

Religious Society of Friends - German Yearly Meeting - Epistel 2017

Loving greetings to Friends everywhere.

The 87th Yearly Meeting of German and Austrian Friends, held in our Quaekerhaus (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 Quaekerhaus 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 Alverman & Neithard Petry,
Clerks, German Yearly Meeting