



Yearly Meeting 2019 Epistle to Friends Everywhere of The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia

Australian Friends gathered in Hobart, Tasmania 6-13 July at The Friends' School, under the gaze of the majestic kunanyi / Mount Wellington. Janice Ross, a Saltwater woman welcomed Friends to Lutruwita (Tasmania) in Palawa-kani language and English with stories of her ancestors and elders held in the land and waters of this region. Meeting in winter, when the days are darker and colder, we have been reminded of the ongoing process of renewal, beginning in darkness and moving towards the Light. Friends reflected on this theme in the Friendly School held on the first day of our meeting.

We are deeply saddened by the extent of the climate and species crisis that is threatening the survival of living things on our planet. Many Friends are taking individual and collective action on reducing our impact on global heating. A Quaker Earthcare Climate Emergency and Species Extinction Epistle has been offered as part of our Earthcare testimony and Junior Young Friends urged us all to move towards a vegetarian or vegan diet out of respect for all creatures and for the environment. A group of Friends built a "cairn of mourning" as a reminder of what has already been lost and of the importance of grief in the healing of our relationship with the earth before we can act effectively. As one Friend asked; "We need to listen as the Earth. What is the Earth hearing?"

The Backhouse Lecture, given by Jason MacLeod, reminded us of the joyful obligation of a life of service as he spoke about his experience accompanying the West Papuans in their struggle for freedom. He described his experience of the deep and abiding love of Spirit that unites all things. He challenged Australian Friends to make a commitment to working together even before we decide on what we want to do.

We are challenged by the dwindling numbers of members and a higher proportion of older Friends. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find people to take on administrative and committee responsibilities. We are asking ourselves, what is essential to the ongoing life of our meeting. What can we let go?

We are using technology more often as we gather, and Friends are experimenting with online meetings and worship, including a Standing Committee meeting by Zoom and live streaming of the Backhouse Lecture. We hope that these new ways of communicating will be more inclusive and reduce our collective carbon footprint. However, these new technologies cannot replace the value of gathering together in faith to care for each other and for ourselves. We continue to affirm the necessity of meeting in community. At the same time, the burden of organising our annual gatherings is becoming too much for smaller regional meetings. We are being challenged to explore new ways of doing business and meeting in community.

The Truth prospers in the many ways that Friends act in the world: through our peace projects, social justice actions, building relationships with other faiths and our work with Original Australians.

Many Friends care deeply about and are involved with refugee and asylum seeker issues, and a generous bequest to Quaker Service Australia has enabled some of this work. We see the need for “Active Hope” as we strive to mend our broken world. We are grateful for the many ways that God lives through us, uniting us in hope as we continue to seek the Truth in difficult times.