

Epistle of the Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri held online 28 April to 1 May 2022

Greetings to Friends everywhere.

Some 100 Friends in Aotearoa New Zealand gathered online under the care of Christchurch Monthly Meeting and the Yearly Meeting Arrangements Committee. After the lingering Covid pandemic had made it unsafe and inequitable to gather in Christchurch as planned, we were moved to attempt as full a Yearly Meeting gathering as possible online.

We felt delight, excitement, and some trepidation, and also gratitude for the advantages of meeting online. We missed the face-to-face conversations, as we explored being able to make the most of our first completely online Yearly Meeting, yet we had confidence that the Spirit would lead us.

While not being able to be in Ōtautahi Christchurch we were treated to a partly bilingual presentation focusing on the history of Ngāi Tahu, the tangata whenua (indigenous people), of the land on which the city was built, and Tahu Pōtiki their important ancestor. We were reminded of the trauma from the land loss and colonisation that followed. There was also an overview of recent events which continue to shape that land and its people.

The online format allowed us to welcome visitors from Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) and the Asia West Pacific Section (AWPS) of FWCC. We were reminded of how much stronger we are from our international connections, made more possible with the online technology. We heard from our visitors Aletia Dundas representing Australia Yearly Meeting, Adrian Glamorgan the new Secretary of AWPS, Tim Gee, General Secretary of FWCC, and YangSu Park and Hyun-Duck Bae, from Seoul Monthly Meeting, AWPS. They spoke of their own journeys, the people who had inspired them and the concerns they are working on in their part of the world. Tremendous energy is going into AWPS to build on the work already established and into exploring effective ways to nourish connections and collaborations in an area that holds half the world's population with many different languages. We are reminded of the necessity to work towards more language inclusiveness. We were inspired by hearing about the many activities arising out of concern, and ways of connection that are being planned and tried.

Continuing the theme of connections, a tour of the riches of our website quakers.nz offered us an insight into its potential for inreach and outreach and encourages us to take advantage of opportunities for adventures in the online world.

We are grateful for the vitality, insight and generosity shown by our Young Friends who are engaging in a way that their energy and numbers allow. Our current statement of affirmation of same sex relationships, written in 1992, is now being revised. Young Friends reminded us that the fact that we are a reconciling and affirming church needs to be highlighted to those searching for a spiritual home.

It was good to hear how the Loxley Award is supporting the Action Research of Jeremy Simons into how Restorative Justice social movements can help repair the harm from violence on the ground and in the online world.

“Children are important to our Society and to the world, not just for the future, but for the joy and wonder that they share in the present. Children remind us of the value of love, of fun, of the spirituality of play and of God in our bodies.” *Tracey Bourne 2014 Backhouse Lecture*. We have been thinking creatively about how to engage better with our children and young people. This has resulted in the creation of a new paid role with a support group which will facilitate this process. The All Age Worship on the Sunday morning, based on the Faith and Play story of Gifts led by Melinda Wenner Bradley,

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, left us spiritually enriched and feeling grateful for the insights which children can give us.

As we leave this Yearly Meeting we are mindful of the thoughts attributed to George Fox “Do not simply look at the temptations, confusions and corruptions of the world, but at the light that discovers them. For looking down at corruption and distraction, you are swallowed up in it; but looking at the light that discovers them, you will see over them and with the same light stand against them. ‘There,’ he said ‘is the first step to peace.’”

In Peace and Friendship

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Anne Hall" and "Alistair Hall" written side-by-side.

Anne and Alistair Hall
Yearly Meeting Co-Clerks