

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

Held at Burns Lodge, Mosgiel, Dunedin 25-28 May 2018

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou

Dunedin Monthly Meeting welcomed 62 Friends to Mosgiel. We heard the legend of Te Matamata the taniwha; a mythological water creature. Tangata whenua (local Māori) recognised the hills above Mosgiel as forming the taniwha's body. Captain Cook, when he first sighted the place, saw only an interesting saddle between 2 hills on the skyline. What are we open to seeing here? This resonated with part of the theme of our preparatory retreat for the Meeting; of being willing to recognise our shadow.

We acknowledged the indigenous people of this rohe (region); Kai Tahu and Kati Mamoe. Departed Friends were acknowledged with a waiata tangi (song of lament). We also acknowledged the Burns family who built the homestead and from whom the Lodge takes its name.

Visiting Friends from Australia Yearly Meeting, Britain Yearly Meeting, and North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) in the United States were welcomed.

Music, poetry and song contributed to our sense of unity in the Spirit in this Yearly Meeting. We experienced depth in time and sound in the ancient music produced by the yidaki (didgeridoo) of the Yolgnu of north-east Arnhem Land. Peter Webb, the musician, explained that the Spirit lies dormant in the yidaki, then awakes when the yidaki is played, drawing up the voice of the Earth. Our time together was also enriched by classical duets played on a grand piano in the Chapel, singing along with the Wayfaring Strangers, poetry read by the Quaker Learning and Spiritual Development Committee, and worship with voice and instrumental pieces composed on the themes of Walking Cheerfully, Simplicity, Truth, Justice, Equality, and Peace.

We commend the Annual Quaker Lecture, given this year by Elizabeth Duke, a Member of Dunedin Monthly Meeting: "Can Religion Speak Truth?" Elizabeth explored the question "what is truth?" and gave a definition of religion as "doing spirituality together", which resonated with us. Truth goes far beyond statements or beliefs; we know it experientially in our relationships with one another.

The theme of truth revealed in relationships continued as our Meeting worked through issues that included how to support and engage with our young people. They have contributed to our gathering. We want to listen to them, rather than assume we know what they want.

Development of a new website brings challenges and opportunities; we want to be a visible and authentic on-line presence.

Four Friends spoke movingly of their personal experiences of the transformative power of the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) in Aotearoa New Zealand, and internationally. These stories brought us to the state of a gathered meeting. We saw how generosity and nurturing enable potential to be released. In the words of reflection from Rosie Remmerswaal's presentation, "The truth has its own power, let it go through you. You can't do it wrong."

Junior Young Friends Camp 15-20th April 2018

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Kia Ora to Friends Everywhere

2018 Junior Young Friends (JYF) Camp was about community and family. This was empowered by the traditional Māori Pōwhiri which welcomed us to the Raumatī Beach Marae in Kāpiti. The marae was a peaceful space to reflect upon the togetherness of our group. The name of the wharenuī is Kia Aio Te Noho - To Stay Comfortably.

Over the 5 days we spent in Kāpiti, our discussions were based on the topics of peace and integrity. These were woven into conversations about global issues and what we as a generation will face in the future. We had Murray Short (our Yearly Meeting Clerk) share the process of Quaker Decision Making with us and explain how we as Quakers work towards a united understanding.

A Young Friend sparked a conversation after speaking about past JYF Camps and stating that he felt most himself when attending these gatherings. This was a common feeling amongst many of the JYFs and we all agreed that we feel part of a loving and accepting community. As young people, this provides us with a foundation of trust and the ability to empathise with those around us as we strive to see the light in all situations.

Young Friends Camp 30th March - 3rd April 2018

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Over Easter weekend 2018, eleven Young Friends gathered on Waiheke island. Heaving suitcases full of vegan food, we squeezed aboard the island bus and into the arms of the Friends House in Palm Beach.

We noticed almost immediately a culture of inclusivity, warmth and trust within the group. To describe it, we drew on the metaphor of our sacred 'Tapu Bubble,' which was shared with us in a workshop held during the camp. We held intact an atmosphere of acceptance. It was a safe space to explore our connection to one another, to Quakerism and to reflect on the paths that brought us here. Throughout the week we had opportunities to expand this bubble to be enriched by others in the community such as the Waiheke Waka Ama Club, local Quakers and by other spiritual perspectives including a Māori world view.

Larissa Barritt, a Young Friend from Australia brought with her our connection to Australian YFs. We loved hearing stories from her life. Her bravery and integrity inspired us. Another thing that made this camp special was the presence of many younger YFs, for whom this was their first camp. They reflected that the structure and culture of the camp encouraged a step up in maturity, and an expansion of the scope and depth of conversation.

We trekked across the island at sunrise to experience Waka Ama (paddling traditional outrigger canoes) with the Waiheke Waka Ama Club at Piritahi Marae. We had a great time racing each other in five person canoes, testing our teamwork and our ability to listen and move in unison. The enthusiasm of the club members was infectious and we enjoyed adventuring into the hidden bays of the island under our own steam.

This experience put us in great spirits to tackle the agapanthus growing along the banks of the house in order to make room for some new native bush. Thanks to Sue Stover, Robin Watts and Lincoln Jackson for providing the leadership, seedlings and the impetus to pave some new steps to the meeting house.

Fortunately, we were well nourished by a daily bounty of hearty vegan food. We thank Marion Leighton [marionated.wordpress.com] for many of the delicious recipes. We had as much fun preparing the food together as we did eating it.

We invited Tāne Thomas and Wendy Salter to facilitate a conversation with us about Māori spirituality and how we can each honour our own sacredness through the metaphor of a Tapu Bubble. The local Quakers from Waiheke joined us for this workshop. They asked us questions that we had never thought to ask each other before. As we passed around Tāne's rakau (walking stick), we each shared a version of our pepeha (the geographical history of our connection to the land) and our whakapapa (ancestry). It was fascinating to hear how our friends had come into being, and into the Quaker community.

Inspired by the way we had opened up new territory in our conversation, we created a game where we wrote questions to ask each other in a group. Questions such as 'What do you hope to inherit from your parents?', 'What are three possibly surprising things you have in common with the person on your right?' 'Who in the room would you like to get to know better?' and 'when was the last time you wet your pants?'. The game unearthed raucous laughter and stories that allowed us to resonate with each other with incredible depth and lightness.

We were blessed with the kind of weather that invited us to swim in the ocean each day, and some adventurers among us experienced the triumph of swimming out to Nani Island. We felt so lucky to be a part of the living history of the beautiful Friends Centre on Waiheke. In the lead-up to Summer Gathering, we look forward to facilitating a session about Young Friends past and present. We hope to continue to expand the scope of conversation and depth of our connection to you all.