

WIDER QUAKER FELLOWSHIP, AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND**LETTER 125****MARCH 2013***19 Exeter Place, Rotorua 3015, New Zealand.**widerquakerfellowship@quaker.org.nz*

Dear Friends,

As your new Clerk I have been sorting through the WQF material that Joy Rising passed on to me. I thought that in my first letter I should share some of the information that I found interesting. I would also like to tell you about my own introduction to the Fellowship.

I was pleased to see that we had gained more members over the 2012-13 summer break. According to my reckoning we now have 174 individuals and 13 groups on our mailing list. The groups include our WQF counterparts in Australia and the USA, the Hocken Library at the University of Otago, and several New Zealand Quaker meetings.

You may be aware that the Fellowship was started in 1936 in America by Rufus M. Jones, and that it was extended to New Zealand five years later. The records that I have go back only to Letter No. 32, written by **Olwen Palmer** in October 1987. Olwen did not refer to herself as a Clerk – she was simply a member of the Extension Committee of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in Aotearoa New Zealand. She looked after the WQF for more than twelve years, sending out 5-6 letters each year (there were no computers then) and corresponding with individual members in her own special way. Letters 32-34 started with the words “Loving greetings, my dears!” and she always began with an account of some personal experience or reminiscence. Olwen must have been in her late 70’s or even 80’s at that time. Although afflicted by deafness and by travel sickness, she made a point of journeying around the North and South Islands by bus, visiting as many of the isolated Fellowship members as she could.

My husband Peter and I had been curious about Quakers for some time and had read a number of books about them, notably Geoffrey Hubbard’s “*Quakers by Convincement*” (I always recommend this book to Enquirers). A work colleague had supplied us with the pamphlet “*Questions to Quakers*” in 1987 but in true Quaker fashion had not pressed other information on us. We contacted Olwen and joined the WQF as a sort of “half-way house” while we explored things more carefully. Olwen was touring the North Island at that time and we asked her to stay with us. This was our first enquiring contact with a real, practising Quaker. On her advice we started to attend meetings of the local Quaker Worship Group. Eventually we became interested

in Monthly Meeting for Business and in 1990 the Society received us into membership. I will always remember Olwen Palmer as a true follower of George Fox's exhortation – to “...*be patterns, be examples...wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.*”

When Olwen laid down the WQF work in 1994 she reported to Yearly Meeting that “*The response has been most encouraging. I do hope that a Friend will be found to carry on the work...It is dear to my heart.*” That Friend was **Penelope Dunkley**, who continued as WQF Clerk until 2000, when the word “Vacant” appeared in the list of YM appointments.. Since then, **Alan and Betty Gilderdale** and **Joy Rising** have made sure that the Fellowship continues to serve people who are interested in Quakerism but do not or cannot attend Monthly Meetings.

Now it is my turn. I shall not be able to travel in the Ministry as Olwen did. In trying to follow her example and the examples set by Penelope, Alan, Betty and Joy I am conscious of the fact that unlike them, I have only been a member of the Society of Friends for 22 years. Nevertheless I will do my best and hope that you will support my efforts to support you. I shall be ready to listen to your comments and queries and will find answers to them if I can.

Finally, I would like to quote a part of Olwen Palmer's WQF Letter 32:

“Sometimes it seems as if we really do have the key to the peaceable kingdom very firmly in our hands. It's just that the key is large and old – 2000 years old, perhaps more, for Christians do not have a monopoly on loving concern. The lock is very rusty, and the door is made up of ugly components – prejudice, hate, fear. But it's creaking now as we pour oil into the lock. Trust, loving concern for ourselves and for others, understanding, will hasten the day when the key turns, and our dreams become sparkling realities.”

Yours in Friendship,

Ruth Gadgil.

Some Quaker News

Our sympathy must go out to those Christchurch Friends who have been trying to find a site on which to build a replacement Meeting House. Purchase of a section had all but been approved when it was found that costs of insurance and other requirements were prohibitive. So they are back to Square One again.

Better news comes from the north, where Monthly Meeting boundaries were readjusted at the end of 2012. Waitemata North, Bay of Plenty/Auckland and Waikato/Hauraki Monthly Meetings have ceased to exist. A special gathering held in Rotorua on 2-3 March celebrated the formation of two new Monthly Meetings – “Northern” and “Mid-North Island”.

The annual Meeting for Worship for Business of the Religious Society of Friends in Aotearoa New Zealand will be held on 9-13 May at El Rancho, Waikanae, on the Kapiti Coast. I'm sure there will be plenty to report in my next letter.

Then from 31 May – 3 June (Queen's Birthday Weekend) there will be the annual Fun and Work gathering at the Quaker Settlement, 76 Virginia Road, Whanganui. The weekend has a wonderful tradition of working together – this year the focus will be on developments in the North Valley and the new Food Forest. The Settlement is offering great food and free accommodation. Contact Marilyn Payne or Lyneke Onderwater mm.p@clear.net.nz for registration.

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 letter sent to the Clerk will ensure enrolment as a member.