

Epistle of the Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand

Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri

Held at Burns Lodge near Dunedin (Ōtepoti). 25 to 28 May 2018.

Tēnā koutou, Tēnā koutou, Tēnā koutou

Dunedin Monthly Meeting welcomed 62 Friends to Mosgiel. We heard the legend of Te Matamata the taniwha; a mythological water creature. Tangata whenua (local Māori) recognised the hills above Mosgiel as forming the taniwha's body. Captain Cook, when he first sighted the place, saw only an interesting saddle between 2 hills on the skyline. What are we open to seeing here? This resonated with part of the theme of our preparatory retreat for the Meeting; of being willing to recognise our shadow.

We acknowledged the indigenous people of this rohe (region); Kai Tahu and Kati Mamoe. Departed Friends were acknowledged with a waiata tangi (song of lament). We also acknowledged the Burns family who built the homestead and from whom the Lodge takes its name.

Visiting Friends from Australia Yearly Meeting, Britain Yearly Meeting, and North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) in the United States were welcomed.

Music, poetry and song contributed to our sense of unity in the Spirit in this Yearly Meeting. We experienced depth in time and sound in the ancient music produced by the yidaki (didgeridoo) of the Yolgnu of north-east Arnhem Land. Peter Webb, the musician, explained that the Spirit lies dormant in the yidaki, then awakes when the yidaki is played, drawing up the voice of the Earth. Our time together was also enriched by classical duets played on a grand piano in the Chapel, singing along with the Wayfaring Strangers, poetry read by the Quaker Learning and Spiritual Development Committee, and worship with voice and instrumental pieces composed on the themes of Walking Cheerfully, Simplicity, Truth, Justice, Equality, and Peace.

We commend the Annual Quaker Lecture, given this year by Elizabeth Duke, a Member of Dunedin Monthly Meeting: "Can Religion Speak Truth?" Elizabeth explored the question "what is truth?" and gave a definition of religion as "doing spirituality together", which resonated with us. Truth goes far beyond statements or beliefs; we know it experientially in our relationships with one another.

The theme of truth revealed in relationships continued as our Meeting worked through issues that included how to support and engage with our young people. They have contributed to our gathering. We want to listen to them, rather than assume we know what they want.

Development of a new website brings challenges and opportunities; we want to be a visible and authentic on-line presence.

Four Friends spoke movingly of their personal experiences of the transformative power of the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) in Aotearoa New Zealand, and internationally. These stories brought us to the state of a gathered meeting. We saw how generosity and nurturing enable potential to be released. In the words of reflection from Rosie Remmerswaal's presentation, "The truth has its own power, let it go through you. You can't do it wrong."