

Memories of Earthquakes and their Aftermath

Discerning the right way forward

BY ROSEMARY TREDGOLD

Early in 2011 as we sat in Meeting for Worship, the walls rattled and the floors shook. It was very frightening. Peter Low ministered to the effect that ‘we were the only Quaker Meeting which actually quaked’. We later met outside but following the major earthquake on 22 February the premises were too damaged to use any more.

There had been some concern long before the earthquakes, that those premises in Cresswell Avenue did not meet our needs and were too isolated. We had decided to make some significant alterations and building work had been planned. We did not realise that we were about to be forced to move.

Initially we met in people’s homes just facing our loss and the shock of continuing earthquakes and needing to stay together. After a few weeks we began our search for somewhere to meet temporarily and for new permanent premises. A beautiful room at the Mary Potter Community Centre became available for meetings for the rest of that year. In November 2011, visiting Friends clerked a clearness meeting to discern the way forward. The following minute was recorded from this:

We have heard of the spiritual hurt and stress to Friends, and the Meeting as a whole, that the earthquakes have caused. We have a vision of a new Meeting House, which will nurture our Meeting and its members and look outwards to the wider community. We feel this vision will be best served through ownership. We feel the need for a spiritual home that is secure and allows us to develop our community in an inclusive and flexible way. There are still many uncertainties for us to face, but we feel that we can move forward with spiritual confidence towards ownership.

In January 2012 we moved to the Presbyterian Support offices for meeting because of the need for more space for the children. We were so grateful for the support of being able to meet in this building. In September 2014, when the Presbyterian buildings needed to undergo earthquake repairs, we moved again, this time hiring a room at the Aspire premises on Worcester St. During all this time the wider Christchurch community dealt with the overwhelming effects of earthquakes in the city. Our understanding about the implications of damaged buildings, the re-establishment of land and the costs involved all increased. Our financial settlement with the insurers was completed on 5 July 2012. Careful stewardship of our resources gave us a wide range of choices. We began exploring a range of possibilities, including sharing the use of a building that would be part of a rebuilt swimming pool in St. Albans; sharing space with the Methodists; joining in a community development competition; and buying various houses. We were grateful to be carried by the wider Quaker community, as we realised we had no energy for outside concerns.

In August 2012 at Monthly Meeting, we clarified what we were looking for:

1. A spiritual and physical home for our Meeting and the wider community.

2. Walking lightly upon the earth.
3. Disabled access.
4. A suitable space for our children and those who work with them.
5. Marae-style space to encourage overnight use by Young Friends and others.
6. Use of space by outside groups – serving the community.
7. A place for resident friends and travellers.
8. A place in accord with our testimonies.
9. Transport accessible.

After many of us had searched and searched, Dirk De Lu found a very different site near the centre of town, on a bus route. This site, a former car yard amidst other car yards which had been partially converted for educational use, was so different from other places we had considered that we had to give it careful thought. It did not meet all the needs we had identified, but did it meet enough of them?

This came from Marvin Hubbard on 4th February 2013: *At Meeting for Worship in Dunedin this morning we were asked to hold you in the light as you were discerning your way forward in regard to a decision on buying a proposed property for a Meeting House. I know nothing about the property or the decisions that you need to make.*

All I know is that I need to hold you in the light of prayer. I pray that you will uphold each other in listening attentive love during and after your decisions are made. I know that over the last two years you have all suffered one degree or another due to the continuing catastrophe that Christchurch has suffered.

When we dig deep love can come from suffering. At a Conservative Unprogrammed Meeting in Ohio after a very difficult Meeting for Worship for Business over same-sex marriage, I heard perhaps the wisest and deepest ministry I have ever encountered from a very elderly Friend who said at the end of his ministry ‘Let go and let God. In love and peace.’

On 25th February 2015 Christchurch Monthly Meeting purchased 213-217 Ferry Road after much discussion and discernment. As we look back, we can see that the process of discerning the right way forward and supporting each other through all the difficulties caused by the earthquakes drew us together as a community.

