

Senior Conference Epistle 2006

To all Friends everywhere,

From the 19th to 26th August 2006, eighty-seven Young Friends and twelve “over twenties” gathered at Sibford School for Southern Senior Conference. We have lived together in an accepting and loving community whilst responding to our theme, “*Be patterns, be examples – Changing our world :-)*”

Our first speaker, Laurie Michaelis, lived out his values by cycling a 5 hour round trip to visit us to talk about the relationship between faith and action, which for him was based on environmental issues. We found his commitment and enthusiasm inspiring and we responded by taking small yet effective steps like reducing our waste to make Conference more environmentally friendly.

Susie Paskins spoke about *What Quakers Believe* in a way that was relevant and reassuring to us. We found her session grounding and deepening for the Conference. Her suggestions of focusing on words, feelings of gratitude or images such as water to centre down in Meeting for Worship were especially useful. In base groups we then created a game of snakes and ladders sharing what had helped and hindered us on our spiritual journeys.

Liz Kingsnorth led a highly interactive session about Non-Violent Communication. We learnt how negative expression and conflict results from positive needs such as understanding, love and closeness. We used hand puppets to represent the roles of the destructive jackal and compassionate giraffe, learning how to rephrase our own inappropriate expression and connect with other people in a constructive way.

Bob Maycock and Jeannie Thompson from the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army gave us an insight into their innovative ways to protest for a cause whilst using humour to connect people and so diffuse potentially violent situations. Their games demonstrated their values of spontaneity, fun and creativity. These activities were also useful for on the street problems which require fast consensus decision making.

We were touched by Sam Maher’s slideshow and discussion of the everyday, yet destructive, events she experienced in Palestine, whilst volunteering as an International Accompanier with the olive harvest. We learnt about the troubled history of the conflict with Israel and its effects on the Palestinians. In a second session we learnt how we are, unfortunately, part of the chain that encourages sweatshops and agreed to send postcards querying the practices of high street shops we buy from.

A more intimate atmosphere was created in our many base group sessions. We enjoyed ourselves together, sharing a meal in costumes such as buff lifeguards and partying toddlers. We danced wildly in the pirate disco, learnt to jive heartily in a session led by “Jive+” and had many wonderful conversations and special moments throughout the week, which included a spiritually uplifting night walk. We came together in worship, with ministry which grew in depth as the week progressed. Outdoor worship was especially memorable.

Our belief that there is an inner light in everyone is reflected in the atmosphere and the way our event is organised by us. Let it inspire us to be patterns and examples.

Signed in and on behalf of Senior Conference

Jennifer Stanger and John Walton (Clerks)