

September 2018 AWPS Gathering Epistle

Friends from the Philippines, India, South Korea, Hong Kong, United Kingdom, United States, Aotearoa-New Zealand and Australia. Friends from Japan were unable to attend because of extreme weather but were very much with us in spirit.

Dear Friends,

Greetings to Friends everywhere from a warm hilltop with magnificent views in Hong Kong.

Between the 12th and 16th September 2018, thirty-five Friends from the Section of the Asia West Pacific Region gathered on Cheung Chau Island, Hong Kong.

The group came together as a community, mindful of the great diversity of the Section and keen to explore what it means to be a Quaker in this part of the world (the theme of the gathering). The gathered group heard warm messages from Quakers across the region and beyond as these absent Friends expressed goodwill for the upcoming days of discussion and fellowship.

The focus on the first morning was the Quaker Testimonies with initial addresses setting out the philosophical and historical events which led to their establishment. Friends shared their experiences of the Quaker Testimonies, namely: Simplicity, Truth, Equality and Peace (STEP), and Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality and Sustainability. (SPICES).

The testimonies guide the work of Friends worldwide – they encapsulate the unique perspective that Friends bring to issues and concerns. We shared how the testimonies are influencing our involvement in social action.

Friends were united in agreeing that Quakers 'Live the Message' and what is important is to return, through example, to the fundamentals of life and living. We found the sharing inspiring and despite the group's diversity and varying cultural backgrounds, there emerged a common understanding, unique to Friends.

The importance of taking one's time to answer became a powerful message as Friends reflected on giving time for the emotions to subside before speaking out.

Flute and guitar playing as well as singing offered us a renewed understanding of the universality of music and was much appreciated.

During the Business Meeting, there developed the strong awareness that for the Asia West Pacific Section (AWPS) to serve the needs and priorities of the region there is much to be done. But it was agreed that this is time very well spent because AWPS enables Meetings throughout the region to contribute to the regional and global witness of Quakers. During business meetings we agreed processes to strengthen the section and put it on a firm foundation, both organisationally and financially.

Taking effective and just action on both mitigation and adaptation to climate change is a key issue. We greatly appreciated and benefited from having the FWCC Sustainability

Communications Officer with us. It helped us deeply consider climate change and the Quaker contribution to the urgent responses at local, regional and global level that are required.

The Quaker concern for justice and fairness to all brings an invaluable perspective to action. Climate change is a double injustice: it has been caused by actions that have benefited the affluent; while its adverse impacts fall most heavily on the poor and disadvantaged. A just response must recognise this.

While responding to climate change is challenging there are messages from the heart of the Quaker testimonies on simplicity, community and equality that speak to the changes required. Further, we can be joyful about making change as it supplies reason and opportunity to embrace and promote greater community engagement.

One Friend shared his settling in phrase *wait, listen, trust and abide*; this provided a fitting introduction to a deep and very personal session on Quaker relationships, their strengths and value. We arrived as a disparate group and very quickly developed a kindred spirit and felt the love deep down and all around. To listen to another person's soul in a condition of disclosure and discovery may be the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another. (Douglas Steere)

The gathering had an unexpected extended period of fun and fellowship as we waited for a super typhoon to pass through and release us from our island home.

Ronald Titus
AWPS Clerk

Salesian Retreat Centre
Cheng Chau
Hong Kong
16 September 2018

“We commit to...radically changing the way of living – let us do so out of joy, celebration, reverence and a deep love of life.” – Australian Friends Statement on Earthcare, 2008.