

Epistle of the Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri

Held at the Quaker Settlement, Whanganui, 17 – 20 May 2019

Greetings to Friends everywhere,

The Clerk of the Whanganui Monthly Meeting welcomed Friends and Attenders from all 9 Aotearoa Monthly Meetings to the Quaker Settlement for the 2019 Yearly Meeting (YM). In doing so she welcomed us onto land in the rohe (territory, homeland) of Te Ati Haunui a Paparangi, the iwi (tribe) of the Whanganui River.

This is the centenary of the purchase of the land for Friends School which operated on this site until 1969. Eleven past pupils were present.

The preparation day prior assisted those attending to come to Yearly Meeting with hearts and minds prepared.

The opening session set the tone for the Meeting with greetings read from Friends in our Asia West Pacific region, our neighbours in Australia, and the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC). These messages emphasized our close connections with the world-wide community of Friends, our collective concern for the healing of the world, and for equality. Concerns to which Quakers, by working together, can bring our unique perspective.

Prejudice and unfairness has directly affected our Yearly Meeting: for the second consecutive year the Young Friend from India nominated by her Yearly Meeting to attend was unable to because she was young and lacked financial assets. As such, New Zealand authorities viewed her as an over-stayer risk and denied her a visa.

Moved by Christchurch Friends' recounting of the outpouring of love in the wake of the Mosque shootings, we were inspired by one of our number (a Muslim Attender) who spoke refreshingly of the limited utility of group action by Quakers but reminded us that those who are not our siblings in faith are our siblings in humanity: there is always value in engaging with individuals.

The challenges we face with shrinking numbers but the desire to do many things were brought into sharp focus. Do we do less? Stream-line our processes? Seek to expand our membership? Or all three? The spirit is willing, but our human resources are stretched and we need to discern the essential things and concentrate on them.

We welcomed Jacque Schultze, our Australia Yearly Meeting guest, and heard that Australia was in a period of change responding to similar pressures and concerns that we face. It was gratifying to discover we are not alone, and we hope we can learn from shared experience. We look forward to hearing whether their decision to include Junior Young Friends in Yearly Meeting planning will bear fruit in attracting and retaining these young people.

The website team demonstrated the new Aotearoa New Zealand Quaker website. We applaud the enormous task the team have so successfully executed. When the website is

launched, not only will we have an interactive site for our Quaker whanau (family), we will also have a valuable outreach tool.

The work of FWCC Asia West Pacific Section (AWPS) was presented by the Section Secretary showing the range of activities undertaken. We heard about the value and importance of engagement across the Section and with the world-wide community of Friends. This connectedness both enables us to be challenged by and learn from each other and provides support for us as we seek to bring a Quaker perspective and take effective action both locally and internationally on important global concerns. The Section is making ever-increasing use of digital technology to ensure good communications and maintain connectedness in a sustainable and responsible way.

The dialogue with Terry Waite, which followed a recorded repeat of his Quaker Lecture delivered in Whanganui in February, left us invigorated by his life-long compassion for disadvantaged people and commitment to acting on his concerns. He is not one for 'limits to action', but acts wherever he sees injustice. His example is an inspiration to all of us.

We were both impressed and challenged by the Loxley Award recipient's presentation and the amazing work that the team is doing engaging young people on the climate emergency.

The climate emergency is a spiritual crisis for us and is exercising both our hearts and our minds. On the one hand we are concerned that in gathering and communicating locally, nationally, and internationally we enlarge our carbon footprint. On the other we wish to make our Quaker voice heard clearly and effectively at local, national and international decision-making forums.

We drink from wells we did not dig. We warm ourselves at fires we did not kindle. (Deuteronomy 6:11) In doing so we have a responsibility to take on the role of kaitiaki (guardians) for resources and leave the world a better place for those that follow.

Lesley Young, Clerk