

WIDER QUAKER FELLOWSHIP, AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

LETTER 126

JULY 2013

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Dear Friends,

Many thanks to those who responded to my first letter with encouragement to keep going! It is good to have this two-way communication and I hope that you will keep the comments and questions flowing.

In this letter I would like to explore the meaning of the word “Fellowship”. Two definitions given in *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* that seem to fit our Wider Quaker Fellowship are “the spirit of comradeship” and “intercourse, especially spiritual”.

In our case the spirit of comradeship relates to a common interest in examining and perhaps subscribing to Quaker values and testimonies. We belong to a group that keeps us in touch with Quaker thought and Quaker action.

The concept of “belonging” is important here. Some time ago, Rotorua U3A (formerly University of the Third Age) was treated to a talk by a local Maori Anglican minister, Tom Poata. Using his great talent for humorous presentation, his message was clear and strong – that although human beings tend to gravitate towards like-minded people, each of us must decide who we are and what we stand for. Children tend to relate to the values of their closer family; as they grow they learn to respond to more diverse groups of people. Eventually they associate and identify with specific groups and persons. This is fine unless the group or person imposes rigid expectations and punishes or rejects those who do not conform. Fear of rejection can result in the “letting go” of ambition and personal standards. Tom gave the example of people who drop out of the education system because of low marks in certain subjects. He said that Christians in particular have high expectations about “belonging” and their notions of “propriety” can inhibit expression of the individuality that stimulates development of literature, science and art.

The Religious Society of Friends is based on Christian teaching. Does it impose expectations or punish those who do not conform? One of our best-loved quotations from an epistle issued by a meeting of Quaker elders in 1656 says it all for me:

“Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all, with the measure of light that is pure and holy, may be guided; and so in the light walking and abiding, these things may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.”

One of our best Advices is to:

“Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your heart, and respond to them; they are the leadings of all that is good and pure. In each of us there is a light to show us our condition and to renew us.”

There is no doubt that Yearly Meeting in Aotearoa/New Zealand is willing to acknowledge and support those who do not feel able to seek full membership of the Society. Attenders and Enquirers are valued and are included in all activities except the holding of some official roles. Their presence is completely voluntary. And our Wider Quaker Fellowship is supported by Yearly Meeting because we understand that Quaker values extend far beyond the boundaries of the formal Society.

Since my last letter was sent out I have heard about two birthright Quakers who do not wish to be counted as members of the Society. Nevertheless their lives have clearly been influenced by Quaker values and they have passed these on to their children and grandchildren. They like to keep in touch through the Wider Quaker Fellowship.

Yours in Friendship,

Ruth Gadgil.



WQF Display at Yearly Meeting 2013

Some Quaker News

Yearly Meeting 2013

The annual Quaker Meeting for Worship for Business held on 10-13 May at El Rancho, Waikanae, on the Kapiti Coast was attended by more than 80 Friends. All eight Monthly Meetings and the Young Friends Meeting were represented and we had visitors from Australia, Britain and Japan Yearly Meetings. Hiroko Koibuchi was our guest from the Asia West Pacific Section of the Friends World Committee for Consultation.

Matters discussed included respectful relationships, Treaty commitments, constitutional reform, and Friends' spiritual and educational needs. Our Co-clerks reminded us that Quaker structure should not be a box that confines us, but a supporting trellis on which we can grow, flower and fruit.

The new edition of *Advices and Queries* was launched and is now freely available to Friends and Enquirers. It has been produced in A6 pocket size and also in A5 format with larger print.

The 2013 Quaker Lecture

An attentive audience of approximately 145 gathered at the El Rancho Camp on Sunday 12 May to hear Jeanette Fitzsimons, former Co-leader of the Green Party, deliver the fourth lecture in the annual series. The title was "*Enough! The challenge of a post-growth economy*". Although not a Quaker herself, Jeanette's appeal for diversion of resources into human well-being, rather than unsustainable economic growth, spoke to Quaker testimonies of simplicity and equality. Jeanette has repeated this lecture in Wellington and in Christchurch. A printed version can be obtained for \$8.00 by emailing quakerbooks@quaker.org.nz

Quaker Settlement Events

August 16-18 – Penal Reform

Sessions will be held on current trends in crime, criminal justice and penal reform. There will be updates on some of the positive changes over the past two years and on the Restorative Justice programme.

Murray Short and Tony Taylor will be facilitating.

Please contact Judith Robinson at the Settlement – Phone 06 3482369 or email judith.robinson.qa@gmail.com

September 13-15 – Training for Trustees

This workshop will cover responsibilities under the Trustees Act, the Charities Act, the Charitable Trusts Act and the Incorporated Societies Act. It will also look at Quaker attitudes to investment. Judith Timpany will be the Facilitator.

Please contact Michael Payne at the Settlement – email mm.p@clear.net.nz

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.