

WIDER QUAKER FELLOWSHIP, AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

LETTER 140

FEBRUARY 2017

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Dear Friends,

First of all some administrative matters.

The Wider Quaker Fellowship does not operate its own bank account. I receive a grant from Yearly Meeting which covers the cost of paper and postage for three letters each year. This is supplemented by your donations which have recently allowed us to send out a fourth Letter.

I have two requests to make. Firstly, if you currently receive a paper copy and would prefer to receive the Letter electronically, please send me your e-mail address.

Secondly, if you send me a donation by cheque, would you please make it out to "Religious Society of Friends Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa NZ".

Now to my reflections for this month.

Like me, you may be getting a little tired of the constant mention of a single name in the media and in general conversation. One hopes that some of the associated threats will not be carried out; nevertheless a majority of voters have opted for change and we must all take the consequences. Let us hope that there will be some good outcomes.

It seems incredible that one man is able to affect thinking and action in so many parts of the world, yet this is the case today. It is entirely a matter of degree – every one of us influences the world in some way from the time of our conception, and the effect continues after our death. Socially, personal influence takes the form of interaction with family members and groups that support us either physically or ideologically. This is why Quakers, like Aristotle all those years ago, recognise the importance of examining the life they are living. It is why Margaret Fell remembered and immortalised the words of George Fox: "You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this; but what canst thou say?"

Although it's best to be content with what we already have, passion for change is understandable when conditions are unjustifiably burdensome. Doing nothing under such conditions gives a message of tacit approval. Some sort of action is required, and this is where discernment, guided by the Inner Light, can assist each one of us to avoid foolhardy options. It is also why Quakers bring their concerns to Meeting for Worship, seeking appropriate group support.

I've included passages from "Quaker Faith and Practice in Aotearoa New Zealand" below in the hope that they may bring some comfort and guidance at a time of uncertainty.

Yours in Friendship,

Ruth Gadgil.

Personal influence

"Friends keen on action may see progress in their good works, their political activity, campaigns and concerns. Or simply, while dealing humbly, justly and mercifully in their daily lives, at work, with family, friends and children."

Mel Bogard, 1996.

“Being prepared to honestly examine ourselves and our responses to others (not easy, often very painful and needing courage) and endeavouring to act out of purity of motive is a move towards the search for Truth, as is an openness to leadings that come from somewhere purer and higher than our own minds.”

Margaret Burling, 1996.

“There are many social attitudes that I don’t like. I may be right, I may be wrong, but I do know that if anything is for the good of the community it will prevail; if not it will disappear and something better will emerge. No one can stem the flow of social change and ultimately that change must be for the better. Why? Because all of us are basically good. We all want a better way of life, not only for ourselves but for mankind. Therefore I don’t look on those with different outlooks from mine as suspect, but as other individuals striving to better mankind in their own way. I may even think their way anti-social and, if indeed it is, I believe that by constructive action and dialogue others will cause them to see the light, and joint efforts will bring forth something better. ... In the extreme, I believe that if one is persecuted by the ill-informed and ignorant, who no doubt believe themselves right, the repercussions of that persecution are such that good rises from it.”

Russell Gregory, 1974.



How Quakers influenced the Department of Corrections at Christmas

It’s a pity that some people in preventive detention find it necessary to encourage friends, family or contacts to smuggle contraband into prisons. Others are known to use anything hard or sharp to intimidate their guards. These offenders make prison life more difficult for others who might benefit from demonstrations of love and concern. It’s little wonder that prison authorities have found it necessary to place ever tighter restrictions on visiting and things that visitors might bring with them. Some say that it’s easier to get out of prison than to get in!

For many years, ever since World War 1, Auckland Quakers have gathered at the Mt. Eden Meeting House at Christmas to prepare hundreds of flower posies as gifts for the inmates of Mt. Eden Prison. The flowers have been donated by local nurserymen or green-fingered Friends. The aim is to show that someone cares, and to bring a little beauty into a place known for its grim image. Suddenly in 2016 the Prison Authorities decided to break with tradition and asked Mt. Eden Friends not to take flowers this year. Asked to reconsider they still said no. It so happened that the Unitarians had offered to help with preparing the posies, and one of their members, a Fairfax reporter, asked if he could investigate and write a story for the press. Rosemary McLeod included an impassioned piece in her syndicated newspaper column, and there was also national television coverage. As a result the Department of Corrections backed down, and the posies were made and delivered.

Rosemary wrote: *“Whether the prisoners eat the flowers, whether they smash them on the floors of their cells, whether they are furious at being taken for sissies, I don’t care. But what they experience with these gifts is kindness, and they may register that. There isn’t enough kindness in this world, and wherever it exists we should celebrate it, not try to shut it down.”*

Can the Japanese influence world powers?

We have received a poignant letter written by the Hibakusha, the atomic bomb survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is being circulated by the organisers of an appeal for the global elimination of nuclear weapons. Here are some extracts from the letter:

“For more than 70 years since then we have struggled to live on, afflicted by the delayed effects and by anxiety about the possible effects of radiation on our children and grandchildren. Never again do we want such tragedies to be repeated ...

Human beings have prohibited the use, development, production and possession of biological and chemical weapons by treaties and protocols. Why do we hesitate to prohibit nuclear weapons, which are far more destructive than these weapons? We, the Hibakusha, call on all State Governments to conclude a treaty to ban and eliminate nuclear weapons ...

We believe that your signatures appended to this appeal will add up to the voices of hundreds of millions of people around the world and move international politics. They will finally save the future of our blue planet and all life on it. We earnestly appeal to you to append your signature to this petition.”

We have been advised that signatures which have been collected each year are being sent to the United Nations Association every October from now until 2020. There is plenty of time to collect a huge number of signatures and send them to Japan each year.

Petition forms can be obtained from Patricia Waugh, Ph 07 262 0022 or e-mail davetricia@hnpl.net

Weekends at the Quaker Settlement, 76 Virginia Road, Whanganui 4500:

24-26 March – 7th Annual Penal Reform Seminar

Join the Quaker Penal Reform Team in reflecting on the legacy of reconciliation, justice, restitution and community. Connect with those working in the criminal justice and penal system to find a new way forward for Aotearoa New Zealand.

Facilitators: The Quaker Penal Reform Team.
Contact: Allan Harvey.
allan.harvey@xtra.co.nz

24-29 April – Junior Young Friends Camp

Camp for those aged 13-16 years.
Theme: Living Simply and Sustainably.

Leader: Hannah Chapman-Searle.
Contact: jyf@quaker.org.nz

19-21 May – Quaker Peace Work: The Power to Transform

This weekend focuses on how to develop transformative action. It will provide an opportunity for Quakers and peace workers from other faiths to build bridges and let the Spirit speak.

Facilitators: Peni Connolly, Liz Remmerswaal, Stephanie du Fresne.
Contact: Christine England
Syntonychris86@gmail.com

2017
YEARLY MEETING GATHERING
at El Rancho Christian Camp, Waikanae Beach,
Kapiti
Friday 12th May – Monday 15 May
There will be a prior Retreat Day on
Thursday 11 May
Please use the on-line registration form if possible
<http://quaker.org.nz/yearly-meeting>

The Wider Quaker Fellowship is an association of persons of diverse backgrounds who wish to have ties with the Religious Society of Friends without necessarily being in its membership, or who, through isolation, illness or some other circumstance are unable to attend a Monthly Meeting.

Any person who finds the fundamental Quaker testimonies and the Quaker way of life, with its emphasis on sincerity and simplicity, compatible with his or her philosophy of life is welcome to join the Fellowship. A request to the Clerk will ensure enrolment as a member.