

Epistle for 2015

of the Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand

Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri Held at the Quaker Settlement, Whanganui, 8-11 May 2015

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

This year, 82 Friends gathered at the Quaker Settlement in Whanganui; our special place, embodying our long term vision of community, and kept warm by the Settlers. A number of us prepared for Yearly Meeting with a day and a half of spiritual refreshment.

The welcome reminded us of our connection to the land and the Whanganui River. We welcomed our invited guests; Tessa Spratt and Cathy Davies (Australia YM), Jairaj Brown from India (Bundelkhand YM) and Mike and Liz Watson Skipton LM, Britain YM, currently Resident Friends in Auckland.

Our Co-clerks asked us to consider and respond to the questions: What is Yearly Meeting for? Why are we all here?

We accept that we share the following purposes. Firstly, we are here to worship and foster our spiritual life. Secondly, to build and sustain a beloved community. Thirdly, we are here to witness and to service, as we feel ourselves led.

The Gospel story of the Good Samaritan resonated with us as we considered our response to communities in other countries affected by natural and human disasters. Today our neighbour is global.

Given that there are declining numbers of Friends able and willing to take on the roles we currently try to fill, we need to assess our future and structures. Are there changes we could make that would transform us to better carry out our service and give witness?

The public Quaker Lecture this year was given by Bryan Bruce, a highly regarded documentary-maker. The invitation arose our concern about growing inequality in the past 30 years in Aotearoa New Zealand. We are disturbed to learn that our children are suffering preventable diseases that have not been seen in decades. Bryan Bruce said *"Economic decisions are moral decisions."*

We received with joy the news that, 4 years after the earthquakes, Christchurch Quakers now have their new Quaker Centre to sustain their community.

We recognize that climate change is a challenge for us now, and that our prosperity is based on exploitation of the environment. In discussion, led by our Futures Committee, we were encouraged to move into wider collective action focused on the common good.

Ministry on Sunday included blessings from our children, and a quote from Tagore, depicted on "The Quaker Shop" panel of the Australian Quaker Embroidery;

"I slept, and dreamt that life was joy.

I woke, and found that life was service.

I acted, and behold, service was joy."