

## CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN AFRICA YEARLY MEETING JANUARY 2015 – EPISTLE

To Friends everywhere,

We have met among the rocks and lush green bushes, grasses, flowers and birds of the bushveld summer, beneath billowing white thunder clouds in the clear blue sky overlooking the Hartebeespoort dam and Magaliesberg Mountains, near Johannesburg, very aware of the blessings of the earth. Our Yearly Meeting gathered about 110 friends of many ages, countries, cultures, languages, personal histories and spiritual vocabulary.

Worship sharing groups form the heart of our gathering and help us to meet each other on a deep level, come to understand our own limitations, and relish the rich blessings of diversity. We learn to be more tender and imaginative in receiving and giving communication. Detailed guidance – notes and questions – deepened and informed Worship Sharing groups. Summer School included “Experiment with Light”, and practice in talking about our faith.

Communication is a challenge. Email and the Website are replacing personal contact because of expense, new customs, the breakdown of postal services and thousands of kilometres between meetings. This continually endangers personal relationships. Many of us rely on traditional media and electronic coverage is patchy and faulty. Our common language is English which can be unnecessarily highbrow. However, YM provides an experience which builds up mutual trust and enriches the ground from which we operate. Our Handbook, available in hard copy and on the website, describes the Quaker Way and the unique and spirit-filled practice and experience of Friends in Southern Africa; our corporate memory.

We sensed that the time had come to break with outdated habits and for a great “spring cleaning” to fit us for the new world emerging in Africa in the 21st century. Change and renewal centred on a fruitful, re-vitalised Nominations process and fresh procedures which do not waste energy but allow reliable officers to make practical decisions. We broke into local meeting groups to consider which YM offices were unnecessary and to nominate those from our own Local Meetings whom we knew to be properly suited and qualified for positions. A rich crop of names were given to the current Nominations Committee to consider for the truly necessary offices.

We looked at the Outcomes we want. There will be co-ordinators for each of six clusters to focus on: Strengthening Meetings; Communication; Financial Oversight; Clerks and Administration; Youth and Activism and Advocacy. Instead of unwieldy committees we appointed trusted co-ordinators with power to co-opt suitable persons. They are obliged to report to YM and Mid-year meetings and must appoint and brief deputies if they cannot attend.

Improved discipline in business meetings, the microphone and the calm competence of the Clerks helped us to sense the guidance of the Spirit, respond to the Light and move into Unity.

The Richard Gush lecture gave a taste of the future academic and actuarial work required to calculate the way business and other organisations improve or destroy the Earth, the Economy, “the Wellbeing” of stakeholders and the planet. Using “Ecos” as the environmental currency, the “triple bottom line” in the reports of business and national organisations could become accurate and meaningful, and organisations can be held accountable for the sustainability of their activities in each of those domains.

Singing, the final Celebration provided chiefly by children and young friends, the sunshine, swimming pool and good ordering of the children’s program, lightened our hearts. We enjoyed the few visitors from other continents. “Nature walks” took the place of costly outings. Young Friends were not separate, but were full participants at all times. Our Theme: Reverence for Life – Silence, Transformation and Action has inspired us to look into the future, to sweep away the autumn leaves and make space for the new growth and vision from the grass roots of our community. We hold each other in the Light.

Clerks: Central and Southern Africa Yearly Meeting  
January 2015