought his experience of more than 20 years facilitating a meditation group, including silent meditation, for inmates at the Dozza prison (in Bologna) and young volunteers. Sharing is based on processing life experiences, with a view to a personal journey of reintegration into society, which has led to very moving, positive results.

Then friend Paolo Vitali, with extensive experience coordinating nonviolent theory and practice groups in Bergamo, introduced us to the interpretation of "conflict transformation" offered by Norwegian professor Johan Galtung (mathematician and philosopher, 1930-2024). This vision of conflicts, which are not necessarily to be considered "war," allows us to consider solutions that Galtung calls "transcendental," meaning different ones that offer creative, sometimes unexpected, alternatives. Galtung's attention to situational awareness, to the respect due to each party in conflict, to the consideration of timing and methods appears to connect well with the Quaker practices of actions and reflections in silence, experienced with equanimity and, in any case, personal involvement.

Friend Lucia Biondelli proposed an activity focused on "learning to care" for one another and for ourselves. The starting points for a personal meditation, which was then shared with the group, were a series of images and phrases (in the form of "queries") that prompted reflections on: "How is my soul?" "How have I been nourished?" "What is God calling me to do?" and "Do I walk gently over the earth?"

Michael Eccles spoke to help us broaden our perspective to the entire Quaker community in Europe and the Middle East. In addition to providing important information on the groups and activities that were carried out over the past two years and are planned for the near future (Friend Kirsten Hills from Florence will attend the All-Age Gathering in August with her family, and Friend Joyce Steijn will be attending the Peace and Service Network meeting as our representative in October), he shared extraordinary experiences, such as the first meeting in many years between the Ramallah group in Palestine and the Brummana group in Lebanon, as well as the group in Kiev, Ukraine—all in dire situations, yet active and engaged in bearing witness for peace. Let us hold them all in the Light.

Together, Friends Cecilia Clementel and Joyce Steijn, representing Italy in the EMES Peace and Service Network, introduced testimonies from conscientious objectors in Europe and the Middle East. These testimonies were collected in two booklets: one edited by the QCEA (and others) in Brussels, and the other, in Italian, produced by the Un Ponte Per association with the direct collaboration of Joyce. Of particular interest are the motivations of the conscientious objectors: moral, religious, social justice, and the hope in pacifism as a force for radical change.

At the Meeting for Worship for Business on Sunday morning, we expressed our gratitude to the organizers of the meeting, Francesca Isola and Friend Andrea Guidotti. We congratulated Friend Jeannette Tien-Wei Law on her appointment to the EMES Executive Committee and thanked her for her service as Clerk of the Quakers in Italy since December 2023. Friend Cecilia Clementel and another Friend will endeavour to take the initial steps towards the possible roles of Co-Clerks in helping to take care of the community in the coming years.

The Meeting for Worship, during which we heartily greeted old Friends from Sweden and Germany, was followed by updates from Yurii Sheliashenko, conscientious objector in Ukraine, whose testimony we support and want to raise awareness about.

All in all, our Annual Gathering was a time of sharing in an atmosphere of respect and renewed hope.

In peace and Friendship,

signed on behalf of the participants of the Italian Annual Meeting
Jeannette Tien-Wei Law (Clerk)

La Guscella, Camugnano, Bologna ITALY, July 26, 2026