**Report of the Local Arrangements Committee - Yearly Meeting 2017 at El Rancho, Waikanae Beach (hosted by Wellington Monthly Meeting)**

We were guided from the start by the report of the LAC of the 2009 YM, which had been hosted by WMM. The 2009 report remains a useful guide for any LAC, especially if the venue is in a large urban area, and should be read in addition to this report.

An earlier 2017 LAC had discontinued when two of its members withdrew from involvement with Quakers. Our Committee was formed in September 2016 beginning with our only face to face meeting. Our subsequent three meetings were by Skype. Other communication was based on the cloud project management tool “Trello”, plus group emails, one on one emails and one on one phone calls.

We ran our Skype calls in the manner of Meeting for Worship for Business with periods of opening and closing silence, and a reading at the opening. Our reading each time was taken from the 2009 LAC report:

“Which do we want people to have touched: their hearts or minds or spirits (or all three)? Superb organisation touches the mind first, a warm and helpful welcome touches the heart first, a Yearly Meeting held in the Light touches the spirit first. In an ideal world all three are touched, and of course each interacts with and affects the other.”

By the time our committee was formed the dates had been finalised and the venue had already been selected. The venue selection team made an excellent choice, and this was the single most important factor in what proved to be a successful Yearly Meeting. The venue selection team was aware from experience of previous Yearly Meetings of the pitfalls of usingboarding schools during the cold winter months. The venue was booked more than one year ahead, as it is essential to allow at least that much lead time.

We ran our project around the Trello tool, which uses kanban project principles - well suited to a project such as this. We organised the Trello “board” in four main columns of “cards” - the columns were:

1. Relationship with El Rancho (the venue)
2. Financial and registrations
3. Promotion and publicity
4. Event programme, materials, equipment and transport

We also had a fifth column for LAC admin and reference materials. If we were to start again we might add a further column “Liaison with other Quaker groups” to cover Quaker Lecture Committee, Yearly Meeting Clerk, Quaker Book Sales, Trust Board and FWCC representatives.

The early cards on our board were based on the checklist provided to us by the LAC for YM 2016 (Northern MM).

We knew from WMM Nominators that our first priorities were to establish a bank account and develop a registration form, which we got on to quickly. But we did visit the venue very early to get a “feel” for the place that would be hosting our Friends. So taking our broad project categories in turn:

**Relationship with El Rancho**

We knew from previous LACs that it is important to make a friend at the venue. Our Convenor made a point of contacting and staying in touch with our designated El Rancho staff member. This required effort because the staff member was brand new in the role at the start of this project and seemingly very busy. We made two familiarisation visits to the venue - once early on in the planning, and again about two weeks prior to Yearly Meeting, with both occasions a chance to build relationships with El Rancho staff members. The Convenor phoned our contact on two or three occasions to confirm the cost of certain arrangements (e.g., to double check that quoted prices include GST).

We also established a separate relationship with the kitchen and made efforts to satisfy ourselves that the special diets would be edible. In fact the kitchen made a huge effort and really satisfied most people, etc.

**Financial and registrations**

Our financial and registration systems worked well because we invested time in building and challenging the financial model, and then building and testing/refining/testing/refining the on-line registration form which was built in Google Forms.

Google Forms proved a very easy way for people to register and about 90% used the on-line registration form, rather than the paper based form. Many of those who used the paper form paid using internet banking. Google Forms generates an automatic Google spreadsheet and this became the basis for all of our planning (e.g., rides from the station, special meals), room allocations, keeping track of who had paid, etc.

The budget was based on a profile of expected numbers of people staying in accommodation each night and dining at each meal. For the total number of people we used the total supplied by Kapiti who hosted a YM at the same venue in 2013. We used information from Wellington in 2009 to estimate the “distribution” of those numbers across each of the days and sessions. We made a point of understanding how many people we needed each day to “break even” and tried not to make a large surplus or deficit overall. We set our prices to encourage people to live in at El Rancho and to attend as full timers.

If we did it again we would consider a surcharge for anyone who wants to stay in for only the Saturday night, because this can increase costs for the whole weekend.

***Final numbers for Yearly Meeting 2017***

Accommodation (no. of persons):

Thurs 11th: 31 (incl. 7 single)

Fri 12th: 65 (incl. 11 single)

Sat 13th: 72 (incl. 13 single)

Sun 14th: 63 (incl. 11 single)

Dining (no. of persons)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Thurs 11 May** | **Fri 12 May** | **Sat 13 May** | **Sun 14 May** | **Mon 15 May** |
|  | **Dinner** | **B** | **L** | **D** | **B** | **L** | **D** | **B** | **L** | **D** | **B** | **L** |
| Standard vegetarian | 25 | 26 | 30 | 63 | 55 | 75 | 74 | 59 | 73 | 65 | 53 | 60 |
| Special vegan/ gluten free/ intolerant | 4 | 5 | 4 | 11 | 10 | 14 | 15 | 12 | 13 | 10 | 10 | 11 |
| Total | **29** | **31** | **34** | **74** | **65** | **89** | **89** | **71** | **86** | **75** | **63** | **71** |

Total number of non-resident people on site each day

Thursday 11th: 1

Friday 12th: 11

Saturday 13th: 22

Sunday 14th: 18

Monday 15th: 8

We came up with a format for name tags, based on the previous year’s YM held in Auckland, which had 9 (3x3) name tags per A4 sheet. We found out from the commercial printshop that it is good to allow a small margin of 1 to 2 mm around the edge to allow for an unprintable area. We asked the printers to use the best quality card that can go through the printer, to cut into the individual cards, and then to bore holes. We used lengths of wool as lanyards at the event.

Church camps and conferences (including Yearly Meeting) are subject to GST so the host Meeting must remember there is GST on the income and expenses when setting its budget and pricing. If the Meeting is GST registered it is good practice to issue a GST Tax Invoice to any Meeting that has paid registration on behalf of a member, as this allows the paying Meeting to claim the GST back. We understand that it is acceptable to embed the Tax Invoice in the body of an email. It just needs to be dated, contain the words “Tax Invoice”, tax number, and description of the service provided (e.g., “Joe Bloggs’ Yearly Meeting registration”).

We took the view that any cash sales of Quaker Lecture booklets were on behalf of Yearly Meeting and deposited the proceeds straight into the Yearly Meeting bank account (therefore we didn’t “sell” or “purchase” any booklets for GST purposes). As always, GST is potentially the biggest financial fish hook in running an event like Yearly Meeting. We only accepted cash as payment because that is MUCH easier than keeping track of people who owe money. Exceptions were three Monthly Meetings that asked for 10 copies on a sale or return basis and one Quaker who took 5 copies without asking first (though indignant when challenged about taking the books, this person took some considerable time and follow up to make payment - let that be a lesson for anyone tempted to offer booklets for sale on credit)

About 90% of people registered by the requested deadline 4 weeks before the start of YM. The registration form had a $50 additional charge - we did not enforce the charge though some late registrants voluntarily added it. Refunds of registration costs for people who cancelled or changed their bookings …….

**Publicity and materials**

We used the Kiwi Quakers Facebook group to promote the event and the venue, in addition to Friends Newsletter and YM Clerk’s newsletters. It was important early on that we worked out the deadlines for submitting material to these newsletters.

We developed an information pack which was mostly about the venue and location of Yearly Meeting and how to get there by car, public transport or cycling/walking. We developed map guides for people using all three modes, using Google Maps as a starting point. The information pack included information about times and locations of rides to the venue - we decided early on that we would only offer transport from the local railway station (Waikanae) at one time on the Thursday (before start of retreat) and one time on the Friday (before start of Yearly Meeting). We distributed most information packs by email - only a small number of people did not supply an email address, and only one who did requested a printed copy to be posted.

It proved very useful to have laminated signs and blue tack for the various meeting locations and the registration desk. Some of these locations shifted during Yearly Meeting and it was a simple matter of also shifting the sign and blue tack. At times our Quaker banner came in useful to draw people’s attention to the location of the registration desk and, later, for members of the public to find the Quaker Lecture.

**Accommodation and room allocations**

All bedrooms numbered plus they had name holders. We made names for each room. Most people had indicated who they wanted to share with so it was not a big job to allocate rooms, including sharing arrangements

**Equipment**

We had a technical person on our team who helped to make sure that we had the right equipment, hooked up in the right way with the venue’s projector and sound system, etc. This person was also a source of comfort during the YM itself by helping to make sure people’s presentations worked well, and that the microphone worked. During the planning we were not clear about whether anyone would want to use the projector for presentations so did not plan down to small details about what equipment we would be using. It is good to remember that some people will be nervous before their presentation. If it involves a slide show, the person setting up the projector can help by being a reassuring presence.

If we were doing it again we would identify in advance which computer we would use and plan to have someone(s) who can operate that computer available at every session. We would know what connections it needs to the projector and the computer would be fitted with a hand-held point and click device for presenters to advance through Powerpoint presentations. Another thing we would do is to get in touch with people who are presenting (per Gold Papers) and find out whether they plan on using audio and/or visual and how it needs to work.

We found during planning that should identify in advance which meeting rooms will be used for:

* The main Yearly Meeting (on the day we did an initial set up of the seating, which the appointed Elders slightly rearranged to beautiful effect)
* Sunday Meeting for Worship (could be the same room, but with some changes in seating setup)
* Friday afternoon Elders and Overseers
* Friday afternoon Standing Committee
* (Probably) Friday afternoon Trust Board meeting (liaise ahead of time with the Clerk of the Trust Board for requirements)
* Quaker Book Sales display table and sales facilities (liaise ahead of time with Quaker Book Sales)
* Morning and afternoon teas during Yearly Meeting, especially if it the LAC is self catering for these.

Biscuits and fruit etc plus tea and coffee

**Quaker Lecture**

We decided that the Quaker Lecture would be held at El Rancho without discussing it with the Quaker Lecture Committee (QLC). The QLC had assumed it would be held in downtown Wellington and they were concerned that the location would restrict the numbers who would turn out. But in the end we understand that most people were satisfied with the turnout (estimated at up to 220, with at most 92 of these attendees at Yearly Meeting). If we had our time over again we would have discussed details of location with QLC much earlier, though we would not have shifted the lecture (which is primarily a part of Yearly Meeting) do a distant venue. Holding the lecture at El Rancho saved us the large job of organising transport for 90 Quakers to and from Wellington.

We eventually agreed roles and responsibilities with QLC, with the LAC taking on the liaison, travel arrangements, etc. with the guest lecturer; and QLC doing publicity. Because of the Kapiti Coast location of the lecture, some members from Kapiti Monthly Meeting helped the QLC with local media contacts, etc., as well as spreading the word locally.

Until the day before the lecture we intended to hold it in Elm Hall, the same venue as the main Yearly Meeting. Kapiti Friends had been advising us to hold it in a larger hall, maintaining that public interest would be high. In the end we took their advice, aided by a review of how our Meeting’s post about the lecture had begun “performing” on Facebook, and booked the much large Kauri Hall. This proved to be a very good decision as Elm Hall would have been way too small for the numbers that turned up.

**Liaison with other Quaker groups**

We were not proactive in the way we liaised with other Quaker groups, e.g., the QLC as above. In almost all cases they initiated contact with us, luckily in sufficient time for us to do something. Here’s what could be a good framework for future LACs:

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|   |   |
| Quaker Lecture Committee | Liaise about the timing and location of the lecture.Roles and responsibilities are not set in stone so need to be negotiated (e.g., lecturer’s travel/accommodation, publicity) |
| Yearly Meeting Clerk/Secretary | Agree to liaise on the White Papers and Gold Papers timetables to ensure meal breaks coincide with any standard meal times of the venue, and speaking slots are assigned to days/times the speaker has registered to attend (e.g., a programmed speaker might only be registered for one day) |
| Quaker Book Sales | Make contact with David Alexander well ahead of time about how many books he wants to send. Depending on the location for Yearly Meeting, people from Whanganui/Taranaki might be able transport the books. In 2017 we did not end up manning the book stall, but a member from Christchurch who was very keen on having book sales manned the desk during some of the breaks. |
| Trust Board | Requirements for any on the Friday afternoon, including numbers attending, whiteboard, etc. |
| FWCC representatives | Find out the names and travel intentions of overseas visitors, as well as their dietary and accommodation preferences |
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**At the event**

We were blessed to have one person on the committee who registered for YM including the retreat and resided on site, and who intentionally attended no YM sessions - to be available to set up morning/afternoon tea, man the registration desk, set up for the Quaker Lecture, etc.

We were in a venue designed for more or less the exact purpose we were using it. This was helpful compared to some other YM venues in that security was easy. We locked the main meeting rooms with expensive equipment, but we did not provide keys to individual bedrooms. We decided that issuing bedroom keys would create the nightmare of trying to recover them from people before they left the venue. We received no complaints about lack of security.

**Yearly Meeting protocol**

All of the LAC members except one had never attended a Yearly Meeting and the one who had had done so very part time. We learned how our role interacts with others:

* Elders of the meeting were appointed and then manned the doors of sessions and the Quaker lecture. They also took on the re-setting of the main meeting room for Meeting for Worship on the Sunday.
* The LAC Convenor had to do a welcoming address on the Friday evening and daily notices. We followed a suggestion of having a box in the registration/morning tea/display hall for people to put in their notices. The job of the Convenor is to sift through these beforehand to identify the ones that will be called, and later during notices to call the person who wants to give the notice.
* We also set up boxes for epistle suggestions and lost property.
* There’s a need to give the safety briefing a few times and announcements about any other matters (e.g., extra duvets were made available for the forecast cold night, etc.). It is helpful to find out beforehand a bit about emergency arrangements in the area (e.g., what happens if you dial an ambulance in that area, locality/distance to nearest emergency facility, etc.)

Obtain the YM Clerk’s intentions about who will have a speaking slot at YM so that the dates and times of each speaker can coincide with the period for which that person has registered.

Some of us found the foibles of Friends, after all the effort we put into this event, to be spiritually challenging - but it is helpful to remind ourselves to appreciate our Friends, foibles and all, while they are with us. At the end of Yearly Meeting, when all the Friends have left, you come to realise that it is all about the people - the venue/organisation has no life of its own separate from the people. As a seed can produce nothing unless it falls to the ground and dies, Yearly Meeting comes together for a time and then ends.