

To all Friends everywhere,

From the 22nd to the 29th of August 2026, 61 young people and 14 adult volunteers gathered at Sibford School in Oxfordshire for a week of fun and spiritual growth, run by and for the young people, considering the central theme of:

‘How can living simply bring about peace in ourselves and our communities?’

On our first day together, we gathered as base groups to partake in a series of games and challenges led by our 22+ team. This strengthened our bond as a community, which then provided us with safe spaces to discuss speaker sessions, play games, perform skits, and dress up for our themed dinner. Throughout the week, we also gathered in small groups for workshops, including Out and About, Art, Holding Space, Sport, Flourish, and Board Games. This allowed us to connect with people who shared our interests, forming closer bonds and learning together.

The week was framed by interactive speaker sessions, with space for discussion in small groups, to explore how our theme connects to our own lives.

Our first speaker was Sam Donaldson, a Quaker and practicing Zen Buddhist, who delivered a fascinating session exploring the simultaneous simplicity and complexity of peace, drawing comparison to the interconnection of starlings during murmuration. Sam offered us four principles for building peace, drawing on the work of John Paul Lederach: cultivate connections; keep asking; express yourself; and step out. He also spoke about the Buddhist concept of interbeing, stating that, like a lake, ripples from one person impact those around them, and that we are all one, forming the body of water as a whole.

Our next speaker session was delivered by Jennifer Kavanagh, who spoke with great wisdom about how her life changed for the better when she prioritised simplicity. Without placing pressure upon us, she encouraged us to find what we could simplify in our own lives and minds, emphasising not only material but also inner simplicity. She related this to an encounter between William Penn and George Fox, in which Fox told Penn to that he should wear his sword “as long as thou canst”. Jennifer placed silent worship at the forefront of the session, rendering it all the more personal for each participant.

“What Matters to You?” was a workshop run by our adult volunteers, seeking content for inclusion in a new Quaker book by the same name. It found us tackling some difficult and thought-provoking questions such as “what makes you a Quaker?” or “what do you believe?”. There was space to share experiences and stories from our own lives, along with visually representing how our life moves and flows like a river from source to sea.

Our adult volunteers also ran a session in which they spoke about their ‘Lifelines’, which left many of us deeply moved. Hearing about their journeys touched our hearts and made us feel seen. It was a beautiful session that helped connect everyone at the event - no matter who we are or we come from, we are all here together.

The event was grounded by prologue and epilogue every morning and evening. A simple yet powerful atmosphere was created through ministry from the community. Ministry was

deep, rich, and took many forms, with musical elements featuring more than once. We appreciated outdoor worship with meaningful contributions from the sounds of nature, including a passing barn owl! On Wednesday, we visited Stratford-upon-Avon for the first time as an event and were lucky enough to join Junior Gathering for a prologue, reconnecting with Friends. We also enjoyed activities including visiting many Shakespearean landmarks and shopping for ourselves as well as our secret friends.

We built a strong sense of community during the event, forming new friendships and deepening existing connections. This atmosphere was strengthened by gifting anonymously to our secret friends, and the organisation of our evening entertainments including a themed disco, ceilidh, and talent show. These events helped to uplift us after what were often thought-provoking and introspective days.

Our theme joining simplicity and peace was at the front of our minds the entire event. It guided our discussions and allowed us to find a deeper resonance and connection as a community, as we shared and considered our individual experiences. From contemplating the theme, we leave the event empowered to actively seek simplicity within our day-to-day lives, with the hope of achieving peace, both in ourselves, and in our communities.

Signed in and on behalf of Senior Conference,

Alex Hepburn and Hayden Kemp

Clerks of Senior Conference 2026