

Junior Gathering Epistle 2025

To all Friends everywhere,

From the 23rd to the 30th of August 2025, 54 young people and 18 staff gathered at Leighton Park School, Reading for a week of exploration and reflection on the theme “Global Issues Regarding Conflict and Climate Change.”

This year we had internal and external speakers talking and sharing their own experiences about our theme. In Phil Wood’s session, we reflected on our thoughts about resolving conflict and positive and negative peace and how it affects people around the world. Jacqui Davis talked and educated us on the topic of climate anxiety and how we feel about what’s going on elsewhere in the world. Lyndsay Burtonshaw workshop prompted us to express our feelings in creative ways such as drawing and describing creatures that represented our ideas about this year’s theme. Finally, Caro and Sue Crosfield from the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) shared their experiences working as a witness amongst people living in conflict zones. All of these speaker sessions were thought provoking and deepened our understanding of Global Conflict and Climate Change.

Each morning started with a Meeting for Worship where we collected our thoughts while drawing and reading topical booklets that prompted ministry from Friends. We also ended the evening with Epilogue where we reflected back on the day and wound down with candles and calming pieces of music. This year we held a few epilogues outside, under the stars which was greatly received by all.

We had a wide range of activities which made sure everyone found themselves in a session that they were happy and comfortable to take part in. These include sports like rounders and frisbee, many crafts and board games, with swimming making a popular return. After lunch, everyone took part in an afternoon group activity which featured a fête, a film and a construction activity which challenged us to create a crazy golf hole. In the evening, we collaborated with our base groups in the base group challenge, danced to a live band in the barn dance and many more fun activities. We also had lifelines where two members of staff shared the ups and downs of their life.

On Wednesday, we and Senior Conference (who we are sharing a site with) visited and explored the city of Oxford in small, chosen groups. As one of the highlights of each event, everyone enjoyed freely roaming and having time off site. We were very grateful to hold a Meeting for Worship in Oxford Meeting House where we met back afterwards. Many of our young people have appreciated being around Senior Conference again this year, seeing

friends and siblings while giving fourteen year olds a better idea for what's to come after Junior Gathering.

We found that this event allows us to meet other young quakers which many of us do not have the opportunity to do in local meetings. Lots of us appreciated how we could talk about deep topics whilst still having fun making friends and enjoying the event as a whole. We saw this especially in Base Groups which has been a highlight again this year. It gave us space to communally collect our thoughts, play games and get to know people we wouldn't talk to otherwise.

The week has highlighted to us that even when discussing the conflict and climate crisis and other such issues, we can still find a way to make connections and new friends. We found Advices and Queries No.21 to summarize this point: "Do you cherish your friendships, so that they grow in depth and understanding and mutual respect? In close relationships we may risk pain as well as finding joy. When experiencing great happiness or great hurt we may be more open to the working of the Spirit."

In our Meeting for Worship for Business we discerned that Junior Gathering 2026's theme will be "Young People's Involvement in Society" and the disco theme will be "Under and Over the Sea" We very much look forward to next year's event and wish well to those moving up to Senior Conference.

Signed in and on behalf of Junior Gathering 2025,

Clerks
Emily W and Martha S

Elders
Iris C and Seb