

Letter to America

BY JAN AND JOHN SCHMIDT, WELLINGTON RESIDENT FRIENDS

Dear Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting,

Being Resident Friends in Wellington, Aotearoa/New Zealand is a joy. The Quakers across the country have welcomed us and shown such care and acceptance. We are lucky ducks! We know the Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting, (PFYM) is happening in June and thought you might want to know about our YM experience in NZ.

Unlike in the United States or in North Carolina (NC), the Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa/NZ (YMANZ) is the only Yearly Meeting for the country and all the Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups are unprogrammed meetings. We have been to two Yearly Meetings: 2021 in person and 2022 on Zoom. In both cases we have learned so much about NZ Quaker process in making decisions and how different it is from what we are accustomed to at PFYM Yearly Meeting. Preparation for the YMANZ begins months before we all get together. By the time Yearly Meeting begins, many decisions have been discerned through documents sent to Meetings over four months and unity reached at business meetings. During Yearly Meeting there are discussions about business issues that need further discernment and about important social interests that Quakers are concerned about climate challenges, criminal justice, and other issues.

Though Covid makes meeting online necessary, there is a huge difference between an in-person and an online YM. As much as the clerks and tech folks tried to create bonding opportunities through breakout rooms, where small groups of folks gathered for fellowship, we missed the in-person socializing, and walks and meals together. However, on the plus side, more people were able to participate in the Yearly Meeting and the business of the meeting was accomplished. The Clerks are amazing... facilitating, listening, synthesizing, writing minutes based on decisions... we so appreciate and admire their warmth, patience, and dedication.

Understanding that engaging young families, children and young people is important to having dynamic and healthy meetings, the YM approved contracting a young person to assist with outreach and engagement of this group.

This is a concern that meetings across the US have and hopefully we can all learn from NZ Quakers.

The workshop on climate was especially important and memorable. A TED talk discussed the notion that sometimes a problem can seem so huge and unsolvable that we tend to want to give up in desperation. Whereas if we focus on helping each other with support, our avoidance tendencies can be turned into appropriate positive responses.

It was very exciting to have the first All-Age Worship Meeting as part of Yearly Meeting. It proved to be a wonderful opportunity for Quakers, young and old, around New Zealand to come together for this experience that was different from the ones to which unprogrammed meetings are accustomed. We welcomed Melinda Wenner Bradley, to share a *Faith and Play* story called *Gifts*. Melinda is a Quaker from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and works as the YM Youth Religious Life Co-ordinator. Using simple props, Melinda shared the story of gifts, the ones we share with our Meeting community.

“What gifts do you have to share with your family, your friends, and your meeting community?” The children responded vocally, and the adults shared their thoughts through the chat tool that Zoom provides. We then all went into silence for the remainder of the time. Melinda is not far from our NC meetings and she is a resource we can consider engaging.

In peace, love and Light,
Jan and John Schmidt

Editors' Note: American spelling is used in this letter to recognise that it is from and to people who use this style of spelling.

Gifts: Faith and Play Ministry with Melinda Wenner Bradley



The Inner Light / Spirit



Gift of welcome