

## Epistle of the Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri

Held at Waikanae, 14 to 17 May 2021

Greetings to Friends everywhere

Some 90 Friends gathered at Waikanae, 14-17 May 2021 under the care of Palmerston North and Kāpiti Monthly Meetings. In welcoming us to Waikanae they began by acknowledging the tangata whenua, the local first peoples.

We rejoiced in the opportunity to be fully present 'with each other' after 2020's online-only meeting for worship. While giving thanks for the privileged position of Aotearoa/New Zealand, we were reminded of the perilous state of other nations, especially as we heard of the serious impact of Covid-19 in India.

The value of connection was strongly felt among Friends and we heard how the new use of technology had enabled the Quaker community, as never before, to extend its reach to remote and unwell Friends.

The importance of connection was explored further in the Quaker Lecture, "Stories of Belonging", delivered during Yearly meeting by Anjum Rahman, a founding member of the NZ Islamic Women's Council. She made reference to the whakataukī (Māori proverb) of the toroa (albatross) that journeys out onto the ocean and then returns to the land, its nesting place, where it regenerates.

She challenged us to go forth like the toroa, to listen and change, and to endure the discomfort of confronting our privilege. Those in dominant positions need to be willing to give away some power to allow others to resource their own communities. Her words lent weight to a call by Young Friends, for Yearly Meeting to be active in the move towards decolonisation, which requires more equitable sharing of power with the first peoples of Aotearoa.

The same sense of community and spiritual strength that Quakers at Yearly Meeting valued, was enhanced by the input from Young Friends on a number of subjects. Their creative and thoughtful contributions were heard and showed us a clear way forward.

Wiki Walker, a recipient of the Loxley Award, spoke of self-healing to help ourselves and others, seeing the feminine in our culture and politics, understanding the impact of colonisation on us as a people, and connecting ourselves and others with the natural world. Her project, Te Reo o te Whaea (The Voices of Mothers, Grandmothers and Aunties), sought to preserve the wisdom and the place of Māori women in nurturing community.

We were captivated by the story of how the board game called "Kaupapa" came into being supported by our Quaker Testimonies fund. The game, developed by Kuruho Wereta and Rosie Remmerswaal, a Young Friend, aims to make learning Te Reo Māori fun. We also experienced our own brief moment of fun in a lively impromptu session on pronunciation

As the meeting drew to a close we remind ourselves that we should let the Spirit guide us and that we must have faith that we will be given the means to follow such promptings. Like the toroa, we now go back to our Quaker communities enriched by the aroha that has embraced this Yearly Meeting, and its attendees, both present and remote.

In Peace and Friendship

Lesley Young

Yearly Meeting Clerk

## Epistle of Young Friends Camp 2021

Held at Kamau Taurua, 2-7 April 2021

Tēnā koutou Friends,

The island Kamau Taurua guards the long and narrow inlet that is Otago Harbour. To its north-west, it looks out to Port Chalmers (Koputai); to its south-east, it spies the Portobello peninsula. The jetty at the beach is supported on either side by the wrecks of derelict ships. From the beach, a steep hill leads to the small settlement on the island: the Island Keeper's cottage, the guest lodge, a hall (renovated from the original nineteenth-century quarantine accommodation), and a little chapel. It is a small and hilly island; you can walk around it in two hours and the central hill is crowned with a thin plateau, from which you can see almost the whole island and much of Otago Harbour. It was in this idyllic corner of the world that Young Friends decided to meet this year for our Easter camp.

It would be futile to waste words emphasising how beautiful Kamau Taurua is; whatever we said would fall short of our point. It is wonderful in the same way that the Bay of Islands, or Mount Taranaki, or Piopiotahi, or Lake Waikaremoana are all uniquely wonderful; let's leave it at that.

When we disembarked from the ferry onto the island (with all the veggies and goodies that Jessie and Ashley had bought earlier that day), we were met by Meghan and Gareth—the Island Keepers. From the very beginning, they made us feel at home on Kamau Taurua. Meghan took us on a tour of the island; she told us about its history as a quarantine station and its present as a conservation sanctuary, and showed us the Island's monument to the five Kiwi men shot for desertion during World War One. The second day, we helped Gareth with carrying gardening supplies up from the jetty to his house. For those who have read *The Lord of the Rings*, Meghan and Gareth were real Tom Bombadil and Goldberry figures.

Before the camp, Jessie and Ashley bought us everything we would need for an Easter's worth of vegetarian feasting. All of us were grateful to them for the work and planning they did to make the camp possible; we Quakers believe that everyone is a leader, but we should also thank those kaimahi who show initiative for the rest of us. For their part, Ashley enjoyed the novelty of filling up a tiny car from boot to headrest with food, while Jessie enjoyed seeing well laid plans come to fruition. Over Easter, we took turns with the cooking and cleaning; it felt good to live (even just for a few days) in a community where we worked to show manaakitanga to our friends, rather than for money. It helped that we were amazed at how tasty and filling the dishes we cooked were.

We found fun and peace in many ways during the camp. We went for sunny walks around the little island, exploring its paths and nooks. On Easter Sunday, the wind was so warm that some of us dared to jump off the jetty into the anti-Caledonian sea. Indoors, we played games, chatted, and knitted. Amy taught us about Tension Release Exercises (TRE), which were a real eye opener to all of us. A short Meeting for Worship on Saturday night ripened into singing in two part harmony; "Dear Friends, dear Friends" made a cheeky but heartfelt appearance.

As Ecclesiasties would say, if there is a time for fun there are also times for solemn study and contemplation. Ashley's friend Matt talked to us about his dissertation on the use of depleted uranium munitions in the First Gulf War (and beyond). We were horrified and angered to hear about the ongoing impact of those weapons on the people of Iraq and Kuwait, including children in affected areas still being far more likely to develop cancer than their peers. What's worse, the superpowers continue to use depleted uranium munitions. At our Business Meeting, we resolved to ask Yearly Meeting to take a corporate stand against depleted uranium weapons.

On Easter Sunday morning, local Friends came over to the island, and we enjoyed Meeting for Worship together at the little dirt-floor chapel on the island. We had fun chatting over coffee and tea afterward. On Monday we held our annual Business Meeting, where we discussed the items set out by the Clerk and Assistant Clerk. This included a dynamic and important conversation around cultural safety, consent and decolonisation.

Young Friends departed at different windows during the final days. One resonant moment captured the connection, joy and experience we shared, as a dwindling farewell party accompanied each group of Young

Friends down to the wharf. As we waited for the boat, the melodic drone of Tīmoti-Huia's Shruti Box (an instrument similar to a harmonium) invited our different voices to join together in humming and song as we offered to the island and to each other gratitude for new bonds formed, and old ties strengthened.

This year, the QEF funded the travel for all Young Friends to journey to Kamau Taurua. A number of us traveled from near and far and the support enabled many of us to attend the camp who would otherwise have been unable to. This was deeply appreciated by all and we extend our heartfelt thanks to the QEF.

### **Epistle of Junior Young Friends Camp 2020** Held at Wellington Quaker Complex 2-4 October 2020

This JYF was different to any others I had attended over the last few years. Due to Covid, there were multiple date changes meaning that the group of JYFs able to attend was smaller than usual, and as we were told when we arrived, 'It's just you guys'—the five of us who came together on the train.

Our initial reaction was disappointment, a huge part of JYF is meeting new people. The mood soon changed and took on a brighter tone. A moment that stood out to me the most was the five of us sitting around the table in the evening, designing and painting a poster for World Quaker Day. Another JYF was playing the ukulele and there was a nice mood to it.

All in all, it was a great experience, and we're all excited to take part in next year's camp.

Rowan, on behalf of JYFs at the 2020 JYF camp (Takutea, Piper, Nikau & Juna)