



# Among Friends

Friends World Committee for Consultation Europe and Middle East Section

No 161 ■ Winter 2024

## EDITORIAL

# CULTIVATING PEACE



Dear friends, even though, everyone tells me, Quakers do not recognise the seasons and holidays, as the year draws to a close, many of us do use this time to reflect on the past year and plan for the upcoming one. And so do I.

As many of you know, I started my role with EMES as Communication & Networking Coordinator in July. Since then I have experienced and learned a lot, especially the way I engage with peace or its absence has changed and my view has broadened. Through lots of conversations that I was able to have with various weighty Friends, I have gained an insight that I would like to share with you in this last issue of the Year 2024.

Peace or peacefulness is a culture. By this I mean, peace is a practice that can be taught, cultivated, inherited and so on. We practice it (or don't) practice it on many different levels as a community and as individuals every single day.

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Friends World Committee for Consultation  
EUROPE & MIDDLE EAST SECTION

[fwccemes.org](http://fwccemes.org)

When I google the definition of peace, it is described as the absence of war or disturbance. And I am not fully sure that this wholly encompasses what peace is but for the sake of this article, I will use this definition. For example when the war in Ukraine started, I noticed some people were surprised by it. The same happens with much smaller conflicts in my county or conflicts in communities. Like everything is peaceful one day, the next day there is a full on war and everyone is taken by surprise. And this in turn surprises me. Because I don't think that is how it really happens. The "un-peacefulness" usually starts a lot earlier. In my quest to live as peacefully as possible, I tried to follow the root of peace. I went through the layers of violence I could identify in daily life. War, smaller armed conflicts, brawls, a slap during an argument, raging and ranting with words... typical violence, I thought. But I went deeper and now feel it starts in everyday conversation.

**The way we speak to one another in simple conversations that are not fights or discussions also make a difference. We can always inquire if we speak from our hearts with the intention of connection or if we speak to hurt and separate from the other person. This will make a difference in our choice of words, our tone and therefore in how our words are received by the people we engage with.**

Lastly, the root is how we speak to ourselves. Being at peace with ourselves is an underrated strength. A person who speaks kindly and peacefully to themselves will have an easier time speaking like this towards those around them. Recognizing that of god in everyone does not only pertain to those around us, but also ourselves.

I don't mean to say that speaking kindly to ourselves and the person at the cash register at the supermarket can substitute our efforts in peace projects or other projects and efforts that aim to change the world for the better. But I do suggest that it can build a solid foundation in each of us and our immediate surroundings, for the seeds of peace to grow healthily and wholesomely. This is my wish and hope for the new year. May the seeds of peace prosper on all levels in the lives of all of you and around the world.

Joyful and restful holidays,

**Julia Walloch**

EMES Communication and Networking  
Coordinator, Vienna Worship Group



# WORLD PLENARY MEETING IMPRESSIONS FROM THE MEETING AND THE YOUNG FRIENDS EVENT

by Paula Christophersen, German YM

“So, how was South Africa?” “Everything. It was everything!”

This is an exchange I have had numerous times over the last weeks. At first, I thought that eventually, I'd be able to sort my firework of impressions and reflections into a coherent report, to describe my experience of the 2024 FWCC World Plenary Meeting and Young Adult Friends event in precise words, once and for all. I have since come to accept that I am not likely to draw a concise conclusion anytime soon, not least because the experience seems far from over, even three months after my return to my home in Northern Germany. Instead, I want to give a few examples to illustrate the different impressions that I have taken with me from two eventful weeks.

## How was South Africa? Well...

**It was alive**, for the hundreds of Friends who co-created the event and for the moments of feeling led and inspired, like I was going in the exact direction life was in.

**It was familiar**, for the Friends I had met before, for prayerful discernment and for every round of (rooibos) tea and biscuits.

**It was unexpected**, for the many new insights gained from listening to Friends from around the world and for the friendships that formed in such a short amount of time, across nationalities, traditions and languages. Oh, and for the monkeys that ravaged the conference room in search of biscuits if you forgot to close the windows!

**It was exhausting**, for the long days and deep engagement in sessions, epistle crafting and mealtime conversations.



| The Ravaging Monkeys!

**It was exhilarating**, for the powerful glimpses of a global network of people who all work for positive change with love, compassion and faith.

**It was heartbreaking**, for every time we grappled with our complicity in the systems that perpetuate harm in this world.

**It was joyful**, for the way we celebrated our shared humanity, history and values. And for delicious dessert!

**It was challenging**, for every time I had to question what I had assumed was a given or a universally adopted position among all Quakers – What do you mean, the bible teaches that we shouldn't embrace trans people?!

**It was comforting**, for every return to common ground, for prayerful silence and every hug and song that enveloped our differences in the shared belief that we belong together.



| The YAFS Campfire

These reflections are inevitably incomplete and far from final. For now, I want to close by saying that for me, participating in these events has also been a new beginning: Following a strong calling to keep engaging with Friends across continents, I was appointed to a new World Committee of Young Adult Friends. As we work to continue and expand our budding global network, I keep coming back with gratitude to the experience that started it all, and how it taught me to hold conviction and ambiguity and joy and heartbreak all at the same time. To hold them with curiosity and humility, to hold them in faith and most importantly, to hold them in community.

# WORLD PLENARY MEETING PARTICIPATING, AND PREPARING FOR MIRACLE & ACTION

by Solveig-Karin Erdal, Sweden YM

In August, I had the incredible opportunity to attend the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) World Plenary Meeting in Johannesburg, South Africa. I was there as a representative for Sweden Yearly Meeting, and also in my roles as member of the EMES and International nomination committees. During the gathering I served in the pastoral care team, as a home group facilitator and I offered morning stretches as well as a workshop on bokashi composting.

The theme of the meeting, “Living the Spirit of Ubuntu: Responding with Hope to God’s Call to Cherish Creation and One Another,” resonated deeply with me. Ubuntu, a Zulu word meaning “I am because we are,” encapsulates the essence of interconnectedness and community. Throughout the plenary, this theme was not just discussed but lived out in our interactions and through worship. Being together during the gathering, sharing meals and socialising, was such a rich experience. Many conversations, even just in the elevator or waiting in line, became deep and enriching very quickly. I often thought of the Quakers words of getting to “know one another in that which is eternal”.

During the plenary meeting itself, there was a lot of talk, learning and inspiration, and not so much action. We were deeply challenged to bring ambitions and action items home to our yearly and local

meetings, and to act for change in the world, in particular along the three thematic streams; Ubuntu, Care for creation and Healing historical and continuing injustice. It is fairly easy to commit to dedicating more effort to this while in the bubble of a Friendly community. Going home, facing everyday life and the realities of our meetings, the challenge grows.

For me, one of the strongest moments was in my home group where one Friend shared the methafor that if you want to test if you can walk on water, if you want to see if your faith carries you, you need to climb out of the boat like the disciple Peter did. Unless you have the courage and faith to get your feet wet, and preparedness to sink, you cannot expect any miracle. Friends, I am still in the boat, with radical hope, praying from the WPM tapestry document:

God of love and grace, we are a beautiful and broken people, living in a beautiful and broken world.

We confess that we have fallen short in caring for each other and for creation.

As a faith community we ask you to forgive us for neglecting creation, and for inflicting grave injustices upon one another.

Give us the courage and wisdom to move forward boldly.

Grant us the strength to seek each other’s forgiveness, and the love and courage to hold both pain and possibility in our hearts.

We ask you to send us on a new journey with our fellow humans and all your creatures in the spirit of Ubuntu.

Amen



| Solveig-Karin and Young Friends

# WORLD PLENARY MEETING

## A REFLECTION UPON THE ONLINE EXPERIENCE

by Pauline Goggin, Ireland YM

**I attended worship yesterday in Limerick, six days after the closing worship of the World Plenary Meeting and the following work of “re-entry” into the physical realities of daily life and its tasks. As I settled into the silence of worship, I felt prompted by Spirit to share something of the work that this plenary had been engaged in, bringing some little piece of the message to Limerick Meeting.**

Given the, at times, overwhelming experience of being present in such a diverse and large community of Friends from around the world, I had thought to read the epistle and then felt perhaps I could say something of what had stayed with me instead. I was glad that another Friend had also been prompted to bring a printout of the entire epistle and was able to leave a copy on the table for any Friend who wanted to see it.

I had considered whether to travel to South Africa earlier this year as I had attended previous world plenaries in person. I was tempted but concerned about the carbon footprint and the need to fund as many young Friends and others who needed financial support to attend, so it made sense to take up the option of attending the first hybrid world gathering of Friends online. However the “in person” experience of previous world gatherings allowed a sense of familiarity and of my place within the gathering as I recognised and was recognised in turn by many friends whose paths I had crossed. My remembered sense of the gathered meetings too helped me to more easily settle down into worship and to stay open in my heart and mind to the ministry.

We heard holy ministry through Friends’ presentations and witness regarding community and belonging and care for each other, communities and creation, reminding us all of our brothers and sisters who were all too familiar with the consequences of rising seas and the loss of viable agricultural land through degradation and pollution. The witness of courageous Friends who spoke of their experience of apartheid, suffering and injustice through video and personal histories were both moving and challenging in terms of how we might balance our faith with actions.

When I “arrived” on Monday 5th, having set up my laptop in the kitchen making sure I had a notebook and pen and the study guide, songbook and the George Fox birthday pack (all supplied by FWCC in advance) to hand. I also ensured that I had good web cover and a glass of water, tissues and my phone silenced but nearby in case I needed a back up resource.

**A comfortable seat, and I was set. My family had been informed that I would be in South Africa for the week but they all knew where to reach me if there was an emergency!**

FWCC had organised a streaming platform, Whova, which, with Zoom, allowed access to the daily agenda, plenary worship meetings and to each of the three streams within the main theme of the WPM, Ubuntu and access to the smaller home groups which were set up through Zoom breakout rooms.

A team of Friends were kept busy ensuring that we were all looked after. Of the 500 Friends gathered for the WPM, well over a 100 Friends joined online each day with the Friends who were present in person in Johannesburg from 53 countries. Those online were attending as both individuals and from hubs, where smaller groups of Friends gathered. The faces of those in hubs or individuals could be seen on screen by those in attendance and we were warmly welcomed each time by the friendly young women who dispensed information, signposted break out rooms and indicated those in the pastoral care group and the elders who were upholding each business and worship sessions..

I was attending wearing two hats: Ireland YM and EMES. I was quickly given a job as one of the online members of the pastoral care group with scheduled meetings during the week. a great way to feel connected to Friends in SA as well as Friends online. I also had a job as one of the elders for the EMES Plenary session and there were other opportunities to help in terms of scribing or clerking for the smaller working groups attached to the themes during breakout sessions.

It was a busy week and I was already very tired as the first full day on Tuesday 6th came to a close. Unfortunately those of us online as individuals did not have an epilogue time as the tech team were working in shifts around the world over the 24 hour clock and had to allow for Friends worldwide to have the programme over the full 24 hours in their own time zones. an amazing technological task and one that was very well done. Friends present in South Africa of course were able to enjoy an epilogue time to close their day.

Speaking with Friends from the USA and Australia/ New Zealand after the Plenary brought new understanding of the challenges and effort and work that was part of the 24 hour commitment that left some Friends working very long days and into the night.

**Attendance too online was a demanding and at times exhausting experience which may not be understood by those reading the epistle from their understanding of attendance at such gatherings in person.**

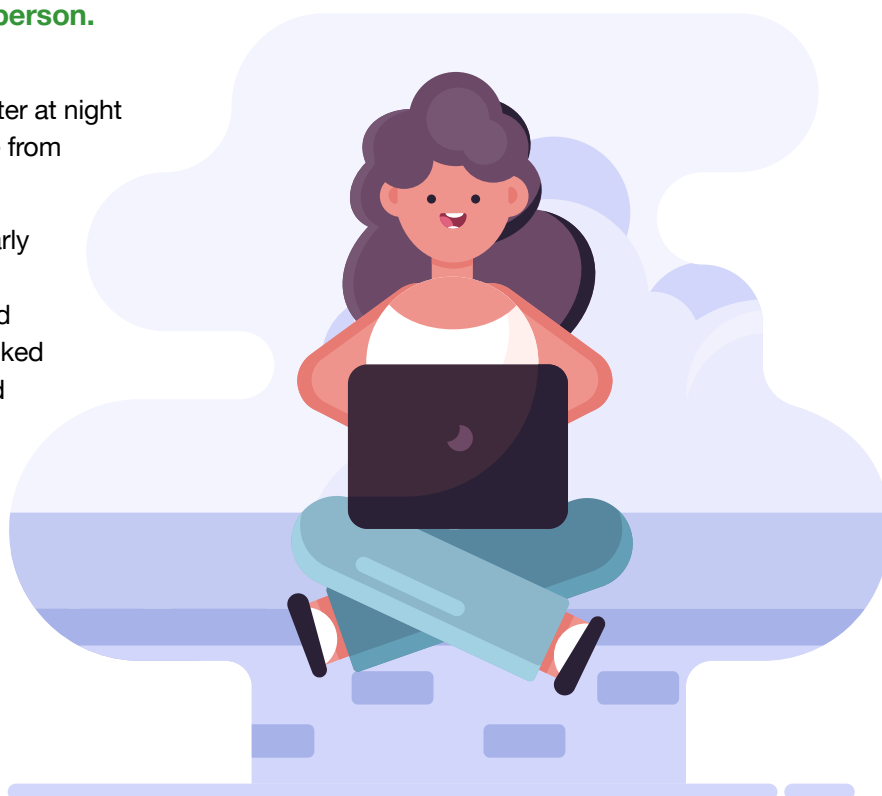
Online worship, both programmed and unprogrammed was offered, but both later at night or in the wee hours which prevented me from attending.

I would like to say that I enjoyed a similarly delectable meal choice here in the Tipperary kitchen as those in SA seemed to have enjoyed but the food, batch cooked and stored in the freezer at least allowed less time spent on cooking. I have learnt further lessons on how to manage the marathon sessions on screen and also glad of the reminders to take screen breaks whenever possible.

I had been very moved and inspired by IYM's physical and spiritual support given to our Friend Simon C. Lamb, Clerk of FWCC as he prepared to travel to SA. Those of us online were able to continue to uphold online.

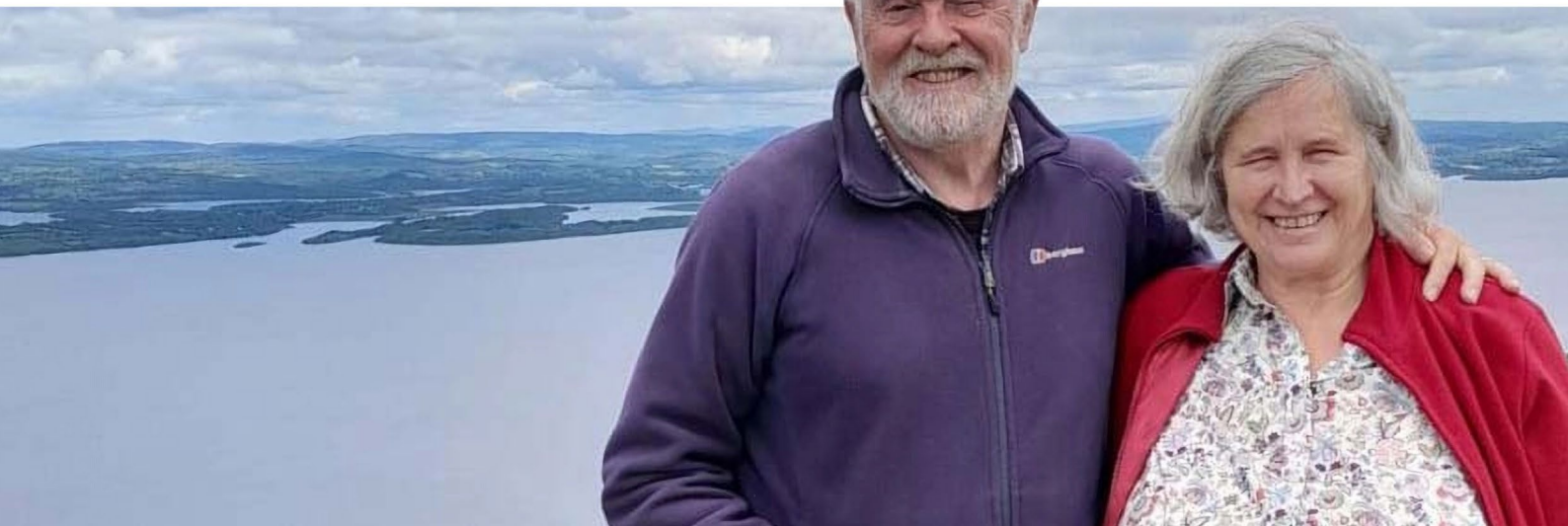
As the week advanced George Fox's was celebrated by those in Johannesburg with birthday cake. I have many other memories of that week: he themes and small groups, sharing worship with a Friend who called, answering doorbells, reconnections with Friends from other times, plenary worship from the FWCC Sections, the Japanese choir, EMES Section meetings and hearing from Joyce Ajlouni from Ramallah, Yuri from Ukraine, the fun and enjoyment of the talent show, the epistle & weaving document and so much more!

**I hope that the experience of 2024 will help to inform future hybrid sessions in these countries and worldwide within FWCC sections.**



# WORLD PLENARY MEETING TRAVELLING OVERLAND!

by Catherine Putz and Mark Holtom, Brighthouse  
West Yorkshire Area Meeting, and BYM



**Having been involved in planning groups for the FWCC World Plenary Meeting in South Africa, we decided to attend in person... taking two and a half months over our travels. And as we travelled through Africa, we received a wonderful welcome everywhere we went, from small villages to large Friends' churches, and of course at the World Plenary itself.**

We had decided to travel as much as possible without flying, so our trip began with three night-trains through Europe to Istanbul, a short stayover in Addis Ababa, and then from Burundi onwards all the way by either bus or train. We wrote a 'blog' as we went at [cathmarktravels.wordpress.com](http://cathmarktravels.wordpress.com), which gives a feel for our experiences en route (it starts at the end of our travels and works backwards).

Our time in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) deserve a special mention: five days in Burundi with local Quakers, including on the Sunday a Friends Church service from 9am to 3pm, with over 1000 Friends present and five choirs – a very different style of Quaker worship from our own, but the same values of peace and justice. And then in the DRC a week spent with projects supported by the Quaker Congo Partnership, of which Catherine is a trustee. The waters of Lake Tanganyika had risen due to climate change, meaning no road transport, so we travelled by small boat and then on the back of motorbikes.

We saw much inspiring work led by local Friends, including peace work with young people and the

extension of clean water to a nearby village. And on the final Sunday in the DRC we gave the 'parole' in French at the Friends church in Uvira.

And so, after lots of night buses, a 50 hour train journey through Tanzania and Zambia, and time spent with local Quakers in Zimbabwe, we eventually arrived in South Africa. Staying in Soweto for two nights, we went with a local Friend to Johannesburg meeting, and then on to Vanderbiljpark south of Johannesburg, to join the other 250 Friends attending the World Plenary in person. In addition to inspiring plenary sessions, there was much singing, much joy, debates across cultural divides, and the sharing of worship in a variety of formats.

Our travels finished with two further weeks in South Africa, staying with local Friends in Pietermaritzburg, and then experiencing both the beauty and also the inequalities of that wonderful country, before attending Cape Town Meeting and returning to the UK and Yorkshire at the end of August. We feel very blessed to have been able to share, however briefly, in the lives of so many Friends in Africa.



| On the way to QCP projects in DRC by motorbike!



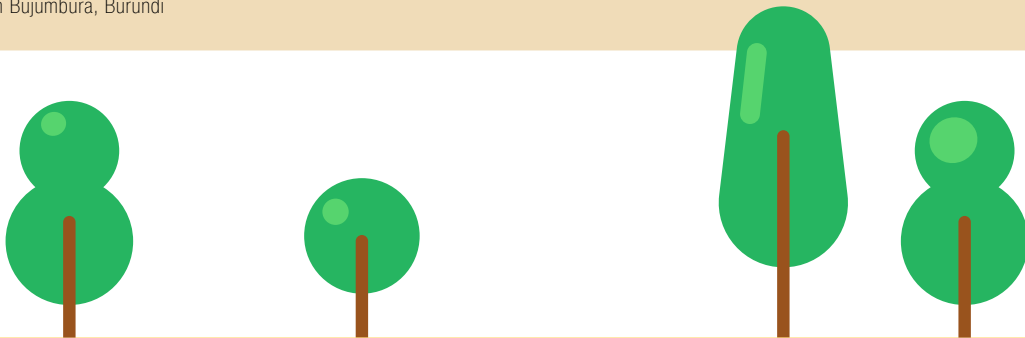
| Catherine kitted out in a dress made at a local sewing project



| Creche at the back of Friends church in Uvira, DRC



| Friends church in Bujumbura, Burundi



DECLARATION FROM THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
IN ST. PETERSBURG SEPTEMBER 21-22, 2024

## **PEACE, NATURE, COOPERATION IN THE BALTIC AND ARCTIC REGIONS FOR MIRACLE & ACTION**

To:

- The governments and members of parliaments in the Baltic and Arctic regions
- The United Nations
- The OSCE
- NATO
- HELCOM
- The Arctic Council
- The Inuit Circumpolar Council

In St. Petersburg on the International Day of Peace some 100 participants from Russia, Europe-countries, US and Canada - on- and offline - discussed the current situation of the militarization of the Baltic and Arctic regions and the increasing risks of global military confrontation and the links to the climate and other environmental disasters.

**The participants called for an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine and for the parties involved in the military conflict to start negotiations for peace.**

Furthermore the participants call for:

- The changing of the current military concept of security to emphasize human and collective security, to prioritize peace, climate cooperation, environmental sustainability, equitable resource distribution as well as social, health and education security, prioritizing United Nations initiatives, resolutions and treaties. Move the money from the military to urgent human and environmental needs.
- Russia to be included in all future HELCOM meetings in order to address the gravity of the environmental situation in the Baltic Sea. We call for joint large scale clean-up operations.



- The elimination of the nuclear threat. This includes signing, ratifying, and implementing the UN Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty (TPNW); removing nuclear weapons from high-alert status; extending warning times and adopting a policy of no first use of nuclear weapons. Furthermore it includes enhancing preparedness for potential radioactive emissions from nuclear-powered vessels in Arctic and Baltic waters and excluding all military activities around civil nuclear facilities as well as establishing safety zones around them.
- The Arctic and Baltic regions should be made into nuclear-weapon-free and demilitarized zones of peace.
- Open borders, facilitate exchanges, restore people-to-people programs.
- Cultivate a culture of peace. The UNESCO mandate to build peace through international cooperation within the fields of education, science, culture and communication is vital in order to counter the present world tension and militarization. It is necessary to encourage renewed contact and cooperation with UNESCO and see the vision and program of a culture of peace as an important, comprehensive, humanistic framework for our common efforts to learn to live peacefully together.

**Finally, the participants call for the restitution of the OSCE's inclusive mandate as a necessary framework for peace in Europe and the world.**

We call for an OSCE Summit in 2025 – in the spirit of the Helsinki Summit in 1975 – should be held including Russia and a broad spectrum of civil society.

We believe in indivisible security; no one is secure until everyone is secure. Peace is achieved by diplomacy, cooperation and open borders.

**St. Petersburg, September 22, 2024**

# I PRAY FOR PEACE, BUT WHAT'S THE USE?

*Words written as the Spirit led...*

I pray for peace, but what's the use?  
The military mind just hates a truce.

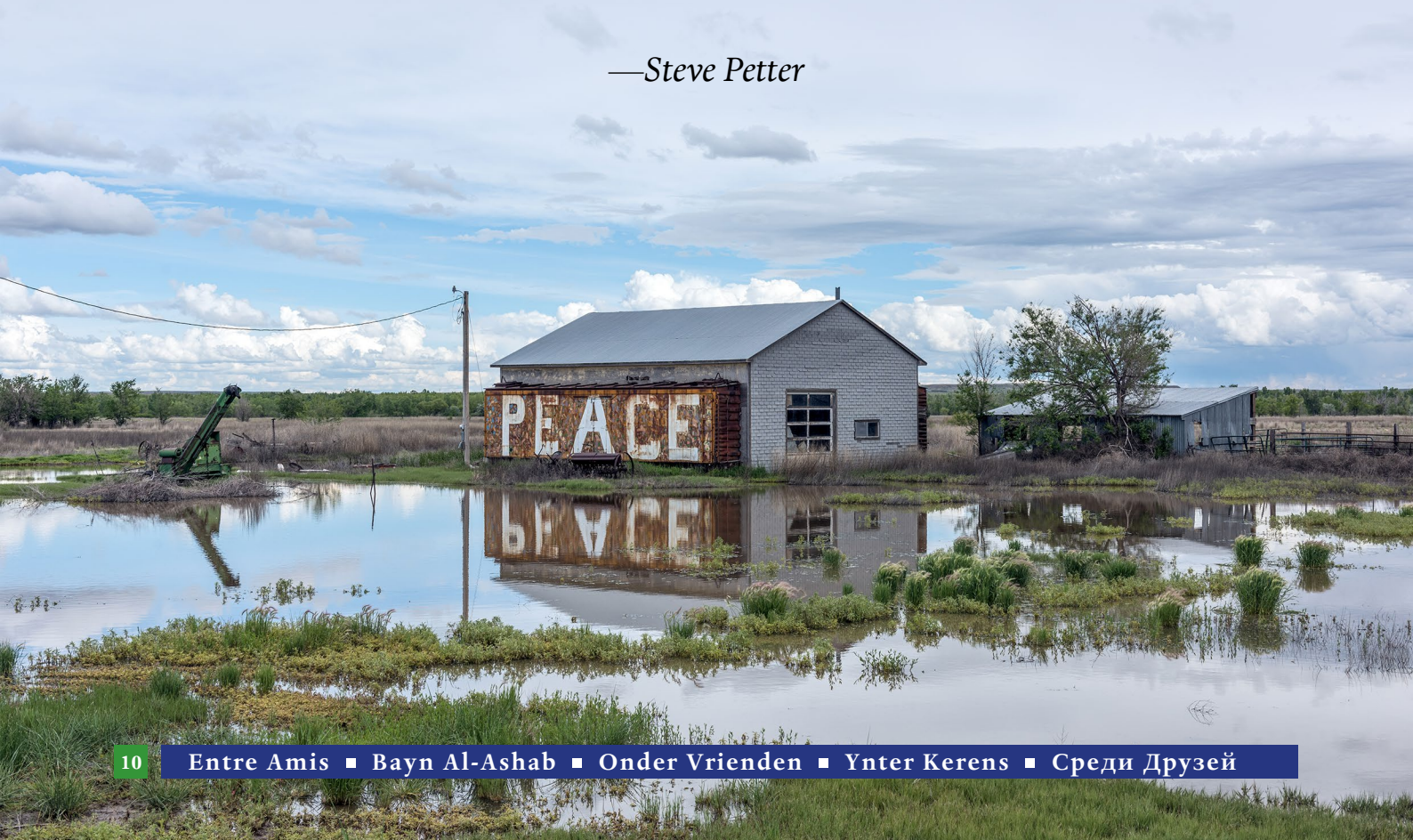
The governments are in the sway  
Of many subtle forms of pay.

We're called to practice love for all  
But faced with tyrants love can pall.

We're asked to give; is that enough?  
Our Faith is weak, its domain small.

So what is left for us to share.  
Here in Prayers for Peace, as I sit here?  
There's hope and hope and hope again.  
Have faith to hope that comes the day  
When Peace at last shall have its sway.

—Steve Petter





# QUAKER PARENT WORSHIP

A space for parents who are currently engaged in bringing up children, to come together for worship, reflection, and connection

9pm (UK time) the second and fourth  
Monday of the month

[woodbrooke.org.uk/parent](http://woodbrooke.org.uk/parent)



# DIARY DATES 2025

More dates are available on the website: [fwccemes.org/calendar](http://fwccemes.org/calendar). Please send items for inclusion in the diary to [michael@fwccemes.org](mailto:michael@fwccemes.org)

**Woodbrooke & EMES** offer several weekly online Meetings for Worship. Please check the Woodbrooke website for the latest information: [woodbrooke.org.uk/worship](http://woodbrooke.org.uk/worship)

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## EMES NOW RUNS REGULAR ONLINE EVENTS

### PEACE & SERVICE CONSULTATION

Monthly gatherings for people involved in peace and service work are held on the second Thursday of each month. For more details contact [julia@fwccemes.org](mailto:julia@fwccemes.org).

### EMES YOUTHGROUP

Monthly gatherings for young people aged 14-18. More details: [fwccemes.org/youthgroup](http://fwccemes.org/youthgroup). Contact [michael@fwccemes.org](mailto:michael@fwccemes.org) for more information.

We also hold monthly gatherings for EMES Representatives and Roleholders in the first week of each month. In January, May and September we run online gatherings for International Members in the Section. Contact [michael@fwccemes.org](mailto:michael@fwccemes.org) for more information about these events.

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At the time of printing, these events were still scheduled to go ahead in the format listed below, however, this may change so please check the [EMES website](http://EMES website) for up to date information.

21-23 March 2025

**Border Meeting (German speaking),  
Black Forest**

25-27 April 2025

**Ireland YM, Lisburn**

8-11 May 2025

**EMES AM, Warsaw & Online**

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### SUBSCRIPTIONS

Among Friends is available free of charge at: [fwccemes.org](http://fwccemes.org)

To receive a copy by post please contact us at the EMES office.

**There is no set subscription fee for Among Friends. We depend on voluntary subscriptions. And we hope those who are able to pay will consider an annual donation of around €15 or £13.**

If you wish to make a bank transfer, please use the following details.

#### Euro account

For transfers or standing orders in Euros please use these account details:

Institution name: Wise  
Account Name: FWCC-Europe & Middle East Section  
IBAN: BE33 9672 0215 6046  
SWIFT/BIC: TRWIBEB1XXX

#### Sterling account

Bank name: CAF Bank  
Bank address: 25 Kings Hill Avenue, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent. ME19 4JQ UK  
Account Name: FWCC EMES  
IBAN: GB73CAFB40524000025578  
SWIFT/BIC: CAFGBB21XXX  
Account Number: 00025578  
Sort Code: 40-52-40

For holders of UK bank accounts please send cheques or CAF vouchers in GBP to the EMES office or directly to CAF Bank using the account number and sort code above. Scottish Charity number: SC 036528

**Among Friends 162 Deadline  
28 February 2025**