

Epistle 2024 from Quakers in Italy

Casa Cares, Reggello (Florence)

Dear Friends,

From Nov 8-10, 2024, Friends in Italy gathered in Reggello at Casa Cares, a manor house originally from the 15th century and, more recently after World War II, a former orphanage in the countryside near Florence. On Friday evening, five Friends shared their stories about their religious backgrounds before Quakerism. By phone, another Italian Friend shared his intention to apply for international membership, after having attended online Meetings for Worship and for Business for several months and having made contributions to the Quakers in Italy website. Lucia Biondelli shared the inclusive vision of the late Pier Cesare Bori for the Quaker community in Italy. Cecilia Clementel commemorated the memory of other departed Friends, whose lives testified to the Light through important reconciliation work between Israeli and Palestinian women and during the war in the former Yugoslavia.

On Saturday morning, Ethel Livermore from EMES led us to consider our theme of “answering that of God in every one.” A key reflection concerned the importance of recognising that of God in ourselves, in order to answer that of God in others, with the exchange of mutual blessings. Four friends of Friends from Florence joined in person for the day. By virtual connection, Joyce Steijn updated the group about the work of the Peace and Service Network with conscientious objectors from Russia and Ukraine, including the larger principles behind current events. Cecilia Clementel outlined the evolution of the Quaker Peace testimony in Britain as responses to two World Wars. The group reflected together in Worship Sharing on how to live out our Quaker Peace testimony, despite deep frustration and concern during such tragic times today. Saturday afternoon, a pacifist and friend of Friends from Pisa, Umberto Mugnaini, shared his research about historical connections between Italian pacifists and friends of Friends in Italy, one of whom had translated George Fox’s journal into Italian in the 1960s. After a short road trip through the hills on a sunny afternoon, a group of 8 women (Friends & friends) visited the Vallombrosa monastery, including a chapel and the monastic quarters from the 13th century. That evening, Andrea Guidotti led the group in some somber reflections about the thousands of deaths caused by the wars in the Middle East and Ukraine.

Early on Sunday, Clerk Jeannette Tien-Wei Law led Friends in some basic breathing exercises for mindfulness, as suggested by Thich Nhat Hanh, then in a time of prayer for personal and group concerns, including Lucia Biondelli’s upcoming work trip to Jerusalem. At the MFWFB attended by 3 more Friends online, the group reviewed the activities in community and in peace and service from the past year, since Annual Gathering 2023, with gratitude. For Annual Gathering 2025, the sense of the Meeting was to discuss and discern further details of dates and 3 possible venues at the next MFWFB on December 1st. This Epistle was read and approved after the Meeting for Worship for Business. Friends concluded the 2024 Annual Gathering of Quakers in Italy with silent worship, then final reflections under a circle of trees in the autumn sun, with renewed hope and vigor for the coming year.

In peace e Friendship,

Jeannette Tien-Wei Law

Clerk for M4W4Bs

Quakers in Italy

November 10, 2024