



Among Friends

Friends World Committee for Consultation Europe and Middle East Section

No 166 ■ Autumn 2026



2026 ALL AGE GATHERING

A Celebration of Quaker Community by Kate McNally

180 **QUAKERS GATHERED 8-15 August in Haus Altenberg in Germany to explore the theme of *The River of Life*.**

Each day was focused on one stage of life: childhood, youth, early adulthood, adulthood, later years, and finally, preparing for death and loss. Friends had the chance each day to visit future ages or re-live past stages of their lives.

Each of these stages of life was well represented, as the youngest participant was a few months old and the oldest was 87. Most Friends were in the middle part, with

considerably less white hair than many Quaker gatherings I have attended. While most Friends were from Europe (including Britain), all four FWCC sections were represented.

It was like a family reunion: there were close family who you see every day, there were cousins that you see often, there were the rarely met uncles and aunts and the new family members who recently joined or were only just born into the family. There were noisy meals and overexcited children. Friends you see every day, those you see less often, and Friends you haven't met yet.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

2026 All Age Gathering	1
Sojourner Truth House	4
Woodbrooke	5
Taking Responsibility	6
QUNO: Learning About the UN	8
Pendle Hill	10
QCEA: Voices of Peace Publication	12
The Svartbäcken Summons	14
Diary Dates	16



Friends World Committee
for Consultation

EUROPE & MIDDLE EAST SECTION

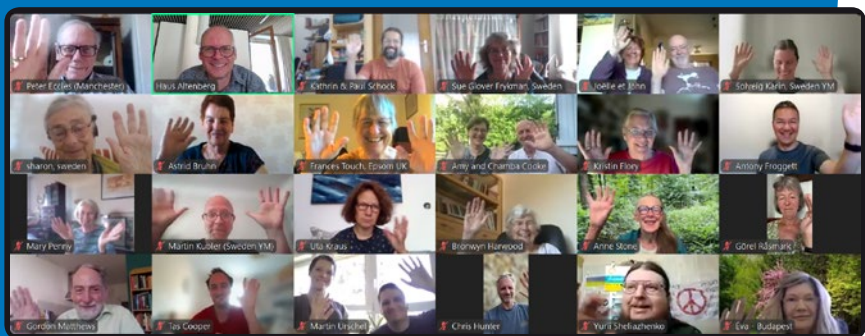
fwccemes.org

There was enough time to really catch up with old Friends and get to know new ones.

We were all assigned to home groups. They were well chosen, balanced by age, home countries, life experiences. There were interesting and challenging questions to address (or not) every day. It was easy to choose how deeply to share.

The days had a loose structure: each day began with early morning activities for those who were so inclined, closely followed by breakfast. A hybrid meeting for worship allowed us to connect to Friends who were not able to come.

continued...



2026 ALL AGE GATHERING

A Celebration of Quaker Community

» Daily speakers addressed the joys and challenges of each stage of life, followed by activities related to the theme of the day. Next came home groups, followed by lunch. After lunch were optional activities which had been posted by Friends on a large wall, and needed to be consulted often as new activities appeared with some frequency.

Each day had activities offered in several time slots. These were offered on site by anyone who had an idea of something interesting to do or discuss. There were parachute games, there was a death café, there was an opportunity to reflect on your life experiences or discuss Friendly economics. We were invited to explore Quakerism in New Zealand, to sing sea chanties, to assemble jigsaw puzzles, play board games, do yoga, play children's games, and contribute to a Quaker patchwork, to name only a few. The image of a certain weighty Friend being a chicken is forever engraved in my memory!

All sessions were translated into German, and some were simultaneously translated into other languages as needed. There were Friends we are used to seeing involved in leadership who had no roles, and it was lovely to have time to chat with them.

The facility was a reconstructed abbey connected to an ancient gothic church. It was large and welcoming and accommodating. There were many meeting rooms as well as nooks for private conversations or contemplation. There were window seats and comfortable chairs. There were poofs and benches and a lovely modern chapel. Despite the fact that the temperatures were in the low-mid 30s, it was cool and pleasant in the old building with its thick walls. There was always a place for a chat with a new or old Friend. On the grounds was a 12th Century chapel and a pond with an albino beast whose exact species was the subject of much speculation. The days were accompanied by the sounds of organ music from the church as well as church bells.

After a well-chosen activity (or nap) there was a break for coffee and cake, then more activities until dinner. Sandwiched between dinner and epilogue were special activities, including a celebration, hybrid worship and a trip to the top of the valley to see the eclipse.

The days had a rhythm that was as intense as we wanted it to be. The schedule was spacious and it offered as much or as little activity as we wanted each day.

Every day was punctuated by the sound of children's laughter and running feet, chats with Friends and really nice vegetarian/vegan meals. And it was a little strange to have so many Quakers in one place with no Meeting for Business.

There was no children's program – children were integrated into all the activities, from mealtimes, to optional activities, to meeting for worship. It was delightful to have an infant crawling into the middle of the circle in Meeting for Worship and then turning to look at all of us, laughing that lovely liquid laugh that babies have.

In my long life I have been to many conferences and gatherings. This was the best one by far. There was space to do as much or as little as we wanted/needed to do, Friends to chat with, walk with, sing with, play with, and just sit with.

As I said above, it felt like a family reunion. It also felt in some ways like passing of the mantle to the next generation as weighty Friends were able to just be there without the expectation that they would run it.

Young Friends had active leadership roles. Friends from Europe and Middle East Young Friends (18 to 35-ish) as well as the Youth Group (up to 18) took the lead in many sessions. It was impressive to see the poise that some of these very young Friends showed. At 17 I would not have been able to stand in front of 180 people with the grace of those who were there and speak openly and candidly about my life. I felt that it was clear that there is an impressive new generation coming along and the future is in good hands.

It is hard to return to the outside world, with forest fires, meetings, everyday duties. The EMES WhatsApp group is full of messages from Friends missing the profound connections that were made. Our challenge is how to bring the community and spiritual wholeness we found there back into the everyday world.

As one Friend wrote: "I have a few days off so I can allow myself to arrive gently in the everyday world. **To combine the everyday with the eternal – that's my challenge for the coming weeks.**"

Volunteers & Donations Call: STH | sojourner truth house

INTRODUCTION

Sojourner Truth House is a Quaker House of Hospitality founded by Quakers in late 2025 in Calais, France. In recent decades, Calais has been experiencing a humanitarian crisis. Tens of thousands of people every year try to cross the English Channel by small boat to reach the UK, but the government does very little to help with accommodating and looking after these people on the move. Instead, police-led mass evictions of makeshift camps occur frequently to disrupt and demoralise those who are already experiencing severe instability.

NETWORK HOUSES

Many non-governmental organisations are present in Calais to fill the humanitarian void left by the government. Many address a specific need, be that providing hot meals, clothing or medical support, to name a few. In addition, there is a network of houses of hospitality based in and around Calais. These houses are intended to be safe alternatives to the camps and are usually targeted to certain groups of people who are particularly vulnerable.

Sojourner Truth House has recently joined the Toiles network of solidarity houses in Calais, aiming to provide accommodation and support to women and children on the move. On top of meeting these basic needs, our mission extends to creating a peaceful community made up of volunteers and guests, while being guided by the Quaker

testimonies. Neither guests nor volunteers must be Quakers, but this does not prevent us from trying to maintain this space according to Quaker values.

LIFE AT SOJOURNER TRUTH HOUSE

Every day in the house is a unique one. The nature of the situation in Calais means that guests may leave abruptly and/or arrive at very short notice, meaning there is plenty to do. New arrivals are referred to us by our partner organisations who go into the makeshift camps. We keep in constant contact with these organisations about new and current guests, managing logistics for their stay and communicating any additional needs. In addition to preparing rooms and beds for them, it is our job to provide information to guests about the different services available in Calais, as previously described. English is rarely the first language for guests, so it is important that volunteers can establish a way to communicate with everyone staying in the house. Creating a safe and welcoming space lies at the core of our work, so it is very important to us that guests feel comfortable and able to talk to volunteers if they need extra help or support. Food is provided to the guests for their stay, and we try every evening to cook and eat communally. There are often children staying in the house, and their energy brings so much joy to the volunteers. Trips to the beach and sunny garden parties are some of their favourite activities that come to mind! Every week we hold a Meeting for Worship in our multifaith worship space (and online) for anyone who wants to attend.

HOW WE FUNCTION/WHAT WE NEED

Sojourner Truth House was founded by Friends and Calais residents from the UK, Ireland, and the USA. In the last 12 months, we have become a registered charity and bought a house in Calais. One member of our founding group acts as the project coordinator on the ground, with many others supporting the project both near and far. Since becoming more permanently established, we are moving towards creating a more formal and transparent governance structure with appointed roles, in line with traditional Quaker business practice.

We are always looking for volunteers to facilitate the running of the house. If you are interested, please visit our website quakersolidaritycentre.org or complete our Volunteer Form directly here: tinyurl.com/4855zccm.

If you would like to make a financial contribution, please visit: quakersolidaritycentre.org/donate.

Sojourner Truth (pictured) escaped slavery in 1826, became a preacher, activist, and abolitionist, lived among Quaker communities, and later published her autobiography, gaining national recognition and independence.



Woodbrooke continues to offer a varied programme of learning and research, both online and in person, that inspires, challenges, and supports Friends at every stage of their journey.

In September, we will announce our programme of courses for November 2026 to April 2027. Our programme offers Friends opportunities to deepen their understanding of Quaker history and theology, enrich their spirituality, develop in their role within their Quaker community, and explore peace and social justice. Rooted in Quakerism, our courses combine thoughtful learning with fresh perspectives, offering something for everyone.

Friends across FWCC EMES may be particularly interested in our series **In Our Name** which explores the work and witness of the Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva. Further details about our full programme can be found at woodbrooke.org.uk/courses.

Over the past year, we have been working with Britain Yearly Meeting's **Reparation Working Group** to research and deliver learning on the topic of reparation. We have undertaken historical and theological research exploring the Quaker theology used to justify and support systems of enslavement and oppression, as well as the theology of abolition, reparations, and liberation. This research is presented in a report, which will be launched at a conference hosted by the

BYM Reparation Working Group in October and explored in an online course in December.

Our upcoming programme includes a number of courses and sessions exploring reparation, including **Reparation: Voices from Kenyan Friends**, which will feature a presentation by Hezron Masitsa, FWCC's Justice and Peace Secretary, on how the legacies of enslavement, colonialism, and systemic racism continue to shape Kenyan communities today. We will also be running a session on **Quakers and the Trafficking of Africans: Researching Our Past**, which will equip Meetings with the tools they need to research their own history.

Woodbrooke's Centre for Research in Quaker Studies (CRQS) continues to flourish. July saw three students graduate: two with PhDs and one with an MA. These achievements also marked an important milestone for Woodbrooke's Programmes Leader for CRQS, **Ben Pink Dandelion**, who now celebrates supervising his fiftieth successful PhD completion, contributing to 112 postgraduate completions in total.

We also continue to host regular online Meetings for Worship in partnership with EMES, alongside a dedicated Young Adult Worship and a monthly Quaker Educators Worship held with Quaker Values in Education (QVinE).

To stay connected with Woodbrooke's work, subscribe to our newsletter and follow our social media channels at woodbrooke.org.uk/connect

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

“Each of us is responsible for our own actions and our own reactions. We are not responsible for someone else’s actions and reactions.” —Alice Wiser, 1985

From a speech at the end of the United Nations Decade of Women. Britain Yearly Meeting
Quaker Faith & Practice, 5th Edition qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/21

Taking responsibility means that we were created with the ability called “free will” to choose our attitude and actions, particularly when that includes uncertainty and doubt.

Responsibility means courage to take what seems to be the best action without certainty of results, nor blaming myself or others for the results if they are not what I hoped. Taking responsibility is above and beyond blame and guilt.

Responsibility starts with taking care of one’s own life – body, emotions, mind, and spirit, with the humility of knowing that all is a gift from power greater than ourselves that some call creation. My physical existence is not mine. My responsibility is to choose positive and say ‘thank you’ for my unique, temporary existence that includes free will. When I do, I am better able to share my positive choices with others.

“Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand.” —Isaac Penington, 1667

Britain Yearly Meeting Quaker Faith & Practice, 5th Edition
qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/10

“When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there. And for that: I am responsible” is the *Responsibility Statement* adopted at the 30th anniversary convention in 1965, the first of many Twelve Step Recovery Programmes begun in the Twentieth Century.

My first responsibility is to “do no harm”¹, which I understand to mean never interfere with another’s spiritual journey.

“There is a duty not only to do no harm but also to make positive change.”

—Participant, Junior Yearly Meeting 2015

From p56 of *Living our Beliefs: An Exploration of the Faith and Practice of Quakers*, developed and edited by Young Quakers with Graham Ralph. Second Edition April 2018. Quaker Books.

Going it alone in spiritual matters, however, is dangerous. I need to participate in community. When I practice humility I learn from the experience of others as to what works and what doesn’t – *I don’t know, others might, I need to listen.*

“Our diversity invites us both to speak what we know to be true in our lives and to learn from others. Friends are encouraged to listen to each other in humility and understanding, trusting in the Spirit that goes beyond our human effort and comprehension.”

Britain Yearly Meeting Quaker Faith & Practice, 5th Edition
qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/1

“Our diversity” is something greater than us. “Invites us” means something greater that reaches out to us, “To speak what we know to be true in our lives” calling us to speak, at the same time inviting us “to learn from others”, calling us to listen.

A spiritual community is three-tiered: those exploring/seeking by listening to others, those finding spiritual sustenance and sharing it, and those serving in community supportive roles.

When we serve, we both serve and can learn from the experience. When we minister, we both say what we know to be true at that moment in our lives and we can learn from ministering. The yield is greater than the action.

¹ health.harvard.edu/blog/first-do-no-harm-201510138421



"Liberté", was the last word spoken by British resistance fighter in France, **Noor Inayat Khan** before execution on 13 September 1944. She is honoured in Gordon Square Gardens, Bloomsbury, London.

Her legacy of authenticity, courage, humility, and sacrifice for the good of others continues as an example of taking responsibility by exercise of her free will.

Source: Wikipedia



LEARNING ABOUT THE UNITED NATIONS THROUGH QUAKER VALUES

The next Secretary-General of the United Nations will take office in less than six months. Imagine you are given the opportunity to write a letter to the person selected. However, following UN practice, the letter must be drafted by consensus with 21 other young people from different corners of the world, whom you met only two weeks earlier. What would you write?

This was the challenge participants faced on the final day of this year's Quaker United Nations Summer School. Twenty-two participants travelled to Geneva, intrigued to learn more about multilateralism, the United Nations, and Quaker advocacy. Their passion and reflections reminded us that many young people remain eager to learn and explore how multilateralism can contribute to solutions to the serious challenges our world faces today.

Since 1955, the Quaker United Nations Office has been hosting a Summer School in Geneva with approximately 25 young people, where expert-led discussions, interactive simulations, reflective practice, and social engagement enable participants to gain a meaningful and accessible understanding of how the UN system works in practice.

This year's theme was the importance of, and the challenges facing, the United Nations and multilateralism. Given the current crisis in multilateralism, the programme aimed to support participants in accurately understanding, critically questioning, and humanizing the United Nations. As two participants shared and reflected...

"So often we're expected to have answers, but these two weeks reminded me that asking thoughtful questions is just as important."

"I have never met so many people who genuinely enjoyed debating difficult questions for fun. Apparently, those are my kind of people."

Participants were introduced to QUNO's long-standing work in faith-based and values-driven action, quiet diplomacy and negotiation, and its thematic areas, including human rights, migration, the human impacts of climate change, peace and disarmament, and sustainable and equitable economic systems.

The Quaker United Nations Summer School sessions are held at the renowned Quaker House in Geneva. Participants also had valuable opportunities to explore International Geneva. The programme included visits to





the United Nations, where they attended a session of the Universal Periodic Review in the Human Rights Council, as well as a visit to the Museum of the International Red Cross, the World Trade Organization and the World Meteorological Organization, which houses the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. These visits are among participants' favorite aspects of the programme. As one participant said...

"One of the most valuable aspects of the programme was gaining access to, and demystifying, multilateral spaces. It didn't make me respect or value them any less; rather, it made them feel more accessible and human."

The programme also included sessions with ambassadors, diplomats, and UN staff, advice on writing CVs and networking, and even a session in which participants collectively drafted a letter to the incoming UN Secretary-General – a letter that QUNO has committed to delivering.

However, what participants seemed to enjoy most were the strong bonds they formed with one another in just two weeks. As two other participants reflected...

"I never would have imagined I would walk away with so many incredibly close friends or have been able to hear so many different life experiences. I think I will mourn these last two weeks for the rest of my life."

"Some of the best learning happened during coffee breaks, tram rides, and conversations that started with 'Where are you from?' and somehow ended with discussions about justice, peace, or climate change. That's something quite special."

This year, participants came from Argentina, Australia, Benin, Colombia, France, Hungary, Pakistan, Palestine, Portugal, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, the United Kingdom, and the United States, which added to the



richness and relevance of the programme. Half of the participants came from Quaker backgrounds.

The QUNO Summer School is made possible through the generous support of Friends around the world, and we are deeply grateful to all who have contributed whether as individual donors, Quaker Meetings, or institutional funders. Your generosity enables us to bring together young people from across the globe to learn, reflect and engage with the work of the United Nations in the spirit of Quaker witness, and ensure scholarship funding for students from the Global South.

If you would like to support the Summer School in the future, or contribute to QUNO's wider work, we welcome donations of any size. You can give securely by credit card, debit card or PayPal at quno.org/donate/geneva.

Ultimately, the value of this support can be seen in both the participants' collective message and the personal convictions they take home with them. The letter written by the participants, which will be made public only after being sent to the incoming Secretary-General, emphasised the need for courageous, humane and accountable UN reform, grounded in truth, justice, peace and equity, with meaningful youth participation at its heart. It brought together the concerns, values and hopes that had emerged throughout their two weeks in Geneva. And once again, the Summer School has provided an opportunity for participants to meet people who care about similar issues and to strengthen the aspirations of those who want to walk this path. As one participant shared...

"I am taking away renewed Quaker faith and a reaffirmed belief that I am on the right career path."

To stay informed about the Summer School and QUNO's programmes, visit us at quno.org and subscribe to our newsletter.



Pendle Hill

Being Friends in Residence Spring 2026

We, Catherine Putz and Mark Holtom were appointed to be Friends in Residence at Pendle Hill, Philadelphia USA by Britain Yearly Meeting, Meeting for Sufferings in July 2025.

Before we went we were a bit daunted. What would it be like being in community? Would there be issues with immigration? What work would we be doing? What could we contribute? Some people told us it could be seen as supporting current US Government. However, it felt important to us to offer support and solidarity to those in US who oppose the government at this time of division and injustice. Connection and contact make a difference to the many who are working for justice, for peace, for inclusion and equity. We had travelling minutes from Brighouse West Yorkshire AM and Britain Yearly Meeting. We left the UK at the end of February and as white British folk with an ESTA and an invitation letter we had no problems at immigration at Philadelphia airport. We arrived when there was still snow on the ground and stayed to early May when trees were in full leaf and there were many blossoms.

Pendle Hill was founded in 1930 and is modelled on the same principles as Woodbrooke with a focus on worship, learning and work. It is a 'Quaker centre welcoming all for Spirit-led learning, retreat, and community'. It is on former First Nation Lenape land in Wallingford near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. As Friends in Residence, we were part of the Spring term cohort of six students, another Friend in Residence and a scholar and an artist in residence. We were able to take part in varied learning opportunities including art, writing, Discerning our Calls, Sing a new song, Primitive Quakerism. The combination of skilled and inspiring tutors, and reflection together with others, led to significant spiritual growth for both of us. In particular we were stretched and inspired by the sessions on Bold Heart in the art room. We were each paired with a student to offer spiritual nurture which was intentional and grounded in spirit. We were also part of faithfulness groups.

At the end of the term we wrote an Epistle together¹... "We sang, we laughed, we cried, acknowledging that we are whole and incomplete at the same time. An effective symbol of our time together is a mobius strip demonstrating the unity of our inner selves and the outer world... We are leaving, if not completely transformed then changed. It has been a threshold in our lives and a *begending*."

Pendle Hill is a place of routine; worship begins and ends every day and was interwoven in our activities; a bell rings for meals at 7.30am, 12.00pm and 6.00pm; there are daily work tasks. It is a conference centre and we were assigned to Guest Services for our work.

We were part of a team offering radical hospitality and we often engaged non-Quakers in conversation. The staff are amazing and very much part of the community. They start each day after worship by asking the question 'what do we need for the day to go well'.

The campus is beautiful; it is a registered arboretum. We walked most days either round the perimeter path or traced the labyrinth. There were familiar and unfamiliar trees and flowers; we missed bluebells but loved the aconites and lilies of the valley and the redwoods and beeches. There were deer grazing, frequent red flashes of cardinals which were exotic to us; in the large pond there were frogs and tadpoles, later a large snapping turtle, fireflies in the trees, however the combination of spells of hot weather and deer meant we also had to be on a look out for ticks.

There was an enormous variety of outside groups using Pendle Hill: churches on retreat, campaign groups of all hues, Buddhists on silent retreat, rowdy students from Harvard, there was an Incubation project for Quaker ministers, QUNO committee meeting and sojourners writing, resting and making art.

Many Friends asked us about the political context. Our epistle acknowledged that we were there "at a time of profound turbulence in the world. War, injustice, cruelty, and displacement press in from every direction, and none of us arrived untouched by what is happening beyond our campus".

However, Pendle Hill is more a place for people to recharge their batteries and not a campaigning organisation itself. The USA launched its bombing of Iran in early March. We were surprised that there didn't seem to be an immediate uprising of protest amongst Quakers, although a local Quaker began a daily opposition by ringing bells for peace at his home. Many Americans are engaged in continuous protest and opposition in different ways. We joined thousands in Philadelphia on the No Kings march at the end of March which brings together many different protest groups in particular resistance to ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement). Artist-in-residence Welling Hall, from Minneapolis where she had been part of singing resistance to ICE, explored the intersection of beauty, spirituality, and trauma in her first Monday lecture in March².

The scholar in residence Jim Fussell gave a first Monday lecture in May on Band of Humble Prophets³. He also writes on Quaker collusion with slavery, and organised a Quaker Trans Day of Visibility on 29 March. The epistle from that gathering is entitled Accompaniment in a Time of Adversity⁴.



Our No Kings Posters



The Barn



Trees in Blossom



Main House



Spring Cohort

At first it seemed there was less focus on Palestine and Gaza than amongst Quakers in Europe but AFSC is deeply committed to work in Gaza⁵. There are strong connections between Quakers and Jewish community with many involved with Jewish Voice for Peace and Parents Circle.

There were personal challenges: we didn't cook for three months, and ironically our timetable was very busy and of course there are cultural and linguistic differences. Mark started each day with Qigong, built in regular naps, and had occasional solo trips exploring Philadelphia by rail and subway; he also had a nine-hour shared road trip with a Friend to Indiana over Easter.

What are we taking away with us? There are things we want to do differently. We aim to have the discipline of worship every day. Mark is taking away a commitment to living life from the heart. Catherine wants to wake up each day with purpose, she feels very clearly that we are on earth to try and make the world a better place for everyone.

We stayed more than we expected on campus, but every Sunday we went to Meeting for Worship at a local meeting. We went to Media, Providence, Haverford, Washington, Arch St. in Philadelphia and later to Boston and Montreal. Our travelling minutes are full of wonderful messages.

It would take a longer article to describe the differences and similarities between most Quakers in Europe and Friends in US who are 'liberal' and practise waiting worship. Examples of differences are: having a facing bench, the custom of having name badges, no centre table or books on display, different ways of describing worship and the divine. There is also much that we share in communal gathered worship and holding each other in the light.

We are enormously grateful for having had this opportunity.

Catherine Putz & Mark Holtom

July 2026

For more information please go to the Pendle Hill website, where daily worship is at 1.30 BST, 2.30 CEST. pendlehill.org/worship.

¹ pendlehill.org/the-2026-spring-term-student-epistle ² youtube.com/watch?v=_MQdnTj8pDw

³ youtube.com/watch?v=y4PPNcGgTs ⁴ pendlehill.org/epistle-from-quaker-trans-day-of-visibility-gathering

⁵ afsc.org/news/afscs-gaza-emergency-relief?ms=WEB26HG

QCEA RELEASES A STORYTELLING PUBLICATION ABOUT CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

On 15 May, International Conscientious Objection Day, we published a special publication: **Voices of Peace: stories of Conscientious Objectors from Europe and Beyond**. It features personal stories from people in eight countries who have bravely chosen to break cycles of violence and refuse the military system.

We made this publication during a challenging time in Europe, as growing militarisation puts more pressure on people to support violent solutions to conflict. Therefore, speaking about the right to refuse military service is more important than ever.

We were also inspired by the Quakers, who have a long history of speaking out against war and conscription. Since World War I, Quakers have often refused military service and led peace efforts in many countries.

Our work was guided by three core principles:

Portraying the diversity of the situation that can lead to conscientious objection. Objectors are not only people who refused to join the army for idealistic reasons; they made their decisions in different ways and in different situations. Some joined the army but later chose to leave, while others were motivated by not wanting to kill or be killed. We believe all of them are conscientious objectors, and every choice deserves recognition.

Showing the human side of saying 'no' to war. We sought to portray our participants as interesting people who made a brave choice at a certain point in their lives. Through this, we hoped to challenge stereotypes about conscientious objectors by asking them about other things important to them, such as plans for their future or hobbies. Each of our participants was unique, even though they made a similar choice.

Celebrating the inner strength of conscientious objectors. We portrayed the different ways in which people stay strong, hold on to hope, and keep going when life is difficult. We believe that even in the hardest times, people still find reasons to stay hopeful and not give up.



Image from *Voices of Peace*

“My message to soldiers or young people considering joining the army and serving. Don’t do that. If you are already in the army, leave. Escape if you can.”

—Alexander, Russia

“Transformative pacifism takes a look at the world and asks us to think about what our ambition is. What is the world we want to build? How do we want to exist in this world? And how do we get there?”

—Theo, Greece

“Women refusers and antimilitarist activists offer a feminism according to which women should act in line with their conscience rather than satisfying an image whose terms are determined by men and male perception.”

—Ayana, Israel



Are you interested in learning more?

We warmly invite you to read the publication on the QCEA website at qcea.org

THE SVARTBÄCKEN SUMMONS

At a Working Retreat run by Quaker Voluntary Action at Svartbäcken Quaker Centre, Sweden, in July 2026 we met to discern what Quakers can do about the global issues of today during a session exploring our theme, 'Pathways to Peace.' The ministry in this session, as shown to us by the Spirit, led us to discern a summons – a call to action.

We began by considering the enormity of the challenges we are facing in the world. We are conscious, though, that at many points throughout Quaker history, Friends have faced what have felt like existential and insurmountable threats. We identified intersecting and interrelated barriers to our witness of creating the Commonwealth of Heaven on Earth.

At the root of many of these challenges is a feeling of disempowerment, othering, and a lack of agency on a deeply spiritual level. This discord has led to conflict in communities, repression of truth in society, local and international violence, and often underpinned and driven by the climate crisis.

We are conscious that the necessary brevity and over-simplification of the immense and nuanced challenges facing us does not fully capture what is deeply understood by those present in our company and those who will read our minute.

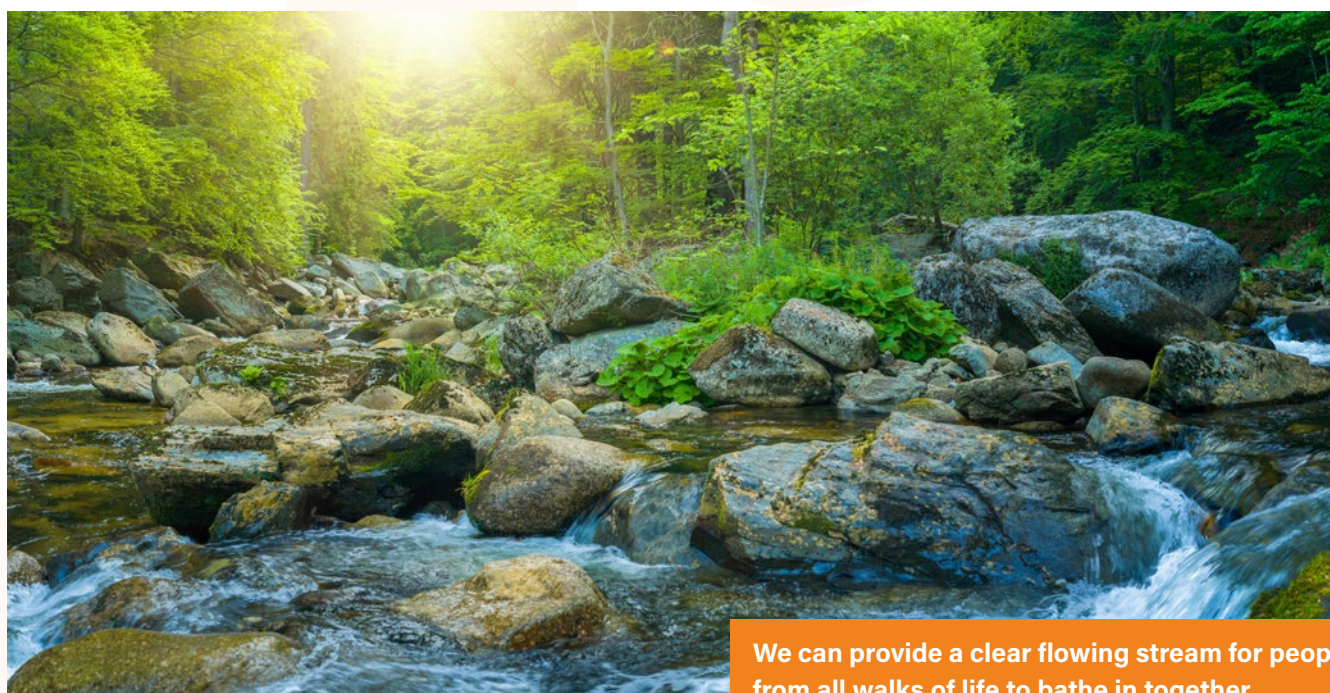
Nevertheless, the rich legacy of the Religious Society's witness to our peace testimony prompted us to consider and envision radical solutions that Quakers on an individual, local, national,

and international level could pursue to and work towards a more peaceful world.

Education and learning is a sacred gift. Conscious of the beauty and strength of intergenerational connection within our community, we are keen to encourage the sharing of perspectives, particularly around peace work. We are grateful for the work that Quakers already do in the field of peace education and in training young people to be peer mediators.

Empowering people to spread peace in their communities and through their relationships trains generations of peacebuilders and provides the long term, steadfast impact we hope to make through our work.

Exchanging wisdom and understanding offers an opportunity to help us learn from the mistakes of the past and emboldens us to mirror powerful actions that our Quaker ancestors took in response to the issues of their time. We also have an opportunity to share those gifts beyond the Religious Society. This can be through advocacy campaigns on issues that Quakers and others



We can provide a clear flowing stream for people from all walks of life to bathe in together...

care about, lobbying those in service of the public to make tangible and lasting change, and in Britain in particular, working with Quaker Members of Parliament to shape policy that furthers our testimonies to peace and truth. We could be providing toolkits to individual Friends which would give them the skills to effectively lobby their elected representatives.

Quakers are known for living and working with integrity, which enables us to provide non-partisan safe-spaces for dialogue and listening. From these spaces for gathering, we may effectively speak truth to power in love, and take action from a source of Spirit-led, grounded, and discerned purpose. How can we offer our experience of seeking truth in an era of disinformation? As a faith body, we are small in number but we enjoy a trusted and therefore impactful voice on the issues we speak upon.

We can provide a clear flowing stream for people from all walks of life to bathe in together, share in its healing properties, and wash away the ills of the world.

Essential to the building of a more peaceful home is solidarity and fellowship among all peoples, but particularly those that share our human values as represented in our Quaker testimonies. Interfaith networks and coalitions can add power to peace work, broaden the scope for change, and instill a spiritual grounding that engages across a diverse range of theologies to reach people beyond ourselves. We hope that in times where civil society, peace workers, and activists are under increasing pressure, that we might serve as spiritual stewards of a movement so deeply ingrained in our collective past, present, and future. We heard ministry about the formation of gospel.

Jesus entered the desert for 40 days and 40 nights to fast, pray, and reflect. During this time, he resisted temptation, and came back to spread the Gospel.

How might we retreat, reflect, and return to the world with love in our hearts and peace on our lips?

We know from our experience that each of us has a direct and unique relationship with the Divine. Expanding our chaplaincy and fellowship work into communities, and beyond prisons, hospitals, and universities, can help that message reach those it needs to and provide a spiritual home for those looking for one.

It is important that the world knows that our work is Quaker work. We should communicate that work done by Quaker organisations is done by following the leadings of the Spirit. When we do work as individuals, we feel we ought to tell the world that we are not just doing it because we care or because we have relevant skills. We need to be persistent in saying 'I am a Quaker and this is my ministry.' When we do, we stand together as a faith community, with a bold and united voice, and we seek to honour the Quakers who came before us. We are summoned by the Spirit to memorialise their work in ours and pave the way for a new generation to confidently say 'I am a Quaker and this is why.'

We forward this minute to the Agenda Planning Committee of Britain Yearly Meeting and Quaker Voluntary Action Trustees. We ask Quaker Voluntary Action staff to publish this minute.

Kit King *Matthew Bittle*

Kit King QVA Coordinator

Matthew Bittle QVA Trustee

QUERIES: HOW CAN I SUPPORT QUAKER PEACE WORK?

We invite you to use these queries for individual and group reflection on The Svartbäcken Summons. We hope they inspire fresh ideas, insight and action within your Meeting or other Quaker group.

We'd love to hear what comes out of your group's work with these queries, so please send your notes, ideas, artwork, or reflections to us by email: contribute@qva.org.uk

- How can I create opportunities for inter-generational / all-age sharing and action for peace in my Quaker communities, and beyond? How do I share my wisdom and experiences with others? How do I encourage others to share wisdom with me?
- What resources do I need to feel confident contacting my elected representatives about peace work? Does our local Quaker community engage with elected representatives about issues we care about?
- How can I as an individual, or my meeting, take time out to refresh and resource ourselves to 'return to the world with love in our hearts and peace on our lips'?

- Does my Meeting or other Quaker group feel like a 'non-partisan safe-spaces for dialogue and listening'? What would help it feel so? If my Meeting has a Meeting House, do we offer it as a non-partisan, safe space for dialogue and listening within our Quaker communities and for others?
- How do I engage with Quaker campaigning? How does my meeting support Quaker campaigning locally through activists in our area? Do we provide enough spiritual and practical support? How do me and my Quaker community support the national level campaigning of the Yearly Meeting?
- How can our Quaker community support chaplains? Am I called to chaplaincy in a prison, hospital, or university? Are there avenues for chaplaincy beyond prisons, hospitals, and universities?
- How comfortable am I saying 'I am a Quaker and this is why' or 'I am doing this work because I am a Quaker'? What would help me feel confident saying those statements?



DIARY DATES 2026

More dates are available on the website: fwccemes.org/calendar. Please send items for inclusion in the diary to michael@fwccemes.org.

Woodbrooke & EMES offer several weekly online Meetings for Worship. Please check the Woodbrooke website for the latest information: woodbrooke.org.uk/worship

EMES NOW RUNS REGULAR ONLINE EVENTS

PEACE & SERVICE CONSULTATION

Monthly gatherings for people involved in peace and service work are held on the second Thursday of each month. For more details contact julia@fwccemes.org.

EMES YOUTHGROUP

Monthly gatherings for young people aged 14-18. More details: fwccemes.org/youthgroup. Contact michael@fwccemes.org for more information.

We also hold monthly gatherings for EMES Representatives and Roleholders in the first week of each month. In January, May and September we run online gatherings for International Members in the Section. Contact michael@fwccemes.org for more information about these events.

16-18 October 2026

**Peace and Service
Network Annual Meeting**
Brussels, Belgium and online

23-26 October

France YM
Carcassonne

1 November

Denmark YM
Copenhagen

6-8 November

All Poland Gathering
Gdansk



SUBSCRIPTIONS

Among Friends is available free of charge at: fwccemes.org

To receive a copy by post please contact us at the EMES office.

There is no set subscription fee for Among Friends. We depend on voluntary subscriptions. And we hope those who are able to pay will consider an annual donation of around €25/£22.

If you wish to make a bank transfer, please use the following details.

Euro account

For transfers or standing orders in Euros please use these account details:

Institution name: Wise
Account Name: FWCC-Europe & Middle East Section
IBAN: BE33 9672 0215 6046
SWIFT/BIC: TRWIBEB1XXX

Sterling account

Bank name: CAF Bank
Bank address: 25 Kings Hill Avenue, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent. ME19 4JQ UK
Account Name: FWCC EMES
IBAN: GB73CAF840524000025578
SWIFT/BIC: CAFGBB21XXX
Account Number: 00025578
Sort Code: 40-52-40

For holders of UK bank accounts please send cheques or CAF vouchers in GBP to the EMES office or directly to CAF Bank using the account number and sort code above. Scottish Charity number: SC 036528

Among Friends 167 Deadline
1 December 2026