

2008 Quaker Youth Pilgrimage

To Friends everywhere,

We are rising up like a phoenix from a fire. So brothers and sisters spread your wings and fly higher.

The 2008 Quaker Youth Pilgrimage combined 25 youth and 4 adults, representing 7 different countries, traveling around the United Kingdom and Ireland.

As we reflect on our month long adventure, we continually seek to delve into our experience by using questions to explore ourselves, this community of pilgrims, and this area of the world. This pilgrimage's theme was a journey through conflict to peace. On every level we have started our journey with dialogue and with cultivating an awareness of listening. This consciousness and intent has guided us as we examine how world, communal, and personal conflict has changed us.

Beginning our time in 1652 country, we were impressed with the accounts of early Quakers' committed faith in the face of trials and tribulations. We held Meeting in the same space where early Quakers worshipped despite the threat of harassment and imprisonment for living their convictions. Such stories provided incentive and a powerful backdrop for our own testing of our faith and convictions.

We moved to Northern Ireland and began to learn about the historical and current political situation. Our consciousness of early Quakers provided a foundation with which to approach the Troubles with empathy and recognize the truth in the struggle of people to maintain their convictions of faith in the face of violence and politics. Through the efforts of Quakers to create a safe place for people to meet, we were again reminded of the importance of dialogue.

As we began this pilgrimage, some of us faced internal conflict as we questioned our spirituality and identity as Quakers. In gathering together, we were able to explore our own doubts and ideas in a community. While building connections with each other we dipped our toes in the water, testing the level of trust in the community. Individuals were struggling to find truth and wanted a supportive community and a safe place to express themselves. As our shared experiences deepened we grew bolder with our experiments. We were more willing to let ourselves go, put ourselves out there, and trust that people would catch us. This transformed the community into a family who would strive together towards truth and deeper exploration. We cultivated an awareness of listening to each other and striking a balance of holding one's own center yet not overbearing another's perspective.

With the miracles and jives of all our time together we felt God's presence working and moving within the group. Through our dialogues we have created a vibrant and invigorated community. We part ways, in love and ready to continue.