

WIDER QUAKER FELLOWSHIP, AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

LETTER 133

MAY 2015

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Dear Friends,

I'm pleased to announce that recent copies of the Wider Quaker Fellowship Letter are now available on the Quaker website. A big thank you to Derek Carver for helping to arrange this. Anyone interested in past Letters can access them by searching "Groups" in www.quaker.org.nz

Writing this Letter at the end of April I'm feeling overwhelmed with information about World War I and Gallipoli. Quakers will be hoping fervently that the effect will be confined to commemoration and does not result in the glorification of conflict and war. I have to remember that my own father "served" in the first world war. Like so many others he rarely spoke of his experiences - but he was very proud of the cigarette lighter that he had made out of a brass cartridge case...

Last week two Jehovah's Witnesses came to our door and insisted on handing out leaflets claiming that The Bible is the only source of divine wisdom. I offered some Quaker pamphlets in return, but they said "Perhaps we would read them if you came to our place."

New Zealand Quakers are not evangelical, but we do feel that outreach is necessary. It always surprises me that very few people know about our faith and practice. Some regard us as present-day Puritans; others as an old-fashioned closed society. Of course neither view is correct. Below you will find examples of the ways in which Friends have responded to change over the years, and have often been the first to adopt common-sense attitudes to extremism. Early Quakers made a point of being different in terms of dress and behaviour – nowadays we hope that our lives speak in a different way.

Yours in Friendship,

Ruth Gadgil.

Quakers and Change

The following account draws on "Quaker by Convincement" by Geoffrey Hubbard (1985 edition). It's a good read and the book is available from Quaker Book Sales - www.quaker.books@quaker.org.nz

After 1647, as a result of George Fox's great "opening" or insight, Quakers felt compelled by the Inner Light to reject many of "men's inventions" that had developed in association with the industrial revolution. They recognised injustices in the world around them, particularly "deceitful merchandising, cheating and cozening". Their principle of making their yea be yea and their nay be nay led to the adoption of fixed price

dealing. Traders came to understand that Quaker integrity could be relied upon, and Friends became trusted keepers of other people's money. The great banks – Barclays, Hoares, Lloyds and Gurneys, were Quaker houses. Many businesses noted for reliability and care for their workers were developed by Quaker families.

In the early days Friends did formalise the requirement for plain dress and plain speaking in an effort to preserve the faith. They became preoccupied with objection to gaming, cards, music, theatre, dancing, novels and field sports. Disownment of those who “married out” actually led to the development of a closed society during the eighteenth century. Margaret Fox saw the dangers, and as early as 1700 spoke out against rigid rules for dress and behaviour. Her warnings were eventually heeded. Today we do not dress differently and we do not address others as “thee” and “thou”. We object to gambling, but consider that the pursuit of other forms of entertainment should be a matter for individual discernment.

In the eighteenth century many of the Quakers who had settled in North America developed an evangelical theological outlook. The nature of their meetings changed as they incorporated hymns, sermons and a paid pastorate. This manner of worship spread to Africa, Central and South America. Other Friends in America, and those in Britain, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand rejected evangelism. Here we continue to believe that it is the duty of individuals to be still and attentive to the leadings of our own Inner Light rather than those of other human beings. This enables us to answer that of God in every one by our own example. We call this process “outreach”.

At one time men and women did not sit together in meetings, but there was never any discrimination against women in the Society. Then as now, women and men are equally eligible for all positions of responsibility and have always contributed to the development of faith and practice.

Some other things have not changed. We do still avoid titles and honorifics, and we retain some standardised Quaker phrases, particularly in business meetings. We still refuse to take oaths.

Quakers never subscribed to prohibition of alcohol – Hubbard comments that the list of stores for three Friends sailing to Philadelphia in 1756 would have done credit to a superior off-licence establishment! Fox himself was only against letting people have “more drink than would do them good”. Today our organised events are alcohol-free because we don't want to have to dictate the amount that may be good for us.

In view of the harm done by the use of alcohol, tobacco and other habit-forming drugs, consider whether you should limit your use of them or refrain from using them altogether. Remember that any use of alcohol or drugs may impair judgment and put both the user and others in danger.

Advices and Queries (1995)

We hope that we may continue to be known for action in our traditional concerns:

- Avoidance of war
- Aversion to gambling and speculation
- Prison reform
- Humane treatment of the poor and mentally ill
- Adult education.

Hubbard in 1985 named some attitudes which he regarded as specifically Quaker: These were

Sincerity
 Regard for integrity in others
 Worship and action that transcends diversity of beliefs and understanding
 Awareness of the universality of the Spirit.

Let us hope that members of our Society will always be distinguished by these attitudes.

A MESSAGE FROM BARBARA CURTIS, NELSON RECOGNISED MEETING

Thoughts of the next **Summer Gathering** may be on the 'back burner'. However, in Nelson, we are busy planning and consulting for Summer 2015-16.

The theme will be "**Building Bridges**" and we have already begun the building. Our small team has no recent experience of organising Summer Gathering, so we are talking to people who can help us. We want to encourage as many as possible to attend, including first-timers.

I have never personally been to SG because the thought of so many people was daunting. But after attending Yearly Meeting last year (because it was close to Nelson) and mixing with my extended Quaker family, I think coming together is a really important thing to do. That is just how it felt, renewing old friendships, making new ones, and putting names to faces.

We want to know how we can encourage YOU to come. I'm happy to have conversations by phone, email or letter. Ideas and feedback are keenly sought. Help and support will be welcomed.

Barbara Curtis, 169 Nile St, Maitai, Nelson 7010.

Phone No 03 548 4883 (I can call you straight back if home, or leave a message).

Mobile 0226 778 702.

Email barbarandy252@gmail.com

**Summer Gathering will be at Teapot Valley Christian Camp, Brightwater (close to Nelson),
 Monday 28th December 2015 - Monday 4th January 2016.**

Weekends at the Quaker Settlement, 76 Virginia Rd., Whanganui 4500:

29 May – 1 June – Queens Birthday Work Weekend

Settlement Contact: Lyneke Onderwater Phone 021-268-2052.

28-30 August – Quaker Learning: the way ahead

Facilitators: Elizabeth Duke and Alistair Hall.

11-13 September – Listening to the Spirit

Facilitator: Elizabeth Thompson.

13-15 November – Strengthening our Meetings

Facilitator: Linley Gregory.

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.