

Junior Gathering Epistle 2023

To all Friends everywhere,

From the 19th to the 26th of August 2023, 41 young people and 19 staff gathered at Leighton Park School for a week of exploration and reflection on the theme of “The Past and Present of Quakers around the world”.

Both internal and external speakers helped us better understand and discuss our theme through interactive sessions, workshops, and talks. Debbie Fleck and Sue Crosfield came from the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) and spoke about their experiences of documenting the conflict in Israel and Palestine from a Quaker perspective. This helped us understand the extremes of what is happening in that area at the moment. Rhiannon Grant, from Woodbrooke, ran a very interesting session about the ways that different Quakers speak about their experiences of meeting for worship. The session helped us open up and have a conversation, learning a lot about each other and the diversity of our community.

Gwen Da Sousa Correa, a volunteer staff member at the event, spoke about how individual actions of Quakers in the past saved and helped many people during the Hungarian revolution, such as a man who drove resources and aid across the border. Gwen offered inspiring quotes from Quakers and others which got us to think about how we could take action and help improve the world in the future. Chris Skidmore spoke about Quaker myths and legends. We learned about the history of the Religious Society of Friends and how our collective values can be reflected in stories of past Friends, but also recognizing the more difficult aspects of where our understanding and misunderstanding of our history actually comes from, and questioning our sources.

At the event, our days started with Meeting for Worship and ended with epilogue. During our Meetings for W orship, we heard a range of meaningful insights and readings from young people. We shared hopes and fears and had a number of meaningful activities that helped us focus and connect. In epilogue, we had reflective

music or quietness and candles which helped us wind down for the night and find focus.

Over the course of the week, there were many fun small group activities led by the volunteers, this included debate, domino toppling, Chillin' 'n' Spillin' (a chatting activity), and various crafts. As a whole, we came together to do group activities such as tower construction, an Alice in Wonderland puzzle activity and base group challenges. We also enjoyed sessions consisting of barn dancing, a 'fictional characters' themed disco and much more. Lifelines gave us a chance to hear about the experiences of the volunteers and the ups and downs of their lives so far. These fun activities helped us to connect better as a group of young Friends.

During the week we had the opportunity to leave Leighton Park for the day. We travelled to Oxford to share Meeting for Worship with Senior Conference and local Friends. We had the freedom to explore Oxford in our own ways and use the free time to connect with friends. We also had a lovely sunny afternoon in the Harris Gardens.

One of the best parts about Junior Gathering was the community that we all built together. One way we did this was in base groups, which gave us an opportunity to connect, discuss the speaker sessions, and play teambuilding games. We also all took part in 'secret friends' which was a way of creating connections throughout the week, leaning about fellow participants, and making their day with gifts and kind messages. Free time also gave us the chance to connect with friends, new and old, and giving us a time to reflect by ourselves. All of these things helped create a welcoming and inclusive environment for everybody.

One piece of ministry that we felt spoke to our theme was Ghandhi's quote of "be the change you wish to see in the world".

Overall, Junior Gathering's theme has helped our understanding of Quaker roots and how Quaker values can improve the world, even if we are not necessarily all Quakers or members of other groups instead. This week has given us an opportunity

to practice putting Quaker values in action. We really look forward to next year's young Friends events.

In our Meeting for Worship for Business, it was discerned that the theme for Junior Gathering 2024 would be on the topic of understanding gender and sexual identities and equality.

Signed in and on behalf of Junior Gathering 2023,

Clerks

Charlotte B and Fergus B

Elders

Ilana J and Rosa D