

Epistle Junior Gathering 2015

To all Friends everywhere,

On the 22nd of August 2015, at Leighton Park School, Reading, 76 young Quakers, aged 11-14 and 23 staff volunteers came together to investigate the theme 'Quakers in War'.

Daniel Bos came to talk to us about video games and popular culture, which everyone found they could relate to, as many participants have experienced military style games and how they turn war into entertainment.

Chris Venables an Ecumenical accompanier came to talk to us about his experience in Hebron, Palestine where he was observing the human rights situation for the UN. He talked to us about the perilous journey that the children there have, to get to school and how it compared to our own journeys.

Simon Colbeck showed us a film which Watford Quakers had made in response to the WW1 remembrance in 2014, this taught us about conscientious objectors and the ordeal that they had to go through to stick to their beliefs.

Noah who was a child soldier in Uganda and is currently still seeking 'Right to Remain in the UK' after living here for 15 years, shared his moving story. He was taken away by rebels and was forced to abduct other children and carry guns for 9 years before he escaped, however he was met with hostility by his government and was then put in prison and tortured for 5 years. His story made us realise how much devastation war causes.

Our last speaker was Elisa Weatherwax who came to talk to us about the militarisation of schools. She talked with us about the influence of the military in the form of cadets and the military ethos within schools. This talk was especially interesting as many young Quakers had experienced militarisation in their schools.

As well our workshop sessions we had a diplomacy simulation where we acted as roles in two counties where peace was needed. We had to try and achieve peace by bringing the two countries back together and by making compromises.

In our non theme sessions we had a super quiz, a drumming extravaganza, base group capture the flag, a barn dance, Charlie and chocolate factory disco and life lines from the staff. A new addition this year was our sunny summer fate with a bouncy castle, ice cream van, sack race, face painting, wheelbarrow race, guess the sweets, egg and spoon race, fortune telling, slip n slide and a tombola. Finally on the last night we had very entertaining entertainments.

In the mornings we had many activities to choose from, including den building, drumming, sports, discussion groups, nail painting, costume making, music, dancing, sewing electronics, cooking and many other crafts.

This year the event was held at Leighton Park school, Reading where they welcomed us warmly to their greenalicious grounds and delicious food. This meant that our trip out was to Oxford where we met up with Senior Conference and held Meeting for Worship with over 200 people!

Base groups are our families for the week and help new comers to Junior Gathering find friends and always have someone to talk to. We play games and discuss the speaker sessions in our base groups.

Meeting for Worship and Epilogue enriched our spiritual understanding of each other and the world around us. A highlight as usual was our epilogue outside which prompted some very insightful ministry.

This year at Junior Gathering although the location changed everyone has kept the same feeling of kindness and inclusiveness, as well as maintaining Quaker values. We had an uplifting and inspiring week in which we thoroughly explored our theme of 'Quakers in war'.

Signed in and on behalf of Junior Gathering 2015

Ailwyn E, Anna-Tina J, Clerks
Lucy C-D, Josh P, Elders