



Australia Yearly Meeting 2017 Epistle to Friends everywhere

Ta Marra, open hands
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Greetings from Australia Yearly Meeting 2017 where we were welcomed to the beautiful lands of the Kurna people among the sand dunes at Adelaide Shores Beach in a moving dialogue between Kurna Elders and Friends.

We gathered from meetings across Australia and with overseas Friends; mid-winter sun gracing our days and a full moon our first night. Amid a 'community of cottages', our children, young people and adults engaged with each other and the ocean environment, deepening the impact of Earthcare and other like ministries over our week-long program, urging us to make spiritual connections with nature, with one another, and with local First Peoples; while jets overhead from the nearby flight path reminded us of the cost of carbon emissions.

During an all-age meeting for worship the children hosting it asked: 'How do we care for the earth and for people?' and many friends reflected on whether they were doing enough. One small boy ministered: *'I care for the bugs and other people'*. Later, Friends responded to a moving ministry of music by Junior Young Friends. We are deeply concerned at the impacts of climate change and recognise that business as usual is not an option.

Visual presentations by Friends in the Earthcare session on the theme of spirit of place were linked by the spiritual and emotional experience of connection with natural and green spaces. David Carline, elder of the Kooma/Gwamu nation, and his niece Cheryl Buchanan, Aboriginal rights activist and writer, in their Backhouse lecture deepened this idea of connection to country reminding us that for Australia's First Nations Peoples this goes back tens of thousands of years through their ancestors. David and Cheryl shared stories showing



how they have let their lives speak and are using their gifts in the service of their communities. The Earthcare committee also asked Friends 'If nature is a conversation, what is it saying?' Cheryl Buchanan urged us to: *'Speak to the land. Listen to it. It will heal you.'*

From their epistle, we learned Tanzanian Friends were encouraged to 'embrace the Eagle's life style, its strength, power, patience, vision, eyesight'. A vision of a powerful Australian bird emerged when Cheryl spoke of the confirmatory welcome to country David Carline received from emus running toward him when he travelled to Kooma/Gwamu country, and of the Emu songline going from there across to the Kimberly and down to South Australia.

YM began with gratitude on hearing that the United Nations treaty to ban nuclear weapons was adopted by 120 countries. However without Australia's signature, much is still to be done. From two winter schools came an afternoon of peace witness. Bearing messages in support of signing the treaty and explaining the health impacts of war, and a large banner with the words 'Honour the War Dead by Ending War', around sixty Quakers walked purposefully and prayerfully to the Adelaide War Memorial.

Australian Friends again felt connected to the wider Quaker community when American Friends' epistles told of their challenge in responding to white privilege and Ramallah Friends of their continued struggle in this their 50th year under military occupation. With a bag packed full of funeral notices representing the weekly heartache that is common across many Aboriginal families and communities, the Backhouse lecturers spoke of the continuing consequences, injustices and trauma of colonisation.

An encouraging State of the Society address felt the pulse of each Regional Meeting and offered the idea that *'We need in every community a group of angelic troublemakers'*. The Australian Quaker Narrative Embroideries express our history of Spirit-led work and inspire us to continue our rich 'tapestry' of practical actions. We worry about our diminishing numbers and too few to fill the roles we have created; but in ministry were reminded that although small in number we are *'a noisy people'*. Despite some early unclear

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pathways, we see how the Spirit often then seems to call forth energies to work in new ways.

Bilyanina yartanga
Let there be peace.

In peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J.R. Jordan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jo Jordan
Presiding Clerk
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia