

**Epistle from Yearly Meeting 2015, Queen's College, University of Melbourne,  
Melbourne, 3 – 10 January 2015**

To dear Friends everywhere

Life in the Light, our Summer School theme, means listening and acting in the breadth of our concerns. Building a gracious and resilient Quaker community that is inclusive and respectful of all its diversities holds us true to processes both new and historic. Life in the Light means looking imaginatively beyond our comfort zone.

To the Boonwurrung people of 1827 white people were visitors who didn't go away. In 2015 Quakers were welcomed to country with the hope of a peaceful future. The First Nations People tell us to listen respectfully, to build long-term relationships, to talk softly and listen well. We continue to look for new ways to internalise this advice, to look for God in every thing.

The brighter the light, the deeper the shadows.

Australian Quakers try to resist labels, divisions around belief and cultural practices. We are confronted by issues such as individualism, extreme political philosophies, environmental desecration, and unscrupulous investment. Living in the Light means taking on the darkneses of capitalism, war, climate change, isolation and racism. It means engaging with champions who have paved paths; we cut our own new tracks and prepare for new light from those who may have been 'the Other'.

In 1697 William Penn underscored our interconnectedness with all living beings around the world. We consider deeply ways to live sustainably, to share this information across our wide brown land and care for our environment with small wins and great efforts to still be made. We add Earthcare to our testimonies. Are we unstoppably moved towards caring for our planet?

We contemplate ways to make sustainable our peace testimony work, recognising this is one of our core beliefs, requiring new funding models to put our faith into action. Are we content to mainly support smaller individual projects or will new decision-making processes allow us to develop a stronger corporate witness? The Backhouse Lecture *This We Can Do: Quaker faith in action through the Alternatives to Violence Project* reminds us of our leadings towards peacemaking amongst Friends, First Nations People, refugees, prisoners and students.

We are juggling and struggling with the challenges of faith in action and the processes we use, encompassing dispersed and isolated Friends as well as being tender to our youth and their needs. How can we extend our corporate witness to these Friends, those in Asia West Pacific and the wider world of Friends?

Introducing an Elders role formally into Yearly Meeting sessions is grounding us in worshipful discernment. Will the trial of the new Yearly Meeting timing and exploring more equitable processes of distributed decision-making allow us to reaffirm our commitment to Quaker faith and practice? How do we live in community, building our relationships and growing the Truth in our Meetings?

Will use of technology allow us to be more inclusive?  
Are we developing creative ways to nurture ourselves?  
In what ways do we offer the Testimonies beyond our Society?  
What is the religious health of our meetings?

The answers to these questions must flow from our gratitude for the Light as we grow in Grace.

Julian Robertson

Presiding Clerk  
Australia Yearly Meeting 3<sup>rd</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> January 2015  
Queen's College, University of Melbourne

### **Epistle from Australian Young Friends Pre-YM15 Camp**

To Friends everywhere

From 27 December to 3 January Young Friends gathered at the beautiful Baldessin Press, an hour from Melbourne, in St Andrews. Tess Edwards and Lloyd Godman very generously offered us the use of their property for our gathering, for which we are deeply grateful. We felt spiritually nurtured by the space, as it was clear that much love went into its creation and care. We hope our efforts at watering their extensive gardens and plant sculptures has ensured their survival over this hot week of summer.

As we arrived, we had the opportunity to meet the Attenders of the Diamond Valley Worshipping Group as they concluded their monthly Meeting for Worship.

Although most of us didn't know each other at the beginning, by the end of the gathering, we had bonded over simple tasks such as sharing responsibilities for cooking and cleaning together. We also connected through enjoying a diverse range of music that formed the background soundtrack to meal preparation, in particular the extensive collection of jazz we found there. On excursions, crammed into 'Mighty Boy', the small car Tess and Lloyd generously lent us, through the discovery of a cassette tape of Tina Turner, we were prompted to ask ourselves what love has to do with it.

The Young Friends tradition of sharing tasks, knowledge and experience fostered learning valuable life skills such as how to pit an avocado, make omelettes and how to cook dahl, an essential skill in the up and coming life of a Young Friend. Other essential Young Friend skills we learnt were how to build community through fun and play, in the process learning new games. As St Andrews is a fire prone area, we had emergency fire plans in place, and our discussions brought out knowledge of the dangers bushfires pose and how one should respond.

We enjoyed both the nature—swimming in a local river and exploring our surrounds by foot—and also profited from immersing ourselves in local history and culture, by spending time in Melbourne's inner suburbs, roaming around the city visiting the National Gallery of Victoria, The State Library, Victoria Markets and the Botanic Gardens.

We deliberately left the week unscheduled to allow us to determine our daily activities by Spirit-led consensus; Young Friends make decisions mutually we are all responsible for everyone's well being.

During our Meetings for Worship for Business, we started the difficult process of discerning ways forward for our Young Friends community on matters of Child Protection, which will greatly impact our future. During a creative afternoon in the art studio, among other creations we made a Quakers for Peace banner that was later used in the Silent Vigil for Justice for First Nations Peoples in Melbourne.

Camp has been a wonderful experience for those who attended, providing the opportunity to form lasting and meaningful relationships that will sustain us spiritually as we go out into the wider Quaker community, not only acting in line with our beliefs, but endeavouring to live them.

A quote we found written up on the whiteboard upon our arrival at camp sums up well the connection we feel as Young Friends to each other, and is a fitting conclusion to our epistle:

'Mind that which is eternal, which gathers your hearts together up to the Lord, and lets you see that ye are written in one another's hearts.'

George Fox 1653

## **Epistle from Junior Young Friends YM15**

The 2015 Junior Young Friends (JYF) program was formed and organised by Andrew Bray, Kyrstie Crane, David Albrecht, Anna Wilkinson, Bruce Henry and Rosie Remmerswaal.\*

Although it was a large group of around 30 JYFs, as a whole we managed to create an inclusive and loving environment. Our week composed of Quaker workshops, creative tasks, meetings and outdoor activities. Yet, somehow, we still found plenty of time for lounging and bonding with friends of all ages.

After many meetings to organise various aspects of the JYF program, we were treated to workshops that lightened our spirits and gave us a chance to discuss our beliefs and mindsets. A creative twist was brought to tasks by Rosie, who helped us produce videos on our groups' interpretation of Quakerism. We were split into four groups and our final products became an entertaining conclusion and a way to reflect on our week.

Camp began with an opportunity to give back to the community of Gembrook Retreat by assisting with chores around the vast garden that is known as a place of healing. A variety of apple picking, gardening and wood chopping jobs resulted in a relaxing and rewarding afternoon, despite the heat. We refreshed ourselves with a dip in the pool that evening, readying ourselves for the coming days of indoor soccer, low ropes courses, and other fun pastimes.

We have our wonderfully open-minded leaders to thank for the hours of time we were given to do as we please. Chess, card games and hair braiding brought the group of all ages closer together because we could all take part. We took pleasure in the afternoons spent in the pool, and drying off on the volleyball court and trampolines. Then on our last night we stayed up until early in the morning playing The Fantasy Game and chatting.

It was the dessert for breakfast, the loom bands strewn across the floor, the interesting spotting on the low ropes course, and the light-hearted vibe which made the JYFs program 2015 memorable and fulfilling. Something as precious as this time could only be concluded with a dislocating high-five.

(Young Friends representative to YM15 from Aotearoa/New Zealand YM)

## **Children's Epistle YM15**

We enjoyed many things in our program this year:

- Going to the zoo, especially when it rained and we threw water all over each other
- Origami
- Making new friends and seeing old friends
- Having alone time
- Watching videos
- Making stories
- Playing Uno
- Playing with the wooden toys
- Circle dancing
- Playing with Clancy
- Falling into a huge puddle
- Yoga
- Having some time with the older kids
- Silence
- Making 'poppies for peace' and the WWI exhibition
- Eating food
- Making films
- Learning Japanese and Korean songs
- Ball games and Frisbee and rocket and paper planes
- Drawing
- Having peace and quiet.

We like spending time with the Junior Young Friends. We would like to do more of this next year.

We liked organising Meeting for Worship. Each year we bring in a new idea to share with the whole meeting. Everyone likes it because it's different.