Friends House Moscow (FHM)

Working for peace and justice in Eastern Europe and former Soviet regions

Newsletter
Fall 2026

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https://friendshousemoscow.org

A Quaker Presence

Do you believe that a Quaker presence in Russia is valuable? We at Friends House Moscow do. When Stalin drove out all the other western religions, the Quakers were the last to leave in 1931. After the fall of the USSR in 1991, it was possible to return.

It was important to have "Moscow" in our name; our testimony on equality requires that we treat all people as family, even those whom others call the enemy. While there were stereotypes of the Russians in the West, we brought stories and pictures of the people. We showed them in all their neediness and all their strength and generosity, initiative and creativity, honor, humor, and beauty.

While the British Committee undergoes restructuring, we will focus on a unique program, one that informs and inspires: the translation and publication of Quaker writings. Our colleague Sergei describes the process in general and the specific details for one book, *Quaker Strongholds (see page 3)*. And you will read the words of a conscientious objector who was inspired by the writings of early Friends *(see page 5)*.

It is not easy to work in Russia right now with the current regime, the war, sanctions, silencing of opposition. However, we know that the war will end someday, travel will normalize, and the survivors of the war who return home will need healing programs. We continue to do what we can until the day when we can do more.

The Refugee Center in Moscow

Wherever they come from – Afghanistan, Syria, Cameroon, Egypt – they find welcome here. Here they learn about resources and begin to learn the language and customs of their new home.

Planning for Peace and Healing: an initiative of members of FHM Support Association

A brutal war is raging in Ukraine and has crossed the border into Russia. There will be no winner in such a conflict, only lives lost, families devastated, land and structures destroyed, and mental health shattered.

When this war is over, reconstruction begins. We know the materials needed to rebuild apartments, hospitals, schools, roads, etc.

However, the lives of the people will need restoring and healing – a return to mental and physical health. For every person who is killed, many lives are affected – parents, children, siblings, spouse, friends – and their lives will never be the same. Some sources estimate over one million killed plus many others wounded. There will be a great many people on both sides with unimaginable losses who suffer from trauma, stress, depression, hatred, grief, shame, and regret, and many people will carry unthinkable physical injuries for the rest of their lives.

Healing such wounds is a long-term process which will require dedicated professionals and volunteers who believe that, with compassion and understanding, it is possible to do healing work with individuals and groups, outreach, and more.

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Message from an AVP facilitator in Ukraine

When asked about the future, when the war ends, the coordinator for the Alternatives to Violence Project said this:

"The first thing that comes to mind is **the return of the military.** It will take time to adapt, and it will definitely be impossible to achieve their stability right away. This will undoubtedly affect military families. So, military personnel and their families will need support. Immersion in the AVP atmosphere could be a place where they can find answers and support."

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Planning for Peace and Healing

This process begins ***now*** in anticipation of the eventual end to this terrible war and the normalization of travel. Now is the time to start talking about how to build a network of willing professionals who can initiate the development of a sustainable program, locate and train volunteers, and, when the time is right, raise money for transportation, workshop space, supplies, outreach, and more.

We have been involved in many programs over the years and now see what might be our most critical service, and we invite you to join us.

Please spread the word in whatever groups you find yourself. We believe that an intense effort will be needed to answer the call for help from both sides in this war. We want to be involved and are looking for others who want to engage in the creative and inclusive process of assessing needs, connecting with the people in both countries, developing programs, raising funds, and implementing such healing work. Knowledge of the Russian or Ukrainian language is not necessary.

If you would like to share your ideas about this vision or know someone who might be interested, please contact planningforpeaceandhealing@gmail.com

This article and the email address may be shared freely.

We Need Your Help

Friends, Let us speak plainly. The British Committee, which has been raising about half of the FHM annual funds, will cease operations at the end of 2026 as it cannot appoint the required number of trustees. There will be some remaining funds available for 2027, and other European Friends do contribute. However, the US Support Association must fill that gap. We must increase our financial base. You are the life blood of our organization. Without your contributions, we could not sustain a presence in Russia, much less support the programs that rely on us. We need you to continue giving those gifts, and to increase your donation when you are able.

But we need more than that. We need not only the current donors, but many more. So, we are asking you to be our partner in reaching out. Here are ways you can help:

1- If your meeting or church is not already donating, ask them to consider a generous one-time gift to help us through this restructuring period. Then add us to the annual budget for long-term, consistent support.
2- Take up a special collection for our general fund.
3- If they want more information, fill out the green slip that came with this newsletter and mail it to us. A board member will be happy to talk to your congregation. A lively, informative, inspiring slide show is available.
4- Print copies of the trifold also included. Carry a few with you to whatever gatherings you attend, hand them to those you think might be interested, and if they show interest, ask if we can have their contact information so we can follow up with a friendly conversation about what time and skills they have to offer and what would fit comfortably into their schedule.
5- Consider what time and skills you have to offer.
6- Let us know what connections you have with Quaker resources, foundations, meetings and individuals whom we might approach for support.

Let us know if we can assist you in outreach. Thank you.

julieh@friendshousemoscow.org

Story of "Quaker Strongholds": from questions to a published book

It started in a Russian-language Telegram chat for Quakers and spiritual seekers, where someone asked a deceptively simple question: "What is Quaker identity, really?" The discussion went on over several days, with people sharing fragments from Quaker books and personal experiences, but no single source answered the question fully. Thomas Barclay's *Apology* is based on the thinking of Quakers in 1676. Someone remembered *Quaker Strongholds* by Caroline Stephen — a classic written in 1890 to explain Quaker faith in a more modern context. We at Friends House Moscow found a copy, read passages, discussed them, and agreed: this voice would be interesting to those who want to deepen their understanding.

We found a translator who was a historian with extensive experience in religious translation. Her background in Quakerism, academic history, and practical translation meant she could capture Caroline Stephen's 19th-century voice while keeping it readable in modern Russian.

One of the hardest passages was Stephen's metaphor of silence as a "stronghold" — an image with no direct equivalent in Russian spiritual language. After several attempts, the translator found a phrase meaning "fortress of inner stillness," which test-readers immediately understood and appreciated.

The manuscript was then reviewed by two Russian Quakers, whose feedback led us to add a preface for those who do not know much about Quaker practice.

We published the book both as a free PDF and as a moderately priced paperback, because our goal was not profit but access and feedback from readers. Now the first print run is almost sold out, and the feedback has been uniformly positive. So, the book met the need — and it continues to live in discussions, shared quotes, and new questions raised in that same Telegram chat today.

St. Petersburg Quaker speaks to FWCC at EMES session

Hello, Friends, My name is Aleksandra. I'm here to tell you a little about Quaker life in Russia. I'm an attender of two Russian-speaking worship groups: in one, we meet face-to-face in St. Petersburg; in the other, online, organized by Friends House Moscow

My first personal encounter with Quakers and Quakerism happened more than 30 years ago, when I was a graduate student in Modern and Contemporary History. The first Quaker whom I met in my life was Thomas Paine, the main character of my thesis, and also the son of a Quaker father. I found the idea of Inner Light very attractive. It was five years ago that I first visited the Friends House office in Moscow (FH), having both scholarly and spiritual interests. A year passed and I ventured to ask for a link to take part in the Russian-speaking online worship organized by FH. The meeting lasts about an hour. We gather and greet each other, worship, and then we just talk. We have much to talk about.

Gradually I got involved in FH publishing activities. I research and often translate Quaker historic or spiritual texts. For a couple of years, my Quaker life was online meetings and Quaker books. But, deep within, I had a feeling that something had to be done concerning a meeting in St. Petersburg.

In April 2024, the worship group in St. Petersburg was born. We are still a small group: there are 5 or 6 who attend regularly. Almost every month we have new people.

We take part in, and sometimes organize, events in St. Petersburg, trying to spread historical knowledge about Quakers as widely as possible. Some Friends took part in the readings of *Memoirs of the Life of Daniel Wheeler*. Wheeler was an English Quaker.

Aleksandra and friends at Wheeler's grave

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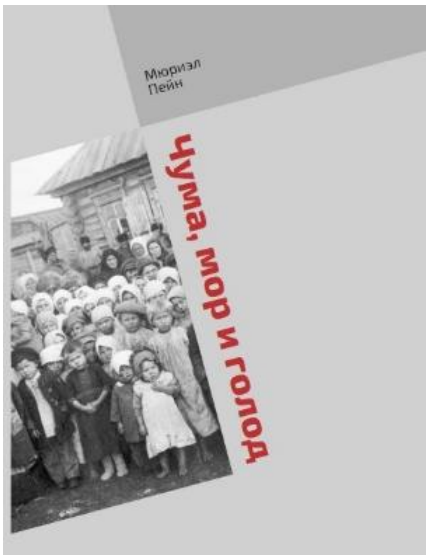
Translations for an International Quaker Community

In this heavy atmosphere, with so much uncertainty and so many people feeling isolated or searching for something solid to hold onto, our publishing work has quietly become one of the most important things we do. Books can go where people sometimes can't. Right now, when honest conversation is hard to come by and reliable spiritual resources are scarce, a Quaker book can be a real lifeline. It's about outreach. It's about offering something thoughtful, gentle, and grounded to someone who might be desperate for exactly that.

Mailing a book to a purchaser.

What's been really exciting — and a bit surprising — is how much this has grown. For years, we'd send out a few dozen books here and there, mostly to people who had already found their way to us. But based on the 2025 results, we distributed 829 paper books. To give some perspective, that's up from 163 the year before. The big shift came when we started selling them on Ozon, a major Russian online marketplace. Now, people discover Quakerism because they're searching for something like Muriel Payne's ***Plague, Pestilence, and Famine***, the book about Quaker relief work in Russia in the 1920s, or Thomas Paine's ***The Age of Reason*** (with a foreword by a Quaker historian) — and there we are. They buy the book, find their way to our website or a Quaker group on social media, and suddenly they're part of a larger conversation. It's real outreach: organic, natural, conversational, and not pushy.



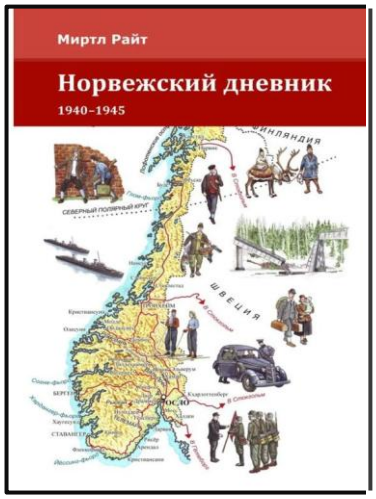
Plague, Pestilence, and Famine

The trends are encouraging. In the last six months alone, 707 books were distributed.

We've been printing constantly — both new titles and reprints of popular ones. A few highlights:

➤ ***Quaker Strongholds,*** by Caroline Stephen, an outsider who walked into a Friends Meeting, found "the very gate of heaven" — and ultimately made Quakerism her home. *(See pages 2-3)*

➤ In November, we printed a new run of ***Norwegian Diary*,** by Myrtle Wright. It's a firsthand account of life in Nazi-occupied Norway during World War II, written from the perspective of a British Quaker relief worker. The book documents the quiet resistance of ordinary people, the work of the underground movement, and the spiritual strength that sustained an entire society through years of occupation. It's a powerful testament to courage, nonviolence, and the difference one person can make by simply witnessing and staying present. This feels painfully relevant to our own situation right now.



Cover artwork is by a former Russian CO

➤ ***Desirable Foreigners,*** by Sergei Nikitin. A piece of living history, it tells the story of three foreign Quakers who came to Soviet Russia in the 1920s, documenting a moment when Quakers showed up when it mattered.

We've also started using AI for translation — carefully. We used it for Virginia Woolf's ***Three Guineas***, and the good quality surprised us.

Looking ahead, the next six months are about building on this momentum. We've launched our own online bookshop, https://shop.quakers.ru/ It gives us more control and a stronger identity, while still using the Ozon online retail platform for broader reach. It will also allow us to sell electronic books.

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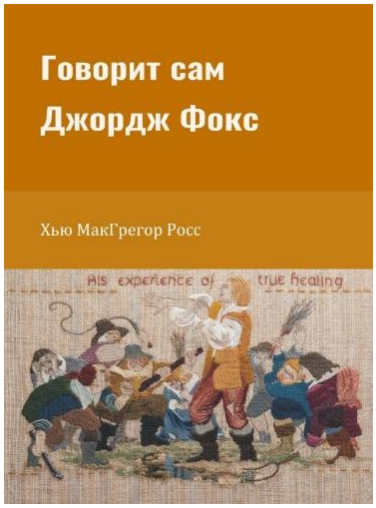
Building Community

We have new books in the pipeline: Hugh McGregor Ross's ***George Fox Speaks for Himself***, Rhiannon Grant's ***Telling the Truth About God*****,** and Ruth Fry's ***A Quaker Adventure*****.** We're also thinking about branching into fiction with Quaker themes, like Jessamyn West's ***The Friendly Persuasion.***



We're also working on bringing costs down. Recently, we started partnering with a new printer whose pricing will allow us to reduce our costs by about a quarter. Another thing we're trying is selling books in sets — from three to six titles together. It allows us to offer readers a better price while moving more copies at once.

What keeps us going is the feedback. People write to say how much they appreciate the design, the font, and the quality of the paper. They talk about how rare these books are, how glad they are to have found them. One reader said, "I had been looking for this book in a paper version for a long time." Another mentioned how nice it was to have an introductory article by a specialist, giving context.

These aren't just transactions. They're connections.

Early Quaker Writings Inspire a Russian C.O.

"I am a conscientious objector. I am also a political activist in Russia and very many things that I do were inspired by the stories of early Friends who would

"speak truth to power".

In 2022, I was arrested for 9 days for supporting political prisoners. When I was in prison, I remembered the letters the early Quakers wrote from prison.

Using these [Quaker writings] I can tell other people about Quakers -- telling what they do. Because one of the principles of Quakerism is

"Let your life speak".

I want not only to go forward, but to become more rooted in my faith."

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St. Petersburg Quaker speaks

Wheeler was an irrigation engineer who was invited to St. Petersburg by Alexander the I. Wheeler's deeds are part of St. Petersburg's history; in one of our suburbs there is even a lane named after him.

The history of our worship group is a history of people who come searching for themselves and for their place in the religious landscape of the city. Some are moved by their personal spiritual search. Some young men are led by their unwillingness to undergo military service. The peace testimony is quite attractive for them, and they look for understanding and support. Every guest adds to the history of our group.

We avoid discussing politics, since it is not safe to do so in Russia nowadays. We don't hide, but we stay quiet. We are committed to peace in our hearts. When I asked our worship group what we wanted to tell Friends in EMES, one said,

"Peace. It's what we want for all of us. PEACE within and without."

We are of different temperaments and life purposes. Some want to worship in silence; some want to change the world. To tell the truth, we have succeeded more in the former than in the latter. One day it occurred to me that we are similar to 18th century Quakers – Quakers of the period of quietism. But knowing Quaker history, we are aware that after the quiet 18th century came the "loud" 19th and 20th centuries. The words are being born from silence. And I hope that someday silent Friends from Petersburg will say their words of testimony aloud.

Be in peace, Friends. Stay together. And stick to the Light . Aleksandra

Note:
Aleksandra S's very engaging talk (here in a shortened version) was given for FWCC-Europe and Middle East Section, which provides steady support for seekers, including a Russian-language version of online course, "The Quaker Way." In 2025, there were 24 active participants.

News from other partner projects

Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) Continues

AVP was brought to the USSR by Friends, and FHM continues to support its continuing service by channeling donations primarily from German Friends. Despite bombs going off around them, sirens preventing sleep, and shortages of all kinds, the AVP facilitators continue to offer workshops. These workshops focus on the things that lead to violence and alternative ways to deal with them: poor communication, making assumptions, emphasizing our differences instead of our common ground. Tools are given for handling frustration, miscommunication, anger, judgements, stereotypes, etc. Cooperative games like "Broken Squares" (*shown above right)* and parachute activities *(on the left)* improve one's ability to see oneself as part of a group, being accepted, belonging. Pretty soon, there is no "us" and "them" – just a group of individuals who have a common purpose and know that the task is completed better, faster, with more satisfaction and joy if there is sharing in the process. Such work brought together ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Russians in Ukraine after the invasion and annexing of the Crimea.

In addition to today's very present needs, AVP keeps one eye open to addressing needs when the war is over. Soldiers will return, or not. There will need to be much work in grief, forgiveness, self-worth, community and communication.

The English Club – Learning to Learn

Getting to learn English is a special joy for former residents of orphanages and social homes. It teaches academic skills but also gives them practice and motivation for making choices in topics to be studied, developing team projects, and public speaking. These opportunities were unheard of in the institutions where they lived.

This year, the project operated through the academic/school year and offered 468 English lessons for 12 students who wanted to learn English and also held 18 English Club meetings for them. Four volunteers took part in these meetings and helped students to complete tasks and communicate in English.

Would you like to learn more about Friends House Moscow ? A lively, informative, surprising, inspiring presentation is available for your meeting or church. Contact Julie Harlow at harlow4julie@gmail.com to find out more about bringing her to your meeting – in person or virtually.

Please donate to Friends House Moscow

Online at friendshousemoscow.org or scan the code

Donations in pounds sterling can be received until October 30, 2026 by bank transfer to the following account:
Friends House Moscow 08 92 99 65036899
For donations that would be received after Oct 30, please use PayPay through the website above.
For an acknowledgement of the donation or for enquiries about gift aid please email daphnesanders@friendshousemoscow.org

In North America,
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Friends House Moscow Support Association
PO Box 60253
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