

WIDER QUAKER FELLOWSHIP, AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

LETTER 128

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Dear Friends,

We are well into 2014 now. I would like to send good wishes to our 179 members and hope that it will be a good year in many ways for all of you.

Since my last letter was sent out, the mailbag has produced food for thought. One of our correspondents feels that WQF should offer more to isolated members of the Religious Society of Friends. These Friends receive documents and newsletters regularly and are therefore already aware of Quaker events and meetings. Because they cannot participate, their need is for fellowship rather than for information.

How can we strengthen this fellowship? One obvious way is by shared correspondence. We are always ready to receive and discuss your thoughts and insights. Letters are very welcome, whether they come by post or by email. Social media such as Facebook might offer advantages but would exclude those who don't have a computer. What are your thoughts?

This WQF Letter concentrates on a topic – poverty – that seems to be mentioned in all the media these days without any obvious effect on its eradication. Below you will find some examples of Quaker attitudes to the problem.

Yours in Friendship,

Ruth Gadgil.

Quakers and POVERTY

First of all, what do we mean by poverty? The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary describes it as

The condition of having little or no wealth or material possessions; deficiency in some property, quality or ingredient.

Generally we think of poverty in material terms and hope that improvement of financial status will bring about relief of physical, mental and spiritual problems. Another approach is to find out what poverty is really like in order to share the condition and promote a better understanding of its causes and possible remedies. Good quality research is needed to find out the true extent of the problem.

What can Quakers say? Here is a sample of their actions that have made a difference over the years:

From Quaker Faith and Practice in Aotearoa New Zealand 2003: 1.09.

During the 1880s, Thomas and Ann Fletcher Jackson and their family of sons arrived from England to become some of the earliest Quaker settlers in New Zealand. Their granddaughter Ruby Dowsett wrote that despite tremendous poverty, Ann started a rural school during their years of Friendly isolation near Whangarei.

From *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree 1871-1954. “ Concerned about poverty, Rowntree conducted a survey of working-class homes in York in 1897-98 and published his findings in Poverty: A Study of Town Life (1901) which became a classic in empirical sociology. A second survey, conducted in 1936, was published as Poverty and Progress (1941). He was also active in labour management conciliation and in various philanthropies.”

From *Chocolate Wars* by Deborah Cadbury (2010)

[The Old-Age Pensions Act 1908, often regarded as one of the foundations of modern social welfare] “... brought fundamental reform to at least one social issue that had troubled the Quaker conscience for generations: poverty. The impetus for change had come in part from the Quaker community itself, through influential writers such as Seebohm Rowntree.

From *Wikipedia*

“1944 CORSO formed. As the end of the Second World War neared, people began to realise that a massive aid effort would be required to rehabilitate war-torn nations. While fighting continued overseas, a group of New Zealanders concerned with the provision of aid met and decided to join forces, forming the Council of Organisations for Relief Service Overseas (CORSO). The co-convenors of the meeting were the New Zealand Red Cross Society, the National Council of Churches and the Society of Friends (Quakers). Many countries have benefited from CORSO’s efforts. The organisation became increasingly involved in the developing world and also spoke out about poverty in New Zealand.”

Brian Easton tells us that CORSO “... decided in 1979 that it was wrong to ignore poverty in New Zealand while working to relieve it offshore. It made a film describing poor families here. The Government addressed the problem by withdrawing its funding of CORSO.” (New Zealand Listener 25.1.14, p 54).

From *Quaker Faith and Practice in Aotearoa New Zealand 2003: 7.02.*

“His concern for the underfed peoples of the world led him to relinquish his position as a solicitor in order to show, by intensive cultivation of half an acre, that many could contribute in some small measure to the world’s food supply.” (Testimony to the life of William Pudney, 1956).

From *Quaker Faith and Practice 1995: 23.51.*

“ he took a small flat in a block of workers’ dwellings in a poor part of London because he felt that his discipleship of Jesus called him to share their life as much as he could, and also to open the eyes of his comfortable friends to the way in which the great majority of people had to live.” (Testimony concerning Stephen Henry Hobhouse, 1961).

From *Quaker Faith and Practice 1995: 23.49.*

“... the only way to tackle personal poverty is to let people have more money. More money for some inevitably means less for others. Are we willing to press for this?” (Martin Wyatt, 1986.)

And what are Quakers doing in New Zealand today? Many small things, a few of which spring to mind:

- ❖ Some Monthly Meetings and individual Quakers support the Child Poverty Action Group with annual financial donations.
- ❖ The Quaker Investment Ethical Trust has a “Dolphin Fund” set up to provide interest-free loans to applicants suffering significant financial hardship.
- ❖ The Rotorua Breath of Heaven Trust (originally set up by Methodists, but supported by local Quakers) offers assistance to people who find themselves in debt due to sickness or redundancy. The Trust takes over debt which the client then pays back in small, regular instalments over a period of years.

You will know of plenty of other Quaker attempts to relieve poverty in this country. Can you write and tell us about them?

And what do you think about the following well-known passage from *The Holy Bible*?

“For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.”
(Matthew 26:11 and John 12:8)

Some events at the Quaker Settlement, 76 Virginia Rd. Whanganui 4500:

February 21-23 “Mediation” (Closing date for registrations 7 February)

Participants will need to have some skill in listening, facilitation and problem-solving.

Jillian Wychel and David James will lead the workshop.

Settlement Contact: Clare Fearnley: clare.rosamund.fearnley@gmail.com

March 7-9 “Summer Weekend @ Quaker Acres” (Please register by 28 February)

A playful and friendly weekend for all ages. Help out with some of the jobs that need to be done around the Settlement. Great food and free accommodation. Bring gloves, gumboots, swim togs and musical instruments.

Settlement Contact: Lyneke Onderwater: lyneke@orcon.net.nz

Easter, 17-21 April “Changing the Dream: Quakers address the spirituality of climate change and sustainability” (Registration closes 3 April)

A workshop organised by the Quaker Futures Committee and Quaker Young Friends – open to all interested people.

Settlement Contacts: Futures: Nigel Brooke: brooke.osteos@clear.net.nz;

Young Friends: Judith Robinson: judith.robinson.qa@gmail.com

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.