

Epistle of Senior Conference 2024

To all Friends everywhere,

From the 20th to the 26th of August, 57 young Quakers and 13 adult volunteers gathered at Leighton Park School, Reading for a period of connection and reflection. This year we centred ourselves around the theme of “Using Our Beliefs to Construct a Hopeful Future” through speaker sessions that helped us to question preconceived notions of what a hopeful future looks like and the steps we, as Quakers, can take to help us achieve it.

To begin our consideration of the theme, three members of the adult volunteer team engaged us with their own stories about their beliefs and how these have affected the decisions that they have made through their lives. Following these speakers, participants joined small discussion groups to share how their beliefs and what they hope for relates to their own lives and experiences. This session established a good foundation to examine our theme more personally.

The next speaker was Ellis Brooks who works for Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW). In Ellis’ session we discussed the effectiveness of nonviolent civil disobedience and learnt many surprising facts, such as that as few as 3.5% of a population need to become involved in nonviolent protest movements for it to be successful. A discussion about what constitutes violence inspired many thoughtful and passionate conversations. From this session, we took away the idea that nonviolent action from a diverse range of people is often more likely to be successful than violent action. There was space to share how each of us understands the complexity and contextual nature of each scenario that we explored.

Our final speaker, David Kikaya, told us stories of his experiences as a Kenyan Quaker and his involvement in organisations such as Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) and Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO). These broadened our view as British Quakers and gave us a unique perspective of what a hopeful future looks like on a global stage. David’s academic work in Peace Studies, and experiences of a childhood living under the propaganda of British colonial rule in Kenya, were an important reminder of how the actions of our government created huge levels of inequality and unfairness that continues today. David explained how he was drawn to Quakers because of their work putting their beliefs into action by engaging with other international organisations to create a better, more hopeful world.

In our non-themed sessions, we enjoyed a trip to Oxford with Junior Gathering, holding a joint Meeting for Worship before exploring the city. Evening Entertainments continued to create fun and laughter with events such as the Quiz,

the Themed Disco, Hunt the Committee and the final night Ents. Base groups and Secret Friends created welcoming, familial spaces for participants to form closer connections. A quiet breakout space supported participants and sustained an inclusive atmosphere.

For the first time in many years Senior Conference has been sharing the same venue with Junior Gathering, which has strengthened the connection between the two events. Changing venues has been challenging; we adapted the event whilst maintaining the parts we think are special, such as the strong community and the responsibility and agency held by the Arrangements Committee.

Our morning Meetings for Worship and evening Epilogues maintained the spiritual closeness throughout the event. With guidance and support from the Elders, people were moved to give emotive and powerful ministry – some for the first time. Centrepieces helped to focus the worship as we shared our beliefs and hopes, as well as our worries, for the future.

We reluctantly leave a week of happiness, safety, and fun, but feel filled with love and hope for the future. We are now re-energised and inspired to take action.

Signed in and on behalf of Senior Conference 2024,

Freddie Fricker and Sam Bennett
Clerks