

Epistle of the Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri,

held at Sonninghill Hostel, Hamilton and online 24th – 27th April, 2024

“You have to look for the wonder, it will reveal itself”. Jonathan Tailby (2020)

Kia ora koutou, greetings to Friends everywhere.

Yearly Meeting 2024 opened with worship as we gathered in the sunlight at Sonninghill Hostel joined online by Friends around the motu (country) and the world.

Our formal meeting followed a preparation day on the Theme of “Faith and Play: an experiential tool for spiritual reflection”, which had led us into listening: moving out of the day-to-day bustle of everyday life and focusing on Quaker values, thoughts and history, as we prepared for Yearly Meeting.

We were welcomed to the Waikato, with acknowledgement of tangata whenua (indigenous people, the Tainui iwi) and a whakataukī (Māori proverb) of the Waikato River: “Waikato taniwharau, he piko he taniwha, he piko he taniwha.” (Waikato of a hundred taniwha, on every bend a friendly taniwha.)

We were joined by Margaret Clark from Quakers Australia (online) and in person by Herrad Heselhaus, who represented Japan Yearly Meeting and as our visitor from the Asia West Pacific section of FWCC.

We celebrated with joy the Quaker Faith & Practice Revision Committee’s completion of our new 2024 version “On These Islands: I runga i ngā motu nei”. This was the culmination of two years of gathering new contributions, and discernment by the Committee and by Meetings across Aotearoa. It is an inspirational resource, in the Quaker tradition of ‘continuing revelation’. While the work is done, it is not ‘dusted’ – it is up to us to “spread the dust” and the book around the motu.

The Website Oversight Committee shared their discernment of the options for us around our website and its functions: outreach, inreach and linked administrative document management systems. We are challenged to consider what we need as an organisation, and how we keep our foundations strong – balancing looking after ourselves so we can look after others. In a later session, we came together in open worship in Quaker tradition as we discerned the pathway forward for our electronic infrastructure and with careful discernment we supported the recommendation of the Committee.

Historical changes in our membership numbers and our capacity to maintain our major functions and enterprises remained a continuing theme of this yearly meeting. This reflects our aging population and the gap between numbers of available friends and our current expectations of ourselves in business and outreach.

This is not a new challenge but has become more pressing in recent times. We acknowledge the work of our committees to bridge this gap and look forward to future review of our level of activity. We appear to be at a pivotal point in time where decisions need to be made to ensure ongoing guardianship and sustainability of our major enterprises. We took comfort from the encouragement and support of our Australian Quaker whānau (family) who are in the process of reorganising their structures.

The 2024 Quaker Lecture: “A Queer Gift: Stepping beyond the mindset” – was presented by some of our Rainbow community who shared personal stories of struggles, courage, and joys. Although we may believe we do not suffer from prejudice, we were reminded that residues of prejudice remain within.

Climate justice is an ongoing concern from our Yearly Meetings and 2024 was no exception. In the context of governments and those in power we were encouraged to be strategic, innovative and joyful in an holistic approach to raising issues and advocacy on critical climate change issues.

A legend of the Quechua people from Peru was shared. It is about a hardworking and persistent hummingbird, though small, that continued to try to put out the forest fires, because to do nothing was not the answer.

In Peace and Friendship

Anne & Alistair Hall

Yearly Meeting Co-Clerks

Epistle of Young Friends Camp 2024

Ōtaki, 29 March – 2 April, 2024

Over Easter weekend Young Friends from all around the motu gathered together for YF camp. Some of us had been there before, to attend and cook for Ōtaki Summer Camp held in January. There was a strong sense of community at the Leason farm. The property is full of tiny homes where people can come to live, and we got to see several more which are currently being built. The community was described to us as “the Quaker Settlement without any money”. All of the toilets on the property are composting toilets, which is even more impressive during the Summer Camp as it is attended by 300 people. The weather was clear but proved to be cold enough that by the end of the camp we had all moved our mattresses into the barn to sleep by the fire.

Meeting new friends and greeting old friends, the camp provided a chance to spend time in a beautiful setting, talking, crafting and relaxing. Our three days in Ōtaki were refreshing. We spent time helping the Leason Family with farm chores and otherwise were crafting, lounging by the fire, reading, eating chocolate, op-shopping, and mending the op shop finds! We also found time to complete more adventurous pursuits including ocean swims, tree climbing, river walks and treehouse exploring.

The Young Friends are looking forward to next year’s YF camp which is to be held on Quarantine Island in Dunedin.

Epistle of Junior Young Friends Camp 2024

Napier, 15 – 21 April 2024

On Monday the 15th of April the Junior Young Friends travelled to Napier to meet in the Asher Hall, part of St Paul’s Presbyterian Church. The contents of JYF this year were focused on team-building, getting to know each other and pushing ourselves out of our comfort zones. Throughout the week we were challenged to make new friends and work together as a team.

The first half of the week included lots of team-bonding exercises like scavenger hunts, discussing deep topics such as Te Tiriti o Waitangi, going to Arataki honey farm and bush walks. We ended Wednesday relaxing with a movie.

In the second half of the week we focused on connection with ourselves and others and we talked about giving back to the community. One way we explored connection was with a full day of drama games. Most of those games were fun and energetic but throughout the day they became more serious, thoughtful and challenging.

One way we gave back to the community was by visiting an organic farm, learning all about organic farming, and even helping out with picking crops. Our last full day together was spent visiting various activities, such as op-shops, museums, galleries, mini-golf and Ocean-Spa. We also had a JYF concert which is said to be a long-standing tradition. It started with a skit and then some comedy, singing and gymnastics acts to follow.

The whole week was very enjoyable but there were some challenges that came with the week as well. Lots of us were affected by uncomfortable mattresses and lack of sleep. There were also some instances where people got lost or separated from the group which was frustrating but was easily fixed by ice cream and a lesson to take away. Overall, this year’s JYF was an enjoyable and enlightening experience.