Pathways to Peace at Svartbäcken

Epistle from a Quaker Voluntary Action Working Retreat at Svartbäcken, Sweden, 6–12 July 2026

To all Friends everywhere,

We are 21 participants from Great Britain, Sweden and Germany who gathered for a Quaker Voluntary Action Working Retreat at Svartbäcken, a Quaker centre north of Stockholm from 6-12 July 2026. We came together several times each day in the stillness of Quaker worship, forming a community of people between 22 and 84 years of age. Our time was split between doing voluntary work and exploring the theme 'Pathways to Peace'. The Working Retreat was led by our Co-Facilitators, Cariad Astles and Kit King, and we were greatly supported by Julia and Mats Ryberg, co-owners of Svartbäcken.

We spent several hours each day working in teams carrying out voluntary service for Svartbäcken. This included weeding, shovelling gravel, cleaning moss from the roofs, clearing gutters, reconstructing a flight of wooden steps, scraping and painting outside walls, sanding down and oiling garden tables. We also served each other by upkeeping the spaces we shared and taking it in turns to prepare meals for one another.

We have spent time exploring QVA's theme for this year, "Pathways to Peace". Our Co-Facilitators, Cariad Astles and Kit King, led us through sessions in which we reflected on pathways to peace at local, national, and international levels. We have explored the theme pack - a resource pack with images, poetry, quotes from holy texts, and more - and shared our findings with each other. We have asked ourselves what we, as Quakers, can do to build peace and take on the issues of our time. During our final session, we agreed The Svartbäcken Summons, a minute which is attached to this epistle.

We were joined by Julia and Mats Ryberg who spoke passionately about the history of Svartbäcken, and about the extraordinary friendship and ministry of Julia and her parrot, Arturo. Julia, Mats, and Arturo joined us in worship one evening and shared traditional Swedish folk music, and they joined us, along with their son Gustav, for a barbecue on the last night. One Friend said that at Svartbäcken "there is prayer sown into the walls".

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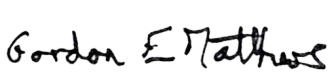
On Thursday, QVA trustees, who were among the participants in the Working Retreat, met each other face-to-face for the first time since the pandemic. The retreat served as a good opportunity to get to know each other as board members and friends, to share ideas informally, and to gather in a more formal meeting of trustees together with the staff of QVA.

Many of us have followed the short pathway down to the lake. Some have taken the opportunity to go for a swim, some chose just to paddle in the water, and one was moved to dance on the pontoon at the edge of the lake. As he was dancing, his mobile phone jumped out of his pocket and into the lake. Another participant dived down to retrieve it the following afternoon and there was great jubilation when the phone was switched on and, contrary to expectations, was working again. This experience displayed the camaraderie of the group and the miracles that happen at Svartbäcken.

We are thankful for the experience of living and working together in a community which has been truly gathered, in spite of our diversity in terms of age and because of how we embraced it. We shared much joy and laughter, including during social evenings of Forum Theatre, arts and crafts, and a games evening.

According to a poster created during one of our earlier sessions: “When we think of peace, we see the unfolding story of a gathered community … unfolding joy”. This is the life that we have experienced this week.

Signed, in and on behalf of the community,



Gordon Matthews, QVA Co-Clerk

Sue Glover Frykman, QVA Co-Clerk