

Epistle of the Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand - Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri 2020

To Friends everywhere

Greetings in love and peace from Friends of the Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand. Because of restrictions during the current pandemic we were, sadly, unable to gather face to face this year. Limited by COVID19 restrictions to our homes, we have met online in our Monthly Meetings to consider our business, and have sought to find unity in responses. We also met online for a time of worship on what would have been the opening evening of Yearly Meeting. In these extraordinary times we send you this epistle, to reflect how the Spirit has been moving among us over the last year and at this time.

For us, for our country, and for the world, it has been a time of change, fear and loss. We feel particularly for all those who mourn, and those who suffer from the direct effects of the pandemic and from the impact of the various measures taken to control it. Many of those who are worst affected, often losing their livelihood, are those who were already suffering from the inequality of political and economic systems, globally and nationally, and from the impact of climate change. This is true of Friends in many places. Can we learn from the disruption we have experienced, and take the opportunity for all of society to rethink how we care for others and the earth? How can we, as Friends, offer witness and service to build a better future?

Peace, in its widest sense, is a calling for all Friends. We know we can do more, but are grateful that our Quaker Peace and Service Aotearoa New Zealand Committee contributes to what is being done with Quaker involvement here and in many other countries. Monthly Meetings, Worship Groups and individual Friends engage in their own actions and donations. At a season when our nation remembers the death and suffering caused in war, we renew our stand against war's cruelty and destructiveness.

Faithful continuity of worship is at the heart of our life. We are glad to see the development of newer Worship Groups, and some growth of numbers in others. National and local learning events sow seeds of spiritual growth, as do the various ways in which Friends prepare their own hearts and minds and enrich their spiritual life. Children's Meetings have been growing in number, and we seek to develop them and enhance their life. A new Quaker website has been developed through skilled, perceptive and demanding work, to reach out to the public, and to connect us in unity. We give thanks for all forms of service, visible and invisible. "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord" (I *Corinthians* 12.4).

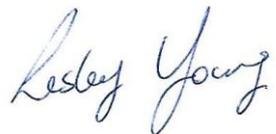
The many faiths in this country are finding greater unity and understanding since the murderous shootings inflicted a year ago on worshippers in two mosques in Christchurch. Friends responded by reaching out to local Muslim communities, taking part in vigils, and offering other support. Locally we are linking with various ethnic and faith groups, and becoming involved in interfaith and cultural activities, hoping to explore and put aside our (often unconscious) prejudices.

Young people and children have inspired our country in their work and heartfelt advocacy for effective response to the climate emergency; many of our young ones are involved. Yearly Meeting, its committees and Meetings, are donating to some of this work. Our response as a body is imperfect; we are moving to vegetarian food at events, have reduced air travel, have

taken action locally, and have made representations to Government and public bodies, including on how militarism damages the climate. The Quaker Settlement at Whanganui applies principles of sustainability and permaculture to its land and gardens. But, like the questioner of Jesus, we still ask, "What do I lack?" (*Matthew* 19.20). Profound consideration continues of what we are called to do. We are reminded that all action on this concern requires a positive regard for all, and a stand for truth and integrity.

Dear Friends, we pray that in these difficult times you may be protected and guided, and may live faithfully in mutual love. We recall the words sent by Philadelphia Friends in 1683 across the Atlantic to Britain: "And though the Lord has been pleased to remove us far away from you, as to the other end of the earth, yet are we present with you, your exercises are ours; our hearts are dissolved in the remembrance of you, dear brethren and sisters in this heavenly love." (*Christian Faith and Practice* 677, London (now Britain) Yearly Meeting, 1959)

In love and peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lesley Young". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and personal.

Lesley Young
Clerk