

Quakers

NEDERLANDSE JAARVERGADERING VAN
HET RELIGIEUS GENOOTSCHAP DER VRIENDEN

May 2013

Greetings to Friends everywhere,

Netherlands Yearly Meeting was gathered this year in a 'Friends of Nature-home' located in the middle of the forest. Some 90 Friends including around 10 children and youngsters were present. There were representatives of Britain, German, Belgian and Denmark Yearly Meetings.

The theme of our annual gathering was "And then you will walk cheerfully over this world, answering that of God in everyone". Marlies Tjallingii, our new Clerk, opened the sessions quoting from a poem by our Friend Kees Boeke. One of the verses says: "In the silence my thoughts merged with God's Thought." A beautiful start to our Annual Meeting. In a relaxed manner the representatives of other Yearly Meetings were warmly welcomed. New attenders were given the opportunity to introduce themselves. We got acquainted with the new representative of the Quaker Council for European Affairs, Alexandra Bosbeer.

Modestly, simply and from the heart, Willem Furnée introduced the theme of the meeting. Willem went over the different dimensions of the theme and pointed out how difficult it may be to find that of God in someone else. He illustrated this with a video of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission which showed how the parents of a murdered white activist were able to forgive the murderer. In doing so they continued the work of their daughter in her spirit of reconciliation. This made us dialogue extensively about guilt and forgiveness in our basegroups.

The representative of the 'Congregations of the Base Movement' in the Council of Churches in the Netherlands, José Höhne-Sparborth, presented us with the second theme, the history of slavery of the Netherlands. On the first of July of this year it will be 150 years ago the slavery in the overseas territories of the Netherlands was abolished. To properly commemorate this there should be adequate awareness and recognition of our role in slavery. The process of forgiveness also requires trauma healing of the families of those that were enslaved. Unfortunately there are still many forms of hidden slavery today. Some 100 million people are working in modern forms of slavery, partly to fulfil our need for luxury.

Listening to readings of some twenty Epistles, we felt connected with Friends worldwide. It is good to hear that the vision of the Kabarok Call for Peace and Eco Justice continues to be at work in many places.

The Children's Committee expressed a concern. To organize a program for the small group with a range of different ages is experienced as rather difficult. This concern was heard and shared by everyone. The question is how we can integrate the children's program better into the program of our Annual Meeting.

The children and youngsters explored the meeting's theme through being clowns. Their presentation introduced a cheerful element indeed. They also collected money for a designated good cause, the Cliniclowns (an organization aimed at cheering up children who are hospitalized), by selling different types of juice in a fruit juice bar. We also collected money for the Trauma Healing and Reconciliation (THARS) project of our Friend David Niyonzima in Burundi and the course in Non-violent Communication Skills given by Marlies and Sytse Tjallingii at Ramallah.

A broad range of special interest groups gave us the opportunity to share what moves us personally. In this way we heard from Kees Nieuwerth about the intensive Just Peace-

process of the World Council of Churches to have war made illegal. We share the hope of our Clerk that in the near future war will be declared illegal, just like slavery.

Next to the usual Silent Meeting for Worship there was also an opportunity to attend a Meeting for Worship with Music and Movement.

Through all we heard and experienced the meaning of the theme was deepened and became more of a challenge. We had to face up to painful questions but are leaving this gathering deeply convinced of the truth in the words of George Fox: “Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.” (1656).

Marlies Tjallingii, clerk