

Epistle of the Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand - Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri 2020

To Friends everywhere

Greetings in love and peace from Friends of the Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand. Because of restrictions during the current pandemic we were, sadly, unable to gather face to face this year. Limited by COVID19 restrictions to our homes, we have met online in our Monthly Meetings to consider our business, and have sought to find unity in responses. We also met online for a time of worship on what would have been the opening evening of Yearly Meeting. In these extraordinary times we send you this epistle, to reflect how the Spirit has been moving among us over the last year and at this time.

For us, for our country, and for the world, it has been a time of change, fear and loss. We feel particularly for all those who mourn, and those who suffer from the direct effects of the pandemic and from the impact of the various measures taken to control it. Many of those who are worst affected, often losing their livelihood, are those who were already suffering from the inequality of political and economic systems, globally and nationally, and from the impact of climate change. This is true of Friends in many places. Can we learn from the disruption we have experienced, and take the opportunity for all of society to rethink how we care for others and the earth? How can we, as Friends, offer witness and service to build a better future?

Peace, in its widest sense, is a calling for all Friends. We know we can do more, but are grateful that our Quaker Peace and Service Aotearoa New Zealand Committee contributes to what is being done with Quaker involvement here and in many other countries. Monthly Meetings, Worship Groups and individual Friends engage in their own actions and donations. At a season when our nation remembers the death and suffering caused in war, we renew our stand against war's cruelty and destructiveness.

Faithful continuity of worship is at the heart of our life. We are glad to see the development of newer Worship Groups, and some growth of numbers in others. National and local learning events sow seeds of spiritual growth, as do the various ways in which Friends prepare their own hearts and minds and enrich their spiritual life. Children's Meetings have been growing in number, and we seek to develop them and enhance their life. A new Quaker website has been developed through skilled, perceptive and demanding work, to reach out to the public, and to connect us in unity. We give thanks for all forms of service, visible and invisible. "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord" (1 *Corinthians* 12.4).

The many faiths in this country are finding greater unity and understanding since the murderous shootings inflicted a year ago on worshippers in two mosques in Christchurch. Friends responded by reaching out to local Muslim communities, taking part in vigils, and offering other support. Locally we are linking with various ethnic and faith groups, and becoming involved in interfaith and cultural activities, hoping to explore and put aside our (often unconscious) prejudices.

Young people and children have inspired our country in their work and heartfelt advocacy for effective response to the climate emergency; many of our young ones are involved. Yearly Meeting, its committees and Meetings, are donating to some of this work. Our response as a body is imperfect; we are moving to vegetarian food at events, have reduced air travel, have taken action locally, and have made representations to Government and public bodies, including on how militarism damages the climate. The Quaker Settlement at Whanganui applies principles of sustainability and permaculture to its land and gardens. But, like the questioner of Jesus, we still ask, "What do I lack?" (*Matthew* 19.20). Profound

consideration continues of what we are called to do. We are reminded that all action on this concern requires a positive regard for all, and a stand for truth and integrity.

Dear Friends, we pray that in these difficult times you may be protected and guided, and may live faithfully in mutual love. We recall the words sent by Philadelphia Friends in 1683 across the Atlantic to Britain: "And though the Lord has been pleased to remove us far away from you, as to the other end of the earth, yet are we present with you, your exercises are ours; our hearts are dissolved in the remembrance of you, dear brethren and sisters in this heavenly love." (*Christian Faith and Practice* 677, London (now Britain) Yearly Meeting, 1959)

In love and peace,

Lesley Young
Clerk

YF Camp 2019 Epistle

Young Friends of New Zealand held their annual Camp over a rainy and windy long weekend in Wellington this July. The convenient setting of the Bukholt-Payne's house in Brooklyn was a perfect base for the games and discussions, with people from out of town sleeping there and local Wellingtonians popping in and out. Jessie Bukholt-Payne masterminded the catering and everybody was well fed with healthy and delicious vegan food, including lentil and pumpkin lasagna, gigantic soup so big the only way to serve it was in a bucket, and a healthy variation on the old YF classic - the cheese toasty. Tip top white bread and value pack edam were nowhere to be found at this gathering, replaced by freshly baked bread with homemade vegan cashew cheese. The wild weather over the weekend kept most activity inside, by the warm fireplace, which was kept going all day, except for nightly excursions to the spa bath. Many YFs used the opportunity to get crafty, and learned to crochet patches to make into a YF quilt. Creative juices started flowing and the group got artistic, creating small Zines which contained illustrations showing people's individual interpretations of quaker values, and their memories, hopes and dreams. There were many opportunities for board games, including a prototype of the Te Reo Maori game that Rosie Remmerswaal is developing, Kaupapa. YFs brought their creative energies to this too, and started making a YF game. All and all, 17 young people joined in across the long weekend.

One of the highlights of the Camp was our visit to The National Library to attend a Treaty Workshop facilitated by Murray Short and Niwa. Over 2,5 hours, we were guided through an extensive history of New Zealand at the time of early colonization, we learned about the different perspectives and the desired outcomes of both the Maori tribes and the Crown, and we learned about the differences between The Treaty and Te Tiriti, and the role that these documents have played in our political system since that time. Murray and Niwa gave us both a historical perspective and a human perspective on this topic. Afterwards we got to take a tour of the Library and see the exhibition of the original documents themselves. We stopped to have our lunch on the Parliament steps, and shared our meal with the activists there, who had been maintaining a constant presence outside the beehive for 52 days. Their goal is to demand that the New Zealand government declare a climate emergency. We spoke with them about the necessity for this kind of protest, and the consequences of climate change action or non action. As of today they are still there, at day 84 of his vigil.

Another highlight was going to plant trees and uproot blackberry at the Owhiro Stream nature strip. We were directed by the capable leadership of Martin Bukholt-Payne, who has been working with the organization Friends Of Owhiro Stream for 14 years. Together we planted a host of native trees and cleared a large patch of land, our spirits being lifted by some healthy sandwiches and plenty of thermoses filled with hot chocolate. On Sunday we joined Wellington Friends for Meeting for Worship, before holding our own meeting for business to discuss our future as Young Friends.

All in all we got to share in the joys of playing games, learning new things, spending time with old friends and making new ones, long introspective discussions on values and identity, excellent food, warmth, and community.