

Epistle of the German Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends from 31 October till 3 November 2013 in Bad Pyrmont

Greetings to Friends worldwide from the 83rd Yearly Meeting of German Friends devoted to the 50th anniversary of Quäker-Hilfe – our service organisation. Yearly Meeting took place from 31 October till 3 November in the Meeting House in Bad Pyrmont and was attended by 194 people in all, including 30 children and teenagers. Furthermore, we welcomed numerous delegates and Friends from abroad.

Yearly Meeting centred on the 50th anniversary of Quäker-Hilfe, which was celebrated in various ways. We are grateful for the commitment and work of Friends during this period and are confident that even our small Society can effect change.

Role models and companions from current and past aid projects in Algeria, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Poland were present as guests. They described how – through their engagement – they had been able to help other people and how on occasion innovative and unusual service projects had been brought about with the support of Quakers. They also showed us how their own lives had been changed through this work and how sometimes friendships were kept over generations.

In the Richard L. Cary Lecture, Martin Kunz shared with us how he came to Quakerism through Quaker service work. He told us how it is to experience one's self as a "bad Quaker", when the feeling of being moved or religiously inspired is weak and when being spiritually touched arises, in essence, from the active bonding with others in service and aid work.

Martin also stated that we frequently have to enter into compromises in our quest for peace and justice. At the same time, he reminded us that we sometimes define ourselves as humans by precisely those choices and decisions in which we are not willing to make compromises, for instance in issues of education or the environment.

We learned that our action in the world is neither completely good nor completely bad, but is revealed rather in “variations in grey”. Some Friends regard Martin’s “grey” as “multi-coloured”: sometimes we have the fortune that our action is embedded in a community that backs us up and in which we can still find our own colours just like in a mirror.

One recurring issue in our Yearly Meetings is the question of how we dispose of our financial capital. Should we allow it to flow directly into our efforts for peace and justice or do we need financial reserves for maintaining our structures?

Moreover, we continue to ask ourselves how we fill the Quaker Peace Testimony with life and what the responsibilities of the Peace Committee are in this regard. We discussed a common letter in which we criticise the policy of barricades against refugees and call upon those soon to be in power in Germany to receive those in need and to respect their human dignity.

Alongside traditional silent worship in the Meeting House, Friends were also able to take part in worship on the move. We were pleased to be host to a Friend from a Conservative Yearly Meeting with whom we were able to talk about Conservative Quakerism.

It is in our variety – whether in our worship or in our peace and service – that we find our strength and this helps us to reach important decisions together as one.

Mit herzlichen Freundesgrüßen

In Friendship