

Senior Conference Epistle 2023

To all Friends everywhere,

From the 19th to 26th August, 55 young Quakers and 13 adult volunteers gathered together in Sibford School in Oxfordshire for a week of fun, friendship and spiritual growth. Through a variety of speaker sessions and time spent as a community, we explored the theme of “Simplicity and Sustainability in an Unequal World”. We grew in our appreciation and understanding of the complexities of the world around us, and where we fit in it as young people and as Quakers.

Our first speaker session was the Black Lives Matter and climate crisis activist Queen Niche, aka, Nelly Adams. Nelly gave a powerful, challenging and occasionally uncomfortable talk on racism, identity and its intersectionalities. She spoke on her journey of self empowerment and finding her ‘roar’, including through poetry, and encouraged us all to speak out against injustice in our unequal world. We discussed the power of allyship, how what we say can make ripples that change the world, and how the first step must include recognizing White privilege, as well as embracing our diversities. We found the session to be engaging, thought-provoking and inspiring.

Quaker Peace and Social Witness campaigns co-ordinator Anna Lewis gave us new insight into the importance of viewing climate change through the lens of justice, including Anna's work with the Make Polluters Pay campaign. Consideration of the continuing legacy of colonialism, slavery and global power imbalances, and the resulting disproportionate impact of carbon emissions overwhelmingly produced by the West and the adverse effects of the climate crisis, led us to explore new perspectives on sustainability. We discussed reparations and the various forms they can take, looking towards building a just future as well as taking accountability for the wrongs of the past.

Our exploration of the theme took a creative and experimental turn with the third speaker Julia Dover. In her drama workshop, we used the power of imagination to turn chaos to simplicity. We celebrated the power, and the gift to those around us, of showing up as ourselves. It took us a step outside our comfort zones. In it, we embodied adversity, and explored how small changes inspired by the Light can completely transform our perspective.

Throughout the event, the sense of community and friendship was tangible, and extended through base groups: small family groups 'like their own planet', that met throughout the week for fun, discussion and dressing up. Secret Friends, bedtime stories and even a hug bandana

helped create an inclusive, warm, welcoming atmosphere. The fun continued with many different workshops from sports to crochet and a trip to Oxford with Junior Gathering. In our adult volunteer “Any Questions” session, we shared in both laughter and vulnerability, and learned about important life lessons. Evening entertainments such as Hunt the Committee, the Base Group Challenge, disco, night walk, quiz and more offered an opportunity for new friends, experiences and fun!

In daily prologues and epilogues, the value of having safe spaces, and of being completely yourself was explored through powerful, fruitful and diverse ministry. In worship, including several meetings outdoors, we celebrated our connection to the natural world around us, and beautiful centrepieces grounded us and opened our hearts, resulting in rich ministry.

We leave the week feeling tired, but happy and fulfilled, with new and rekindled connections to each other, and a greater sense of our power to change the world.

Signed in and on behalf of Senior Conference 2023

Aidan A and Aspen S-E