

Epistles from Yearly Meetings – 2018

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Our Watching Committee has selected the epistles below which will be read during plenary Meetings for Worship for Business.

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For a look at many more epistles from yearly meetings around the world, please visit:
<http://fwcc.world/epistles-from-quaker-groups-from-around-the-world>.



Epistle from German Yearly Meeting 2017

Loving greetings to Friends everywhere.

The 87th Yearly Meeting of German and Austrian Friends, held in our Quakerhaus (Quaker House) in Bad Pyrmont, was attended by 205 people. Our time together was greatly enriched by the presence of around 20 Friends from other Yearly Meetings, and also a large number of children and young people.

This year's Richard L. Cary Lecture, given by Paul Parker, Recording Clerk of Britain Yearly Meeting, was entitled "Special offer! What do we Quakers have to offer the world in these turbulent times?". Paul reminded us that, often in difficult times, Quakers have pointed the way towards a future with room for compassion, where human life is valued; we are called to do this right now if we really mean to live out our faith.

In the silence of our Quaker worship we search together for the truth, truth which some, but by no means all, call God; the very foundation of our faith, influencing, for many of us, every aspect of our lives. But far too many of us hesitate to reveal this, even to each other, perhaps because we are afraid of seeming peculiar, or even because we are unwilling to give the appearance of missionary zeal. But unless we demonstrate our Quakerism, how will the world ever get to know about us?

Paul Parker urges us not to "hide our light under a bushel" but to have the courage to be open about our Quakerism, clearly stating what we believe, and acting on these beliefs.

If we fail to do this it is as if we are all taking part in a shared picnic, but one where the picnic baskets we brought all remain firmly closed. Spiritual nourishment, both for ourselves and others, only takes place when we are ready to open up our picnic baskets and spread out and share the contents.

Maybe we cannot offer ready-made answers, but we are a company of seekers, able to offer both mutual support and companionship in seeking.

These ideas resonated with a concern that was already present in our meetings for business. Many of us, including Paul, only managed to find Quakers after years, or even decades, of searching for like-minded people; so what is it that prevents us making our Quakerism better known throughout Germany?

A further pressing concern is the existence in Germany of US American atomic weapons, stationed, with the cooperation of Germany, in Büchel in the Eifel region, available for use in the event of a Nato mission. We abhor the idea that such weapons launched from our land could be used to bring death and destruction around the world, and a group of us is starting an initiative in which we, as Quakers, plan to take part in non-violent protest, with the support of our yearly meeting.

The matter that exercised us most was that of the future, both of our historic house and of our continuing fellowship as Friends. Until recently many had been unaware of how often the Quakerhaus in Bad Pyrmont is standing empty. Very few local Friends now live and worship in Bad Pyrmont. The house only really comes to life during our yearly meetings, held there every second year. With its practically unique architecture, it is a source of inspiration to us, but even so, its upkeep takes up a seriously high proportion of our budget. With all this in mind a project was initiated about a year ago to investigate possible scenarios for the future, considering both the wishes of Friends and the financial possibilities. The hearts of many of us are stirred by the experience of sitting in the main meeting room, with its lofty ceiling, suspended from an invisible roof support, high above us. This room, first built in 1800, means a great deal to most of us, being a place where we have so often experienced the Light during our meetings for worship and business. Here too we feel at one with all those departed Friends whose ashes rest in the adjacent Burial Ground.

As we explored all this together, we discovered that it is not only the question of our Meeting House that is important, but even more, of the way we as a religious society go forward into the future.

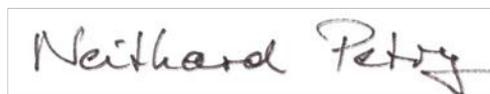
We rejoice in the fact that our Young Friends are seeking to be more closely involved in the life of the Yearly Meeting, and we look forward to the exchanges with them that this closer connection will bring.

We have heard from our aid and development programme, Quäkerhilfe (Quaker help) that they continue working in a variety of small projects, helping improve people's living conditions, simultaneously aiming to promote peace, non-violence and cooperation. This includes the building up of the Alternative to Violence Project (AVP) in several countries. We were most interested to hear from one of our visitors, a member of AVP Sudan, as he described the work of AVP in his homeland.

Your epistles, read out at the beginning of our meeting, give us a deep feeling of connectedness with you as we strive to bring more Light into the world.



Sabine Alvermann
(Co-Clerk)



Neithard Petry
(Co-Clerk)

To Friends Worldwide,

The Annual General Conference of Japan Yearly Meeting was held on November 18-19, 2017. Our theme was "Let Our Lives Speak," the words of George Fox inspired by James 2:14-18. The conference was hosted by Tokyo Monthly Meeting, with 34 in attendance.

In the first symposium, "The Legacy We Leave to the Next Generation, Visible and Invisible," representatives of each Monthly Meeting shared the following observations:

--the hope that we may cherish what we have learned from the models set by our elders and fulfill our responsibilities as members;

--the desire for recognition of the value of mutual respect for diversity and our tradition of openness and generosity;

--the hope that the children of the Meeting will grow up with an awareness of the presence of God in their lives and the joy of working with them;

--the importance of letting the younger generation feel free to choose from the models they witness rather than feeling compelled to accept advice; and

--the hope that intergenerational relations among Friends will be as peers rather than hierarchical, and that we share a global vision of our place in the world.

We felt a common sense of what we want to convey in these experiential testimonies from representatives of various age groups, and hope to continue to sojourn in this spirit.

In the second symposium, "Journeys to Membership in the Religious Society of Friends and How We Welcome Visitors," four new members spoke about how they were drawn to join. In one case, it was related to her daughter entering Friends Girls School. In another case, the journey began with attendance at a Christian church during a period of study abroad. For a third, the opportunity was occasioned by a child enrolling in a Friends kindergarten. For another, it was through the introduction of an acquaintance who was a member. The occasions were various, but all were led by God. We feel a ray of hope in all these encounters. Attenders were also inspired by the witness of the Clerks of our Monthly Meetings who shared their local traditions of welcoming all visitors as friends, of active outreach, and of respect for individuality.

The Meeting for Business approved the following items: the 2016 Yearly Meeting report; the plan and budget for 2017; the plan for the timely demolition of Friends Center Annex; the laying down of the Shimotsuma Meetinghouse Working Group and the Friends Center Planning Committee; and nominations of new executive committee members.

After the General Meeting, we had the opportunity to deepen our acquaintance with representatives of the following affiliated organizations: Aiyuen, Japan Friends Service Committee, Shoutomo Gakuen Kindergarten, Shouyuu Gakuen Kindergarten, and Friends Girls School.

Sachiko Yamamoto, Clerk
Japan Yearly Meeting
November 19, 2017

July 30, 2017

To Friends Everywhere:

“Joined by every supporting ligament” was the theme for this year’s Western Yearly Meeting. Using Ephesians 4:16, “From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work,” Western Yearly Meeting gathered in Plainfield, Indiana from July 27-30, 2017 for our 160th annual session.

Over the past several years, the themes of each gathering have continued to build on each other, providing a framework for unity and growth to meet today’s challenges. From recognizing and encouraging spiritual giftedness, becoming better stewards, and laying a foundation for growth; we moved this year to consider the process of strengthening each part so that we can, together in the Spirit, withstand the forces that threaten to weaken us as we move forward.

Quaker Lecture speaker, Max Carter, had his childhood roots in Russiaville, Indiana (a part of Western Yearly Meeting.) This connection made his Thursday night presentation especially meaningful. He reminded us through historical anecdotes that the growth of Quakerdom was not without conflict, disagreement, and heartache. What allowed the Quakers to survive as a group, was that despite stretching “every supporting ligament,” (sometimes to nearly breaking) they recognized they were united by love and the Spirit which is stronger than any outside force. He pointed out that each generation has been faced with deep social conflict, threats to theology, advances in technology, and resulting changes in culture. Each generation emerged stronger because they faced and worked through the challenges. The current generation does not need to be the exception if we remember that love and the Spirit of God sustains us.

Like many faith bodies today, Western Yearly Meeting faces the realities of outside forces competing for the time of members, a dwindling number of active adults due to aging and its effects, and reduced numbers of new members. While several individual meetings are seeing growth, others are struggling to remain viable, and several have been laid down. We recognize that it is the actions of the current generation that will revive the fervor that draws in people for Christ. Individual meetings have already started reaching out into and engaging the communities around them in a wide variety of ways. At the same time, these meetings are working to strengthen the support and nurture of current members. These meetings have realized that strengthening requires action! The annual Memorial Service provided an opportunity to remember those who have gone before us and the roles each of them played in helping the current generation grow and strengthen.

Western Yearly Meeting was well represented at the Friends United Meeting Triennial and those who attended reported growth in understanding and strengthening of relationships as a result of attendance. Balancing this “outreach” to the world is the “inward” care and nurture that will result from successfully reaching the financial goal for the Western Yearly Meeting Pastoral Ministry Excellence sustained fund. As grants are made from this fund, everyone in Western Yearly Meeting will have a part in helping pastors retire with dignity, and reduce the financial strain of those entering pastoral training.

Each year provides an opportunity to program the annual meeting differently, adapting it to meet the needs of those attending and encourage new attenders. This year was no exception. Morning devotional speakers were local leaders. Meetings for Business were shortened to a two-hour session on each of the first three days, encouraging written rather than oral reports with opportunities for discussion provided. Western Yearly Meeting approved a minute encouraging members to support discussion and legislation abolishing the death penalty in the case of severe mental illness. A proposal to change current procedures regarding nominations and Area Meetings was considered to meet the challenge of reduced membership and still maintain a framework for future growth.

Afternoons were filled with engaging workshops and interest group sessions. Workshops included: “Practice in Peaceful Problem Solving” presented by the Indianapolis Peace Learning Center; “Communicating for Peaceful Resolution” presented by the Alternatives to Violence; and “Drug Addiction and How the Church Can Help,” a panel discussion conducted by especially qualified community specialists. A wide variety of additional interest group sessions reflected the diverse needs and concerns of the members of Western Yearly Meeting. Intergenerational activities were well attended and new evening activities such as a Festival of Fun and an open-to-the-public free concert with Tim Grimm were tried for the first time.

Saturday morning started with a Pancake Breakfast sponsored by the Quaker Men as a fund raiser for the mission in Belize. After the business session, workshops, and interest groups, the mission emphasis continued. Quaker Men and the USFW met for a combined session led by Oscar Mbali from Nairobi who is assuming pastoral responsibilities in Belize. This was followed by Quaker Men/USFW meals and business, and the public concert!

Sunday was a day of rejoicing. Musical gifts of individuals and groups from within Western Yearly Meeting were highlighted in an uplifting program presented prior to the Sunday morning closing worship service and the official recognition of our newly recorded minister, Kathy Luethje.

As we move forward “To strengthen every ligament” by putting our faith into action, your prayers of support and encouragement are appreciated.

In Christian Love,

Sarah Lookabill, Presiding Clerk

Elizabeth Ann Carter, Recording Clerk

Kay Carter, Assistant to the Clerk