

## Epistle of Junior Yearly Meeting

held on Gather Town

2nd-6th August 2021

As the Arrangements Committee of Junior Yearly Meeting this year, we would like to say how important this event is to us, the young people that attend each year, and to the community. JYM provides a space for young Quakers in Britain to feel a part of our beautiful and diverse Quaker community, a part of a family, but perhaps most importantly we feel like we have had our voices heard in the decision making process of an important Quaker body, something that young Quakers do not often feel outside of the event. It is for these reasons that when asked if we wanted to serve the JYM community for another year, we both knew we had to say yes.

The form that JYM took for the 2021 event broke from tradition, and this epistle is no different. We have divided the epistle into 2 parts: the first on behalf of Junior Yearly Meeting 2021, and the second on behalf of us, Kit and Sasha.

To all Friends everywhere,

From 2nd August to 6th August 2021, 11 young Quakers, 2 Arrangements Committee members, and 6 Adult Team members met together in Gather Town, having created and designed our own unique space. We explored the theme “For our comfort and discomfort: how can we use Quaker testimonies to live faithfully?”, through the lens of anti-racism, climate justice, and other issues that intersect.

With the event being held online, there were concerns over the ability to foster community amongst the participants. However, we were extremely impressed by how quickly, easily, and organically, the community of young people came together and bonds formed. This ranged from small groups talking in ‘private spaces’, to post-epilogue conga lines with Clare Scott-Booth. The surprising similarity to an in person event and use of the chat function allowed participants to engage more fully with theme sessions, in perhaps a more accessible fashion.

Throughout the week, Rachel Swancott, Edwina Peart, Beatrice Liese, and Daniel Nteziyaremye delivered sessions on a range of topics that allowed us to address the theme from different perspectives.

Rachel’s session left us with a strong metaphor that carried us through the event: if your life is a boat, who makes up the crew? What role does Quakerism play - is it the wind in your sails or is it the anchor keeping you grounded? And finally, how is your boat equipped to make change in this world?

To start us thinking about race, racism, and how to navigate anti-racism Edwina Peart quoted Stuart Hall's book *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation*, saying that race is "one of those major or master concepts (the masculine form is deliberate) that organize the great classificatory systems of difference that operate in human societies. Race, in this sense, is the centerpiece of a hierarchical system that produces differences". It is this sense of "difference" that causes the issues we have with race in society today. She drew our attention to the racial abuse that the members of the England football team that are black, brown, or people of colour received after the final of the Euros and we heard Marcus Rashford's open letter about the abuse he received and the support from his teammates. This was extremely moving for many members, leading us to discuss the uncomfortable and comfortable aspects of the story, and what kind of world that we ourselves would like to create. She closed the session with a conversation about the links between modern racism, and how we are taught about colonialism and the Transatlantic slave trade. Participants particularly responded to the words of Professor Kehinde Andrews; "Society can only ever be as equal as the knowledge it is built upon".

We had 2 workshops led by Beatrice Liese from the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) and Daniel Nteziyaremye from Turning The Tide (TTT). Beatrice spoke to one small group about the work of QUNO in international negotiations, particularly about working towards climate justice. We then practiced Quiet Diplomacy - speaking from the heart, answering the question "What can I do to support myself and those around me to act on climate change?". Daniel gave an overview of the advocacy that TTT carries out with young people in Rwanda, their philosophy and methods for engagement, and encouraged us to think about issues that were local to British Quakers.

In the final theme session, we reflected on institutionalised racism within Quaker bodies, and the attitudes that allow it to go unchallenged in preparation for our Meeting for Worship for Business. This allowed the participants to engage with the theme one last time and bring their thoughts to the front of their minds, ensuring that they attended with hearts and minds prepared.

Participants were enriched by Meetings for Worship at the beginning and end of each day, allowing space for all to be calm, reflective, and engaged with the Spirit. Themes of different worships included starfish, change for the common good, and remaining in touch with your conscience. In order to emulate the refreshing nature of prologue this was held on our beach, and to preserve the soothing nature of epilogue we gathered on the sofas of the virtual rooftop.

During the course of the event, we welcomed several guests - Paul Parker, Jasmine Peripanayagam, Clare Scott-Booth, Rob Francis, Wendy Sender, and Ella Otomewi - who joined us for worship, story telling, base group sessions, and gave us their own perspective of the theme and how it relates to their Quakerism.

To keep us excited and energised, the evenings were filled by community sessions ranging from a retro game show themed quiz to a dress up drama. These sessions encouraged participants to let go and express themselves through performance and healthy competition. The high number of participants that opted to stay on during their break for optional community activities, such as crane making or a musical quiz, is a testament to how well the community formed despite being online. Our Adult Volunteers facilitated base group sessions which were at times very thought provoking, and at other times had debates on whether banana has a place on pizza.

This week has been an exciting week of learning; learning about the theme, learning about online events, and learning about ourselves as individuals and Quakers. We have been encouraged to engage in deep reflection and introspection from start to end, and we can leave this event content in the knowledge that our participants have come away feeling equipped to make positive change in themselves, in our community, and in the wider world.

Signed in and on behalf of Junior Yearly Meeting 2021,

Kit King  
Clerk

Sasha King-Smith  
Arrangements Committee

To our participants,

We are extremely grateful to you all for making the decision to come to, yet another, online youth event as we are aware that the prospect of not having an in person JYM is not a particularly attractive one. You put your trust in us and the Quaker community that we could produce a fun and worthwhile event that includes you in wider Quaker society, and for that we thank you.

To Matthew Bittle, Grace Bach, and Gabriel Carter,

We started this journey as a group of 5, with a different theme, a different venue, and no pandemic. Some of our original ideas, thoughts, and feelings remained in the planning for the event this week. We wanted to take this opportunity to recognise and give thanks for your input and remember the event we had pre-COVID.

To the Adult Volunteer team,

Thank you for supporting us during and in the run up to the event. From stepping in and taking the lead on base group sessions, to helping us in times of need, we are eternally grateful for stepping up and taking on roles that you did not originally sign up for.

Finally, To Cat Waithaka and Howard Nurden,

The last 2 years have not gone the way we expected them to, since we met at JYM 2019. This process has been transformative, insightful, and challenging to say the least. Howard, we thank you for the incredible work you have done, not just in the first phase of this process but the years you have spent working on the Children and Young People's Team, and we feel sorry that future AC's will not have the pleasure of receiving your guidance and experience. Cat, you have taught us about Quaker process, taught us more about ourselves than any self-help book could, and you have taught us to be mindful of all the different aspects that people contribute to a group which has allowed us to deliver this event. We have been your longest serving AC and yet it still feels like our time together has been cut short.

In 1991, the clerks of JYM wrote in their epistle "We realised that we are individuals and that we are alone but, as part of a loving community, to be alone does not necessarily mean to be lonely. [ ] We should not feel guilty when we are wrong, and appreciate that there must be room for mistakes." and 30 years later, these words are still true to JYM.

Signed

Kit King  
Clerk

Sasha King-Smith  
Arrangements Committee