

## Epistle for 2013

of the Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri,  
held at El Rancho Christian Camp, Waikanae, Kāpiti Coast, 10-13 May 2013

### **Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa, greetings to Friends everywhere**

Over eighty Friends gathered from ngā hau e whā , the four winds of our country and around the world to the homeland of Te Āti Awa ki Whakarongotai, Ngāti Raukawa, and Ngāti Toa Rangatira, to meet amidst the trees and constant ministry of birdsong.

*"Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand."* These words of Isaac Penington (1667), quoted in advance documents and shared in song and spoken in session, set the tone for our gathering where the presence of the Spirit has been strongly with us.

We were reminded by our co-clerks that in mechanically clinging to our structures in detail "they become a box to imprison us, rather than a trellis on which we can grow, flower and fruit". As we looked at respectful relationships, Treaty commitments and constitutional reform, and meeting our educational and spiritual needs, that sense of reaping the harvest of earlier struggles and hard work, sometimes over many many years, was indeed blossoming and fruitful. We look forward to future positive developments with a sense of excitement and anticipation.

The importance of inclusion, drawing on the roots of our many-layered communities, recognising our interdependence, and the need for respectful participation, has been a recurring theme.

That we are part of the worldwide community of Friends was recognised in many ways; we welcomed the presence of our invited representatives from Japan and Australia Yearly Meetings as well as our current Wellington and Auckland Resident Friends from Britain Yearly Meeting. The Friends World Committee for Consultation Asia West Pacific Section Annual General Meeting was held during our time together, giving us a greater opportunity to participate.

There have been 12,400 quakes and aftershocks in and around Christchurch since September 2010. We heard personal testimonies from Friends as they face their third winter of physically broken homes, dealing with the 'new normal'. Friends are repeatedly speaking truth to a power that doesn't hear, a bureaucracy which lacks consistency, transparency and integrity. They are weary and stressed; we grieve with them and hold them in the Light.

We were challenged by the words of *Micah(6:8)* 'And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.'

How can we each be more effectively a 'publisher of the Truth'? We recognise the need to let our light shine as Quakers, and not hide it under a bushel. To avoid growth simply for growth's sake we have to support and nurture those we have, as well as look for and welcome newcomers. We need to enrich our worshipping communities by getting to know one another in that which is trivial as well as the eternal. Our worship underpins and supports our communities' spiritual and educational development.

Our newly revised *Advices and Queries* was launched within a period of worship; this reflects not just the work of the committee but the spiritual discernment of our whole Yearly Meeting. Making this

freely available for Friends and enquirers is a step towards honouring our renewed commitment to our spiritual nurture and outreach.

The Quaker Lecture by Jeanette Fitzsimons (former co-leader of the Green Party) on planning for an economy of 'enough' reminded us that humans have outgrown our habitat. The holy grail of economic growth as a mark of success is not a sustainable one, and instead we should be seeking to increase the level of human wellbeing. Generation Zero and 350.org have taken up the challenge of being patterns and examples as they work towards shifting political opinion. Ways of supporting our younger Friends to more fully partake in this work and similar concerns, through internships, grants etc., are being explored. We enter this process in faith and trust that a suitable way will open.

Despite the difficult times we live in, we affirm that we are all loved and worthwhile, we're in this for the long haul and together we have a tremendous collective power.

Elizabeth Duke & Elizabeth Thompson, Co-clerks