

Epistle of the 94th German Yearly Meeting in Bonn, Haus Venusberg, 2024

What MOVES us, dear Friends everywhere,

Firstly, on the opening evening, the horrifying images of system collapse flickering across the screen. We flock into the main hall, having just greeted one another cheerfully, but now we take our seats, shocked and transfixed by burning forests, dead animals and destroyed houses. Looking away for even a moment: impossible!

The Young Friends, who have taken charge of preparing the theme of the 94th German Yearly Meeting, confront us with the existential threat to life on our planet. They want to give this fact the space it deserves – across the generations.

We 198 Friends, including many children, juniors and young adult Friends as well as guests and delegates from Belgium/Luxembourg, Great Britain, Ireland, Norway, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the Czech Republic and Central European Yearly Meeting, are facing serious changes. The Young Friends' contributions have been ambitiously woven into the very fabric of this Yearly Meeting: breaks for stretching and breathwork during the Cary Lecture, longer periods of silence during meals, experimental Meetings for Worship, space for feelings and emotions, blended participation and increased intergenerational exchange. Initial scepticism gives way to curiosity and respect. This has much to do with the lively way the Young Friends lead us into the Yearly Meeting, encouraging connection and participation by moving and singing together.

In their Richard L. Cary lecture entitled '***When everything is at stake – journeying as Friends in times of crisis***', Martin Höfflin-Glünkin and Dieter Müller-Nöhring express their personal co-responsibility for the multiple crises facing our planet and their consequences with unflinching honesty. Both share their 'holy terror' at their own failings, 'because the world looks very different from the 50th floor of the Westend Tower (in Frankfurt, ed.)' (Dieter). Martin takes us from our heads to our hearts by showing us the beauty and simultaneous vulnerability of the ecosystem using the example of the Mountain Alcon Blue butterfly (*Phengaris rebeli*). The lecture's central message: to see what is and – in the words of Thích Nhất Hạnh – 'hear within us the sound of the earth crying'. Dieter and Martin call on us to strengthen our relationships in the present in order to shape our future. The Inner Light can guide us on our 'wanderings through the desert' and give us the courage to leave the 'fleshpots of Egypt' behind us.

We seek resonance with one another in a new format – the Forum – in which we take part in parallel groups. Being witnessed without judgement, intense encounters and emotions held by the community. However, we realise we find it difficult to share our feelings and show our vulnerability. It is an experiment that met with a range of responses.

In various interest groups, we explore the pressing challenges of our time and our own attitude to them in through activism and through creative and artistic approaches. Our process also finds expression in the decision made in the Meeting for Worship for Business to support the Compass Collective's sailboat for sea rescue in the Mediterranean, initiated by our Friend Katja Tempel.

Despite our full agenda and the planned programme, the need to engage with the suffering and killing in Gaza, Israel and the Middle East becomes clear. After an intense, multifaceted exchange, the Meeting decides to support the call and statement of various international Quaker organisations on the Middle East conflict. A new working group is to be established to enable Friends to find their

own voice in response to this conflict, while doing justice to Germany's historically based position on and relationships to the parties involved.

In the spirit of inclusion, several cameras and microphones share the events in the hall live with Friends at home. The good image and sound quality means that those taking part digitally from a distance have a sense of true participation in the events in Bonn, including the reunions and emotions.

A MOVING Yearly Meeting comes to an end. After 8 years of successful planning and converting of our Quaker House, we are looking forward to welcoming Friends back to Bad Pyrmont next year and are glad to know that until then, our house will be filled with life in a rich variety of other ways.

Bonn, 3 November 2024

Anne Pommier (Clerk) and Stefan Mann (Clerk)

Translated with the help of DeepL.com (free version)