

Junior Gathering Epistle 2022

To all Friends everywhere,

From the 20th to the 27th of August 2022, 50 young people and 16 staff gathered in Leighton Park school for a week of exploration and reflection on the theme of “Respecting all life and identities and understanding different opinions”.

Both internal and external speakers helped us better understand and discuss our theme through interactive sessions, workshops and talks. In Phil Wood and Lou Whalley’s session, we discussed how conflict and cooperation can co-exist and both are needed to expand our ideas and perspectives. Different opinions enrich us as a community. We also discussed how to deal with conflict and tensions, and how important it is to remember to not disagree with the person, but with the idea. We spoke about respecting differences, and how when differences in opinion arise, we can work together to achieve a win-win outcome, someone doesn't always have to ‘lose’. Furthermore, in Jamie Harris’s speaker session, we reflected on respecting and protecting all living things, including animals big and small. Through Peyton Lee's session we explored the feelings which arise out of both inclusion and exclusion, feeling that respecting all identities means including everyone. In Gwen daSousa Correa’s session, we debated and discussed topics, learning how to disagree respectfully. This led us to reflect that through working together to tackle ideas, we can achieve more.

As a Quaker event, our days contained periods of worship. During the week we found many ways to explore the spiritual side of Quakerism. For example, we began each day with worship in which we often had focus materials such as play dough, paper doves and readings from young Quakers. A particular reading that struck us was the story of the girl and the starfish from living our beliefs, which supported our theme of respecting all life. We also ended each day with an epilogue, with guided meditation, music and candles arranged in striking designs. Over the week we had many interesting ministries from both old and young friends.

Over the course of the week, there were many fun activities led. This included building and launching rockets, a plants themed disco, a visit to the Harris gardens, ents, a scavenger hunt, a fete and barn dancing. Barn dancing was particularly fun as we had an instructor and live band! We were also led through the staff's lives in our life lines session. It was fascinating to see how they had pushed through their struggles. These fun activities helped us to connect better as a group of young friends.

Our trip to Oxford was a fantastic time to visit the senior conference and see the beauty of the city. The trip gave everyone a lot of freedom and a chance to connect with their friends more. Powerful ministry was given by all friends, which enhanced our spiritual selves.

One striking thing about Junior Gathering was the community. Everyone felt more accepted and included than they do generally in situations such as school. An easy place to connect and make new friends were base groups, led by brilliant base group leaders. In base groups we discussed speaker sessions and played games, such as mafia and two truths and a lie, which were really fun and bonded us together. We ate together at meal time allowing us to share interesting conversations. After every meal we had a period of silence to appreciate the food and each other's company. Everyday we had free time, where there was a lot of music played on the piano and other instruments. We also played pool, table tennis, connect four, and shared laughter. We also had secret friends which were a really good way to feel included and appreciated within the Junior Gathering community.

One quote that we thought coincided with our theme is: "Through conflict handled creatively we can change and grow. I am not sure real change, either political or personal, can happen without it." Quaker Faith and Practice 20.71.

Overall, Junior Gathering is an accepting and inclusive place where everyone feels that they can be themselves. All Friends channelled a sense of belonging, community and love. We really look forward to next year's Junior Gathering, a week of fun and friendship.

In our meeting for worship for business, it was discerned that the theme for Junior Gathering 2023 would be: "The past and present of Quakers around the world."

Signed in and on behalf of Junior Gathering 2022,

Clerks

Pippa B and George S

Elders

Hayden K and Thomas N