

Epistle for 2017

From the Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri

Held at El Rancho, Waikanae. 12-15 May 2017

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

Wellington Monthly Meeting welcomed 93 Friends to this place at the mouth of the Waikanae River – “the waters of the yellow-eyed mullet”.

We acknowledged the iwi (tribes) of this rohe (territory) as well as the more recent settlers. We felt anchored by the sanctuary of Kāpiti Island.

The upholding of Yearly Meeting began with 28 Friends attending the retreat beforehand. The facilitator encouraged us to move from our relationship with ourselves towards our relationship with all at this Yearly Meeting. Every one of us has a role in this upholding process. We are all different and we can learn to recognise, respect and work with these differences.

Tenderness towards one another, including recognising the darkness, is not mere kindness. Our Quaker process of spiritual discernment is paramount, and when we are faithful to it, it will lead to a good outcome.

While we sat discerning in Yearly Meeting, we heard that our Friend Ian Upton was continuing on his hīkoi (walk) from Cape Reinga to Parliament in Wellington. He will petition our Government to divert military expenditure to the promotion of the wellbeing of children in Aotearoa.

During our sessions, we were challenged often to put our passion, commitment and spiritual depth into urgent action. We were struck by the underlying connectedness of the key themes, despite their superficial differences.

Tracy Bourne, Australia Yearly Meeting representative, reminded us of our radical spiritual ancestors, for example Elizabeth Fletcher and James Parnell, who at a very young age suffered for speaking their truth.

Children need to be valued for themselves and for what we can learn from them, rather than for what they are going to become. Bringing children and young people into the centre is vital. Our Friends of Philippines Evangelical Friends International Ministries, Betty Pulido and Hildegarde Lumabi, inspired us with their passionate commitment to involving children in their churches.

The session on nurturing the involvement of younger people in our meetings made it clear that it is time to make progress in accommodating their specific needs, especially the needs of “older young friends” with young children. Young people need to be encouraged and mentored into leadership roles.

We were appalled to hear that current militaristic programmes reach our young people in schools and even involve pre-schoolers. We are led to live and teach another way, a peaceful way. As one Friend put it “Our silence needs to be heard”.

The military are also not held accountable for their huge contribution to carbon emissions.

The Futures Committee raised the question of how we can respond to the FWCC Plenary’s call to action on sustainability - what two things can we do practically to support sustainability?

We were encouraged by the radical action for transformation, presented by the young people of Generation Zero. They are on the way to presenting a proposed Zero Carbon Act to Parliament, which would require concrete action to eliminate net carbon emissions by 2050, backed up with legal sanctions.

Jane Kelsey gave the Quaker Lecture entitled 'Transcending Neoliberalism: Moving from a State of Denial to Progressive Transformation'. She spoke of the urgency to take action to mitigate the disastrous changes resulting from neoliberalism. She highlighted the importance of Māori and Quaker values, and the role of audacious young people. We can help to form the 'critical mass'.

Our Meetings for Worship were deep, enriched by spoken ministry, and by the words of Isaac Penington expressed through song; echoed by the steadfast voice of the tui outside. We were reminded to be like our squeaky chairs, persistently nudging our fellow Friends to be active promoters of change.

We had an impassioned plea to remain steadfast to our spiritual roots, especially in our outreach and public profile. We need carefully to balance this with challenging people to re-examine their values.

Ministry was given paraphrasing Samoa's head of state, Tupua Tamasese Tupuola Tufuga Efi 'I am the family, the family is me. I am the village, the village is me. I am a spiritual being.' We Friends are a village of spiritual beings. We are not alone.