

Contribution to EMES Annual Report 2012: European and Middle East Young Friends (EMEYF) 2012

EMEYF may look back on 2012 with a sense of pride and a little exhaustion! We have achieved a lot and laid the foundations for a great journey of transformation. We have gathered together, travelled together, built community together, witnessed together and, most importantly, worshiped together.

At our **Spring Gathering** we were grateful to have the opportunity to come together, spend time, tell our stories, and to help each other grow, all in the beautiful natural setting of the Sächsische Schweiz in Germany. Our time there was spent encouraging and building community, and we felt a sense of deep spiritual fellowship. We supported each other in growing into responsibility, from being nurtured and encouraged by community to wage and encourage community in the wider Quaker world as well as in our private, professional and social/political contexts. To reach the tiny ferry across the Elbe to Wehlen, we travelled from all over Europe. As we travelled back to our own diverse communities, we carried with us the bridges we have built and the skills that will help us to build more. As Young Friends spread all over Europe, we often feel like isolated idealists when we are faced with decisions and asked to speak truth. Our gatherings can help and encourage us, and we want to explore and encourage ways of living this encouraging community throughout the year as well.

Friends from across EMEYF attended the **World Conference of Friends** in Kenya. It was an opportunity to experience the many different Quaker traditions around the world, build new friendships and connections and a chance to meet other Young Adult Friends from around the world. During the Conference we all participated in the Young Adults Friends Gathering that ran in the evenings. We began with the aim of writing a minute from Young Adult Friends on the state of the Quaker World; our Quaker World. This tender process did not yield the neat and tidy minute we had hoped for. Instead, the process showed us the brokenness of our Quaker world and the tender differences that have the potential to divide us if we do not find a way to meet together in unity in the Spirit. This process was painful and uplifting at the same time, and has had a profound effect on those who were present – the memories of which continue to haunt and inspire us. At Kabarak, with Young Adult Friends from around the world, we did not turn away from each other after this let-down, but ended the week by exploring, in loving tenderness, our differences and our similarities and by doing so our pain began to heal. We were united in a way that was much more important than agreeing a minute together. We carry this experience of the need to live through brokenness to find the wholeness within it with us, as a living minute in our hearts and spirits. This process continues now that we have returned to our own Quaker communities.

In November we met again at our **Annual Meeting** in Bad Pyrmont in Germany. This Annual Meeting was different from any other Annual Meeting. The only item of business we considered was the essential one of nominations. Instead, we strove to find a way forward for EMEYF by exploring our needs and visions for (Young) Friends Communities. We felt the need to break down some of the structures and history that seem to be a burden. Rather than desperately running after agendas, we decided to spend as much time as needed for small, slow and sometimes stumbling steps, and to be prepared for ways opening. We acknowledge that it is time to lay down the aspects and structures of our community that do not help us to live in the Spiritual Community we seek. Reassured and reunited in the vision of what we are seeking, we know that EMEYF must evolve and continue to be a living community if it is to survive. This is a work in progress. It is about the Spirit, it is about the Structure, it is about Energy and Revitalisation and it is about Worship, Love and Light. It is a process that has its roots in painful awareness of our brokenness, and sometimes failings, and it is growing into a process where the way forward is about taking ourselves, and the Religious Society as a whole, back to the radical faith that inspired those brave people who were willing to become testimonies of a living Spirit and create the Religious Society of Friends.

We look forward to continuing our journey, and look forward to you joining us on it!

The fellowship that we have enjoyed has also been made possible by the generous support of Yearly Meetings, Area Meetings, and individuals. We thank them for having helped to enable our growth.

EMEYF Elders and Clerk