

## Senior Conference Epistle 2015

To all Friends everywhere,

From 22<sup>nd</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> August 2015 87 Friends aged 15-18 and 13 adult volunteers gathered together at Sibford School in Oxfordshire. We met to consider the theme 'The Art of Simply Acting', exploring creativity in activism and simplicity.

Throughout the week, base groups of no more than ten young people provided structure and continuity. This was highlighted in the base group challenge where groups competed against each other in a series of amusing challenges culminating in the creation of the best hat. Close friendships formed within base groups really helped integrate newcomers into Conference's loving atmosphere. We felt supported in expressing and confronting ourselves, and the ways in which we live, without fear.

Meeting for worship brought us together spiritually and as a community. We met twice a day for Prologue and Epilogue, allowing us to reflect on the theme and the sessions. During our trip to Oxford we even joined Junior Gathering for Prologue in one of the largest gatherings of young Quakers in Britain.

There was a diverse range of sessions for conferees to participate in, one of which was facilitated by members of the Arrangements Committee. We explored through art, discussion and practical means the theme of the week. These engaging 'activity stations' led to a great deal of moving and meaningful responses. Other sessions included external speakers and an 'Any Questions?' panel, during which many difficult but thought-provoking questions were asked of members of our 22+ team, bridging the gap between our young people and adults.

Our speakers, the first of whom to visit was Sima Cutting, an inhabitant of Britain's first Transition Town and owner of local food catering company The Kitchen Table, provided a different perspective on our theme. Sima used her passion for food and the environment to 'safely, effectively and meaningfully effect change in a small community'. Her desire for change and her creative ways of obtaining it connected some conferees with the power they have to change things in their local communities. This stimulated animated discussion especially within base groups.

This theme of creative change was continued and fuelled by our second speaker, Chris Alton. Chris talked about how his Quaker beliefs influence his work as an artist, his art focusing on social issues and often involving simple actions, interventions and instructions with deep and powerful meanings. We were inspired by the way he used humorous methods of protest by creating a group to counteract messages of hate and division. This demonstrated to conferees how using initiative within pacifism can lead to an effective change in perception.

We also welcomed Cat Waithaka and Lucy Sam from Friends House to lead a session on simplicity and enacting testimonies in our daily lives. This prompted us as conferees to ask questions regarding priorities in life and the impact the Quaker testimony of simplicity has on them. This input also allowed us to make contributions towards 'Living Our Beliefs', a new resource for young Quakers.

Our Entertainments Committee organised a fantastic series of social events which were enjoyed by the participants. An emotionally charged open mic showcased the wide-ranging and awe-inspiring talents of the conferees. The unity between both the performers and the audience was highlighted in the ministry brought by that evening's Epilogue.

A base-group themed meal saw an original take on fancy dress ranging from visual representations of our Senior Conference boundaries to Leonardo Dicaprio's career. This hilarious evening further strengthened the bonds the conferees had with each other, and the 'Fiesta' themed disco gave us time to relax and dance in the emotionally intense week to Shakira and Taylor Swift.

This year's Senior Conference has allowed us to reflect on our own lives and priorities as well as becoming aware of the power that we have to make change in the world. Through discussion, worship and art, we have come to know that change should not have to be complicated. Like the many friendship bracelets that we have swapped, this week has created ties between people that will be hard to lose; a week of friendship, security, love, tears and laughter.

Signed in and on behalf of all at Senior Conference,

Catherine H and Olwyn S

Clerks