

WIDER QUAKER FELLOWSHIP, AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

LETTER 147

NOVEMBER 2018

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Dear Friends,

My second term three-year term as Clerk of the Wider Quaker Fellowship has come to an end and this will be my last Letter to you. Yearly Meeting has appointed my good Friend Carril Karr to the position and she will keep in touch with you, probably in a very different way!

For my last communication I've decided to concentrate on one of the major Quaker Testimonies – our commitment to the reduction of conflict in our own lives and throughout the world. Generally referred to as the "Peace Testimony", this is one of the aspirations that unites all Quakers. That doesn't mean that all of us succeed all of the time, but we recognise the value of Peace and do our best to promote it.

Quakers throughout four centuries have expressed the need and hope for peaceful human interaction. In 1987, the Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa/New Zealand issued a public statement in an attempt to influence national defence policy. This statement appears in two publications: "Quaker Faith and Practice in Aotearoa/New Zealand" and Britain's "Quaker Faith and Practice". Although it is too long to reproduce here, I can quote my favourite passage:

"Refusal to fight with weapons is not surrender. We are not passive when threatened by the greedy, the cruel, the tyrant, the unjust. We will struggle to remove the causes of impasse and confrontation by every means of nonviolent resistance available."

So much about Peace has been written by wise Quakers. Again, I can only draw your attention to a very small and personal selection which I hope will affirm and strengthen your hopes and aspirations for a more peaceful world.

Many thanks for your letters, messages and donations received during the last six years. It's good to know that the Fellowship is alive, well and appreciated, and that it will remain in good hands.

Yours in Friendship,

Ruth Gadgil.

What do Quakers say about Peace?

All Friends everywhere, this I charge you, which is the word of the Lord God unto you all. Live in peace, in Christ, the way of peace, and therein seek the peace of all men, and no man's hurt ... it is love that overcomes and not hatred with hatred and strife with strife.

George Fox, 1659.

And all wars and fightings with carnal weapons we do deny, who have the sword of the spirit; and all that wrong us we leave them to the Lord.

George Fox, 1661.

This may be the time for us to show that our peace Testimony means more than just saying 'no' or opting out.

Muriel Morrison, 1972.

The conscientious objectors of our Society, and others likeminded have fared badly, but some of our members considered it right to help our Empire in its hour of need, and chose ambulance work. Three members of our meeting, Henry and Cecil Wardell and J.H. White (James) left New Zealand to assist in ambulance work, and we are pleased to record that their work was appreciated by the State.

Dunedin Two Months Meeting, 1918.

As a Friend, Richard felt especially the need to help the enemy aliens who were in difficulties through war conditions – internees on Somes Island and later in the Wairarapa – dependents of internees who found themselves suddenly deprived of their breadwinners. Tirelessly Richard interviewed government officials on the one hand and the wives of Italian fishermen or relatives of German nationals from Samoa on the other, to reach reasonable arrangements. ... Later in the war when Japanese prisoners of war were brought to New Zealand Richard would visit them, seeking out rice which was in short supply to give a special treat to a sick prisoner in hospital and later recounting with gusto how to conduct an entire conversation with the one common linguistic phrase 'OK' and lavish use of gesture and intonation.

Testimony to the life of Richard Harris c.1877-1962.

The quest for peace and justice needs to begin with the interests and needs of the weakest and most vulnerable. It is these persons who are often most severely damaged by violent conflict and the insecurity that flows from it. Too much of the war against terrorism is being articulated by privileged elites for their purposes rather than for and on behalf of impoverished people who experience daily existential terror at being unable to satisfy their basic human needs.

Kevin Clements, 2002.

It has been a thoroughly valuable experience to see first hand how Quakers perform their international work. The Quaker United Nations Offices (QUNOs) do very little lobbying. Rather, they encourage dialogue by holding congenial, informal discussions on pertinent topics so that diplomats can discuss issues as people, instead of as political representatives. In addition, the QUNOs' staff make it a point to take something to diplomats rather than simply asking questions or presenting positions. A further input is our consistent Quaker stand that a more peaceful and just world is possible and is worth striving for. Many of the diplomats and secretarial staff work at the UN because they share its vision, and they seem to appreciate support for their ideals.

Andrew Wells, 1989.

Peace is a process to engage in,
not a goal to be reached.

Sydney Bailey, 1993

There is no way to peace,
Peace is the way.

Emily Greene Balch (1867-1961)

... While loving one's enemies does not necessarily mean liking them or even approving of them, it always means treating them as fellow human beings and not denying their humanity ...

Kenneth E. Boulding, 1986.

There are many extraordinary instances in Quaker history in which an evil-doer has been suddenly transformed by the power of non-resistance combined with goodwill.

Howard Brinton, 1966.

'Peace is a verb' (song; music available)

*Refrain: Peace on earth, peace on earth,
That's the hope that inspires this song.
Everyone says they want peace on earth
and everybody can't be wrong.*

*What on earth is peace on earth?
Don't conceive it as absence of war,
Not if injustice, oppression and greed
are just as present as before. Peace means:*

Co-operate, let others live,
let go of hate, dare to forgive.
It means befriend, open your eyes,
perhaps amend, apologise.
It means take risks, sometimes accept,
sometimes resist, always respect. *Refrain*

Take time to learn, open your ears,
forgo your turn, let go your fears.
Negotiate, straighten things out.
It could mean wait, or do without.
It could mean share your food and drink,
maybe compare, maybe rethink. *Refrain*

Set people free, give them a hand,
try to agree and understand.
It means don't harm. It means don't fight.
It means disarm. It means put right.
It means don't fuss. It means don't shove.
It might mean trust, or even love. *Refrain to 'can't be wrong'.*

Peter Low, 1996

Let us then try what love will do,
for if people did once see we love them
we should soon find they would not harm us.
Force may subdue, but love gains.

William Penn, 1693.

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.