

To Friends Everywhere

Norway Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) were gathered for their 206th annual gathering, 28th to 30th of 6th month, 2024 at Fana Folk High School in Bergen. We were 37 participants, and in addition there were 6 guests on the Saturday. And there was time in our schedule for Quaker Service Norway to hold their annual meeting in the same place.

Some early arrivals had the opportunity to participate in a “Forest Immersion” in the beautiful surroundings as a help to open their connection to all creation. According to tradition, our programme also included other opportunities for contact with nature, and many took walks in the surroundings and visited the local botanical garden and arboretum.

We wished to celebrate the 400th birthday of George Fox, and Arnstein Finset gave the lecture, **1624 – 1824 – 2024: On George Fox, Hans Nielsen Hauge, and on us, Friends who live in the present time.** He broadened our perspectives by sharing glimpses of the two historical persons, in their ages, and following some of the threads into the present time. He shared his image of Fox’ experience of the following terms: religious experience, elements of faith, use of silence, and Quaker values. Unlike many classical mystics who tended to withdraw from “the World”, Fox typically found inspiration for action from his mystical openings. Fox saw the scriptures as spirit led traditions which we need guidance from the Spirit to comprehend, whereas Hans Nielsen Hauge, whose death in 1824 is also commemorated this year, had a Lutheran understanding of the Bible as the final Word of God. Hauge was afraid to be seen as a “pious dreamer” and remained in his Lutheran Church. Those of us who live in the modern, liberal Quaker tradition as “rediscovered” by Rufus Jones, like to use the terms used by George Fox, though in modern usage they may not have exactly the same meaning as they had to Fox.

We treasure the terms ‘that of God in everyone’, ‘the Light’, and the hope that ‘the silence opens for leadings from God’ as we have come to understand them. In one interest group Friends explored similar words and expressions from the Fox-anthology *Truth of the Heart*. In another interest group on current work on Norwegian *Queries and Advices*, we worked in smaller groups to explore how we may find our own words to express life-changing religious experiences. We struggle with texts and terms which hardly convey what we want to say. In a process for revision of *Queries and Advices* we expect to continue the search for both the right language and scope.

Our religious experiences as Quakers hold a richness which is difficult to describe but which represents our reality. Arnstein Finset quoted Tomas Tranströmer’s paraphrase on some words by Jewish philosopher Simone Weil, which spoke to us: “In the silence we experience something which we cannot fully imagine nor understand, but which is not an illusion.”

The Clerk opened our first business session by reading from no. 2.3 in our Norwegian *Faith and Practice* about the Quaker business method, how we wait together, in the Light, to discern what may be the right way forward. We remain open, listening, while also sharing our own view. Then the process may give us a shared understanding of reality. Our fellowship has again replenished us with gratitude and joy.

Bergen, 30th day of 6th month, 2024

Lara Marie Wik
Clerk, Norway Yearly Meeting