

EMEYF Spring Gathering 2012 Epistle

From April 6th to 13th 2012, seventeen young Friends met for the EMEYF Spring Gathering in Wehlen, near Dresden (Germany). Focusing on the theme of 'Encouraging Community', we shared stories, discussions and exercises in order to develop greater understandings of the elements and challenges of encouraging communities. We were lucky to have guidance and help from Miriam Krämer and Davorka Lovrekovic, invited speakers from German Yearly Meeting. The growth of our group work is presented in this tree. Our initial thoughts and guiding questions accompanied us on a fruitful path towards community at this Spring Gathering, which we hope to carry back home into our own lives.

We thank EMEYF and the Spring Gathering committee for organizing and facilitating such an inspiring event.

Questions providing the roots of our activities included:

- What communities am I part of?
- What is my part in community?
- What do we want to take responsibility for?
- What do we have to take responsibility for?
- How do I live in community?
- What resources help us to live brave lives?
- How am I encouraged by community?
- How can I encourage community?

We branched out our awareness of community to look for answers to these questions through our activities during the gathering, such as:

- discussions
- cooking together
- creativity
- singing
- creative listening
- puns
- hugs
- music
- laughing
- meeting new friends
- eating lunch by the river in the sun together
- Davorka's introduction to 'broken world'
- Miriam's nuclear eggsercise
- visiting Frauenkirche in Dresden
- talking about the Kenya 2012 World Conference
- playing the 'unable and unwilling' game
- creating clay communities
- talking about our own lives
- being alone in nature
- reflecting on and celebrating each others' attributes and skills
- enjoying the experience of being together
- talking about our communities at home and comparing them to how we build a community here
- an introduction to the Quaker business method, leading into our business meetings
- discussing conflict resolution in Israel and Palestine
- meetings for worship
- human contact
- exploring how we discern the will of God
- using verbal and non-verbal means of communication
- respecting the need for personal reflection or quiet space at times
- taking care of each other (when in need) and finding this rewarding, whilst appreciating the help of others when the situation is the other way around

Epilogue gave us time to share silent worship, candles, music, thoughts and friendship, developing both consciously and subconsciously our understanding of how we can encourage community.

- "I feel strengthened in many ways, personal, in belief...and encouraged to live community. I have been reminded of how important truth to others, but mainly to myself, is."
- "Friendships...understanding...space."
- "I've been reminded of the importance of Friends, community and the light they bring...Young Friends events offer a lot in these areas. Also that my own Quaker communities now probably lie elsewhere. [I sense]...an awareness that it is time to move on, and probably also to leave well."
- "Thank you Friends, for letting me share in the growth of this community. I came here knowing no one, not even myself, yet here we have grown close friendships. We have travelled a journey together. I have learnt so much from you, which I hope to take with me and develop within myself and the communities which I am a part of."
- "Building bridges...new Friends...productive, co-operative work on similar problems...enjoying VERY much building/encouraging community here with Quaker Friends."
- "I've found the fellowship really inspiring and the support in the silence."
- "More clear ideas of what I want and what I don't want from life."
- "The gathering taught me that in peace and reconciliation you need to look for the root cause of people's unhappiness and aggression, not just respond to the symptoms/behaviour."
- "Fun...laughter..."
- "I felt we got to a place so deep it was uncomfortable (especially in the sessions on the second day.) Personally, that doesn't bother me at all - in fact I really felt connected with everyone because of this shared experience."
- "I found a place/community in which I can be true to every part of myself, in which I feel acceptance, understanding, love and peace. I feel that even with large distances we will have to face between us we are and will be a true and real community."
- "I feel community with people when we do things together. That's a good focus for me to have and something I will encourage."

Finally, some wisdom from a Quaker text, shared by Davorka...

"In a true community we will not choose our companions, for our choices are so often limited by self-serving motives. Instead, our companions will be given to us by grace. Often they will be persons who will upset our settled view of self and world. In fact, we might define true community as the place where the person you least want to live with always lives."

