

Epistle from Netherlands Yearly Meeting

Held at Natuurvriendenhuis De Bosbeek, Bennekom on 25 – 27 May 2018

To Friends everywhere,

When we headed to Bennekom on Friday afternoon, facing the rush hour traffic, we were grateful to smell the wonderful scent of the forest upon arrival and let the silence descend on us like a cooling balm. The “Nivon Bosbeekhuis”, where we gathered as Dutch Friends for our Annual Meeting, was waiting for us there between the trees. We started our gathering with the assignment to search our inner selves for a heartfelt wish, connected to our ongoing transformation. This wish was written down on a piece of paper, with which you then went to “the market”, to find allies to help you make this dream come true. Ensuing was a funny hive of activity, and quickly small groups were formed of likeminded Friends, who promised each other to get to work. Confronting us with these heartfelt wishes brought us closer together and helped us in our quest for practical solutions.

For several years our Yearly Meeting has not been able to fill the vacancies on our Peace Committee. However, reading the reports of our Monthly Meetings it becomes clear that many members are committed to a great variety of peace initiatives, either at a personal or regional level. This made us realize that sharing our Peace Testimony is not necessarily about forming a committee, but also supporting each other to find God’s guidance in our own lives.

Two years ago we received the working document of Quaker Geloven en Werken (Faith and Practice). Monthly Meetings and members were invited to read this document, discuss its contents and send in feedback. By now a rich harvest of commentary has come in. The process of working through this document as Dutch Quakers has led to many inspiring and open conversations, sometimes about topics that otherwise are rarely discussed, like sexuality and relationships. Now we will progress into the last phase of publishing our own Dutch version of Quaker Faith and Practice. We look forward to put the final version to good use.

Kevin Bales told us about contemporary slavery. He is a professor of sociology and an expert on modern slavery, working together with Free the Slaves to end all forms of human slavery. Although many of us are not aware of it, there are still approximately 40 million slaves worldwide. Slaves are especially used in developing countries, usually in work that is very polluting and produces excessive CO2. Freeing slaves would therefore also be a step forward in the problems around climate change. In every country around the world there are slaves, also in the Netherlands. Forced prostitution is an example of this. Kevin encourages us to learn more about the connections between slavery and our everyday living and which choices we could make in order to free slaves. There are several organizations working towards the goal of ending all forms of human slavery. It is also possible for entire communities, for example the Religious Society of Friends, to become slave-free. We had a lot of questions for Kevin and discussed the subject matter for a long time afterwards in smaller groups. The conversation about modern slavery isn’t over yet.

During the weekend the new booklet '102 ideas to enrich my Quaker life' was presented. It brings us great joy that the German Yearly Meeting took the initiative to design and publish this booklet in memory of Hadewijch Touwen. We will certainly let ourselves be inspired by it!

We enjoyed this Annual Gathering which, thanks in part to the presence of the children and many foreign guests, had a wonderful atmosphere. Re-energized, we said goodbye to each other and to the birds, who we left singing in the woods.



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