Living our Peace Testimony gathering - 13th June 2026

Background

Northern Friends Peace Board was established with the remit 'to advise and encourage Friends in the north, and through them their fellow citizens, in the active promotion of peace in all its height and breadth'. Our role since that foundation in 1913 has thus been one of arranging work that seeks to equip Quakers in their consideration and action in relation to the Quaker peace testimony. Particular challenges have always arisen when there has been a dramatic increase in armed violence, as Friends grapple with the implications of such incidents.

Following the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022, and the devastating violence following the trigger of 7 October 2023, Friends within NFPB and beyond have used different opportunities to share responses; in our meetings and other events and in our publication *'Responses to War – Some Contemporary Quaker Reflections'.* Throughout this process, we also identified the need to bring a larger group of Friends together, to help build the friendships and connections that are such a key part of our lives as a faith community with a concern for peace, and to provide space for creative discernment together.

In September 2025 a working group was set up, consisting of the Coordinator, with NFPB members Robin Bowles, Sylvia Boyes and Till Geiger, along with Jenny Sergeant of Central Yorkshire AM. That group met online twice in 2025 and then in person (twice) and online (three times) up to May 2026. We planned and publicised a gathering to take place at Friargate Meeting House in York on 13th June 2026 with the following description:

> *"We have been and are living at a time that presents many challenges. This gathering will be an opportunity to reflect, learn, inspire and support one another, focusing on what our testimony for peace means in the world today. We shall have times of prepared input and workshops, as well as more open opportunities for discussion, exploration and connection on themes that emerge on the day."*

Slightly over 70 Friends attended on the day, coming from across the NFPB area.

The programme consisted of a morning session with opening worship, followed by a series of introductory reflections. These reflections came from Friends involved in peace action and thinking from the perspectives of supporting the transformation of personal conflicts, community peacebuilding, work on climate issues as a peace concern, and international armed conflict. Morning and afternoon sessions included periods of worship and consideration the theme by participants, and in the afternoon there was a combination of pre-planned workshops and themes discerned on the day as a result of the morning's considerations, along with craft (origami crane-making) and visioning workshops

During the day there were stalls, selling craft goods (to raise money for NFPB) and for distributing a variety of peace materials. Live music and local catering were bought in to create a relaxed atmosphere, and Friends were able to use the lunch time for networking and connections.

Text and notes of input into the morning session

The Context - *Philip Austin*

When NFPB was set up in 1913, just over 113 years ago at this meeting house, we were given the remit to 'advise and encourage Friends in the North – and through them their fellow Christians and citizens generally - in the active promotion of peace in all its height and breadth'. And so we have continued over those years. I'm not going to give a potted history of NFPB today, but do want to acknowledge the vision, commitment and active hope, expressed in the lives and actions of so many Friends over that time. And it's been a period of time with many very significant challenges, one of which we seem to be in the midst of currently.
On the outbreak of war in 1914, my predecessor, Robert Long, wrote a piece headed 'What shall we do?' The question is one we ask ourselves throughout our lives, challenged and inspired by Quakers and others who have both come before us as well as by those around us, in our Quaker Meetings and in the wider community today. This gathering today is in place of one of our normal four meetings of NFPB members that take place each year, as we wanted to engage a wider group of Friends in hearing one another's responses to those questions.

Following the military action by Russia in Ukraine in 2022, and then the horrific increase in war and violence in the middle East, Friends have wrestled with difficult questions about how to respond to an aggressor, how and who to speak out, what a just peace can and must include, what difference can we make, individually and as part of a wider community, to promoting peace in these and other very challenging contexts. There are no simple answers, but we need to sit with the questions, recognising our many diverse and strengths and gifts, but also acknowledging our vulnerabilities.

We cannot and should not expect to be mistresses and masters of destiny. But we do, as our advices remind us, have responsibilities as citizens to be active and to be alert to the roots of unrest and fear. What then can we do?

Friends this morning are reflecting on this from different perspectives, from personal responses to conflict in our own lives and with those around us, to the global context of environmental constraints and growing militarisation, and the very pressing issues of responding to community and political tensions and seeking and building peace pathways in that local and national context.

Over the past year at our NFPB meetings we have had some speakers – a number of professors, as it happens - who give some pointers. Last September when we met here, Rachel Julian talked about her research in the many ways in which community peace building happens around the world, recognising that there are far more people involved in that than in the military. In September in Liverpool, Quaker Diana Jeater, talked about the significance of indigenous and spiritual practices that can inform compassionate and just peace-making. And then in February in Darlington, on the morning of the Israeli and US attacks on Iran, Paul Rogers gave the long view, recognising the geopolitical, planetary and economic factors that shape the unjust and unpeaceful relationships in the world, and the large systemic changes needed.

Through our work with Rethinking Security, we work with others to promote different ways forward in terms of political priorities shaping mainstream thinking and action around security. In

our earlier work on Building Peace in Diverse Britain, we brought together Friends and others to learn about the many routes to community peace-building, work which is now being taken forward by Quakers in Britain through their small team supporting Friends and others in community peacebuilding and thinking. And in our workshops with Friends over the years, we have explored what peace means for Friends in their Meetings, rich in their understanding of the links between planet care and peace, but also grappling at times with knotty conflicts locally. Another local initiative we have supported is the Brighouse West Yorkshire area meeting 'Swords into Ploughshares' project, which is about to send out an appeal for funding to take their work on changing the narrative – leaflets about this are on our stall in the Penn Room.

And in our NFPB meetings, we hear from our members about the ongoing witness and action they and others are taking – from local peace-education initiatives, to work with people seeking sanctuary, interfaith work, witness at military bases and arms fairs, action on the right to protest, advocacy for international nuclear disarmament and more.

What, then, shall we do in living our peace testimony?

Alistair Heslop

Summary: We were reminded that peace is not the absence of conflict but about dealing with conflict in a peaceable way. Drawing on earlier life experiences, Alistair reflected on the need we all have to feel safe and to be safe, and the fact that we might try to avoid tension. He also acknowledged that there are different parts of us that we draw on in how we respond to conflict, and that these may not all be in harmony. Alistair spoke of learning from a Friend who, faced with great anger and upset in a Meeting, was able to give time to listen, to ask questions, to give space for silence. It is important to recognise the needs of all those in the room. We were encouraged to reflect on areas of tension and conflict, and in considering how to engage with this peacefully, being aware where we each are at the moment.

Margaret Calvert

Summary: Reflecting on childhood experiences of poverty in the Welsh valleys, Margaret talked about a household that valued books and music, but in which there was also fear. Anger was prevalent but emotions were not often expressed, being hidden by silence but also at times manifested in physical punishment. There was a tension between love on the one hand, and emotional and material insecurity. Alongside this, parents sought out and supported those who were particularly vulnerable in society. Margaret spoke of recognising something beyond what institutional religion could provide, and finds great joy in learning from and about other people. She encouraged us to be real in different settings, recognising other's sorrows and hurts and trying to understand other perspectives and experiences.

Bernie Jordan

Summary: Reflecting on the environmental crisis and the polycrisis, Bernie talked about finding hope in seeing meadows that are part of flood defences. But there is a tension, as we face the truth, knowing that things are not going well. There is a fear about talking of the future, but an alternative is active hope: Clover Hogan talks about the need to find what is in our hearts and abilities in order to respond to the current difficulties. Bernie attended last autumn's Quaker Earth-Care gathering, bringing people together with different approaches and responses, finding it difficult at times to reach a clear understanding or come up with a uniting big plan.

We were encouraged to recognise the value of simplicity in how we live on this planet – letting go and doing less can be key to how we live our testimony. We sometimes need to do less, and be less forceful, to stop and think about where we want to be and what we are leaving behind. The People's Emergency Briefing film is being shown around the country and aims to stimulate action by addressing the truth. We need people who are informed and able to help us address the problems, but should be wary of pushing the problem onto people who do not have agency to act on it.

Telling Truth

'We are facing an unprecedented global emergency'
I'm thinking big, see.
Start with 'We' that's 7.7 billion; we're big, real big.
I'm just me-
Little me, bound up with We,
part and parcel of emergency.

Life on Earth is in crisis;
Cry sister, cry brother,
Cry the truth.
Heads hide but sand holds no shame.

Agreement at last,
Truth-loaded fault and blame.
Our making is breaking
Abrupt braking, emergency stop.

HALT in the midst of mass
extinction making.

Bernie Jordan 12 8 19

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Word play

Action: Act I on.

Till Geiger

Friends, what can I possibly say about the international situation? About the existential crisis enveloping our world? About the threats to national security? About the unquestioned belief that yet more militarisation will make us more secure?

Would what I say matter when everything seems to change with the latest pronouncement from one of the new type of warlord whose power arises from their capture of states and their militaries enabling them to engage in their personal massive grift? What to say in a world in which public discourse is dominated by endless lies drowning out the truth?

How to respond to a world in which governments seem incapable to implement policies for their electorates? And this supposed ungovernability allows populists to blame immigrants or some disadvantaged for all our social woes certainly in this country but almost everywhere in the world?

So what might I say as a Quaker? What does love demand of us in this moment?

We must acknowledge some hard truths and cling to the hope that our activism can contribute to the repair our world.

We all know these hard truths but need to speak them and speak up for them whenever we can.

To quote Bayard Rustin: “We are one - and if we do not know it we will find out the hard way.”

As humans, we know this - most recently since the pandemic; we can achieve incredible things when we embrace this truth and cooperate. Yet we seem to ignore this truth all the time and allow ourselves to be divided. Accepting this truth means acting in a way that puts humans and every living organism at the heart of all our actions.

However, this will mean that we abandon our unsustainable way of life. This will be particularly hard for all of us who are among the top 20% of the world’s richest persons and live in the Global North which is responsible for more than 92% of the world’s excess global carbon emissions. This is not ecologically sustainable - and we are polluting not just our environment but that of the whole world. We need to take responsibility for our continuous damage to our planet and our biosphere. As vulnerable as we as individuals can feel, we need to accept the uncomfortable truth that humans as a species account for 30% of all mammals on earth and our domesticated animals for another 66%. But we depend on the earth to live and therefore our ongoing damage negatively impacts all humans and our continued existence.

There is a perplexing paradox here: Humans are exceptionally successful because of our ability to cooperate, and yet we are constantly being told that cooperation will not work and inevitably hurt our self interest and indeed national interests.

We know this experientially - we live and rely on our communities. The realisation of our global interdependence led to the setting up of the United Nations and other international organisations in the immediate post-World War 2 period. Quakers played an important part in the creation of these international organisations securing a place for non-governmental voices in international institutions like the United Nations.

At this moment, we should speak up for international cooperation and organisations, because we can only solve global and regional problems together. International cooperation enhances the ability of national governments to improve the lives of their citizens.

We must speak up for us to meet our commitments to foreign aid budgets. By helping farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa to grow food for his family and improve prospects for their children will reduce local conflicts and migration to Western Europe. Paying for the education of girls in the global South will contribute to better lives for our fellow humans and therefore for us. Better education and public health provision will not only improve the lives of those living in the Global South, it will also help us to combat global health emergencies like the current Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo. To pay for increased foreign aid, we will have to increase taxes on ourselves, but we may also want to do this to improve our own public services and human security here in Britain.

Treating every human like they are a part of our community not just here in Britain but on a global basis will hopefully create the basis for real international cooperation to meet the existential global challenges we all face. Putting human security and rights at the centre of all our policies requires a reorientation of government policy here and abroad. To achieve true human security in more places, we need to insist that human rights and dignity are upheld everywhere. And all this necessitates international cooperation, international law, universal human rights and international courts.

But let's be honest, international cooperation will be messy and involve many unpalatable compromises and many concessions and sacrifices like increased taxes and reduced personal consumption which entails excessive carbon emissions. This will not be popular.

What gives me hope in this moment when there are 61 state-based armed conflicts in the world ... more conflicts then at any time since 1945? At a time, when a small group of new state-based warlords seem to be hell-bent on destroying our existing international system, are ignoring international law and abusing the human rights of many including members of their own communities.

I find hope in the fact that the United Nations exists, that there is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent extensions of human rights; our imperfect system of international law which prohibits the unprovoked attack of another state or the mistreatment of populations in occupied territories. Time for us to call out all breaches of international law and violations of human rights regardless who commits them.

Let's remain courageous in speaking up for our peace testimony and insist on what we know is right for our global community.

In ministry following the introductions, a Friend talked about the value of recognising the links between personal to global peace as a cycle rather than a hierarchy, giving the example of the experiences of violence by children in Gaza being a result of international politics and economics. Friends spoke about the importance of listening, questioning, curiosity and silence in creating spaces for peace. Where is hope? It is not in TV screens but is rooted in love, of family, of community and of the environment. We heard an acknowledgment of contradictions, recognising the need for love but also for information, to give account for what we do and to have the courage

to act. A friend was thankful for the encouragement, of being pushed along. We need, however, to listen to ourselves in order to find out about how we can act and to work as humans, finding out how and why people believe and act on what they belief, acknowledging history. We were encouraged to see active hope as the opposite of fear and to be guided by a recognition that, as Bayard Rustin said, 'we are one'.

At the conclusion of the morning session, participants were invited to write down some key themes or points arising for them during and / or that they might wish to explore further. A word cloud that captures some of these is given below. These, along with ministry and responses in the main morning session, were drawn on in setting up discussion spaces in the afternoon.

Word-cloud from key words written by Friends at the end of the morning session



Closing minute

Around 70 Friends have gathered at Friargate Meeting House in York for a day of reflection, connection and discussion on the theme of Living our Peace Testimony.

Meeting at a time of significant turmoil and violent conflict in the world, we started our day with contributions focusing on different aspects of peace, from individual responses to conflict in our own lives to the global situation.

We have been encouraged through these to consider the challenges as well as the need for acts of hope and ways of contributing to peace. 'Let us then try what love will do'.

Reflecting and talking together as a gathered group and in smaller discussions and workshops we have explored a number of concerns and issues, including:

- Speaking our truths

- Tensions and dilemmas

- Peace and young people

- Peace and planet-care

- Israel and Palestine

- Violent conflicts in the world today

- Sharing and working towards vision of the republic of heaven on earth

- Paper-crane workshop

We have heard from Friends about their responses in these different settings.
Insights shared have included the importance of developing an awareness of balance in our own lives and our inner peace and working outwards from there. One of our strengths is simplicity. We have been reminded that the opposite of fear is hope.

We acknowledge the significant demands on us and the wider community in seeking and building peace in these current times. As we close our meeting we hold in the light Friends and others across the world who are striving for peace in all aspects of life. We take courage and hope from being part of this web of connections and of positive and committed action.

Links to some additional resources:

- Pacifism and the Peace Testimony Today – latest issue of *Friends Journal* https://www.friendsjournal.org/issue-category/2026/pacifism-and-the-peace-testimony-today/
- 25 years after 9/11, a new vision for peace – piece from American Friends Service Committee https://afsc.org/news/25-years-after-911-new-vision-peace
- NFPB page with Peace Testimony resources https://nfpb.org.uk/about/quaker-approaches-to-peace/peacetestimony/
- BYM booklet on the Peace Testimony: https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/quakers-and-the-peace-testimony
- *What Shall We Do?* – text of document published by NFPB Secetary Robert Long, August 1914 https://nfpb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/what_shall_we_do.pdf

(see next page for a selection of photos – more to be added to our website at https://nfpb.org.uk/lopt2026/)
















Northern Friends Peace Board
Peace work for and with Quakers in the North of Britain



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- The NFPB working group, trustees and members who supported the day in different ways

- Alistair Heslop, Margaret Calvert, Bernie Jordan and Till Geiger for their spoken contributions

- The staff at Friargate Meeting House who looked after us so well

- Jim Ledgwidge and Hazel Bone for their music

- Elspeth Moore for her photography

- Hannah Brock Womack for the origami paper crane workshop

- Pontefract Friends for the craft stall

- All those Friends who attended, participated and supported the event

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