

WIDER QUAKER FELLOWSHIP, AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

LETTER 142

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Dear Friends,

A word that has become very popular recently is “sustainability”. Nowadays there seems to be some sort of obligation for it to be included in all reports and media offerings. I wonder how many of us stop to think what we really mean by the word, let alone the consequences of ignoring or encouraging sustainability.

The New Zealand Oxford Dictionary has the following definition: “(Of economic development or the utilisation of natural resources) ability to be maintained at a particular level without causing damage to the environment or depletion of the resource.”

Quakers have long been aware of difficulty with this definition. Economic development and conservation of natural resources seem to be mutually incompatible objectives. We prefer the word “stewardship” to “sustainability” and admire the Maori concept of “kaitiakitanga” or guardianship. This is only the start of the change in attitude that is needed in order to achieve better balance between exploitation and human survival. Humanity has outgrown its habitat.

Two of our annual national Quaker Lectures have addressed this subject. In 2013 Jeanette Fitzsimons (Enough! The challenge of a post-growth economy) called for leadership and a national conversation about refocusing on what matters – well-being rather than growth; quality rather than quantity and major reduction in overall consumerism. This year Jane Kelsey (Transcending neo-liberalism: moving from a state of denial to progressive transformation) made it clear that the current economic model is failing. There is urgent need for radical change and a new economic and social order. Both speakers spoke of Quaker values as core requirements in economic transformation.

Strikingly, both speakers also emphasised the need for the older generation to give space and support to younger people who, after all, have the greatest interest in shaping their future.

Is it possible for New Zealand to base its economy entirely on renewable resources? We're fortunate in being able to harness rivers for hydroelectric power, thereby reducing reliance on fossil fuel. Fast-growing tree species, planted, harvested and replanted, conserve native forests and protect unstable land. While our population continues to increase, we shall need and want more and more from our natural environment. The least we can do is to use it more efficiently, and to waste less.

In the rest of this Letter I have included the thoughts of some of the Quakers who have been and are deeply concerned about stewardship and a change to wiser use of the resources that remain on our planet.

Yours in Friendship,

Ruth Gadgil.

What have Quakers had to say about stewardship?

For decades contemporary Friends have pointed out how our greed, selfishness and ignorance are threatening the future health of the earth, and how stewardship of the earth is a major concern. I think there is now a general understanding among us that the present environmental crisis is a spiritual and religious crisis.

Gudde Moller (2000).

Our human focus needs to be widened to encompass the whole web of life. We need to change from domination to participation. The process will not be easy. Our belief in simplicity will help us to live full and joyful lives ... we can cheerfully do more with less.

Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand (2000).

We find our concept of stewardship and the Maori concept of kaitiakitanga (guardianship) helpful.

Bay of Plenty/Auckland Monthly Meeting (2001).

I see us as integrally part of the environment. We're not detached from it. The atoms from which our bodies are made were forged in the stars a long time ago. We can't survive without the water and plants and other animals ... And, because of our huge power over the natural world, we have a correspondingly huge responsibility to look after it. I have moved away from the dualistic interpretations of man over nature, spirit over matter, the hierarchies of God, Man, Woman, Nature. That doesn't tie in with my understanding of God, or of people. I have always had a very strong sense of awe in the face of the mysteries of the natural world.

Christina Gibb (2002).

Do you buy clothes on impulse because you have money to spend, or because you really need them? Consider carefully whether or not the old could be mended and used rather than discarded.

Roger Martin (1973).

We make uneasy compromises until it can be said that Quakers are of the world, but not in it. In our relation to New Zealand society, it is difficult to revolt, difficult not to be co-opted and corrupted. If the devil had approached us and said "I will provide you with a quick convenient means of transport, if you will sacrifice to me 700 lives a year, burn offerings that will poison the air, and design your cities and your lives so as to minimise the possibility of 'community'", we would probably have turned him down. But our society has accepted all this piecemeal, and Friends have drifted along with it. So, here we are, dependent on our automobiles, perhaps vaguely guilty about it, but caught up in a system we cannot extricate ourselves from.

Larry Jones (1973)

Let me be so sensitive to the needs of others and to the glories of your universe that I live as delicately and as harmlessly as possible. Betty Fowler (1979)

I am also afraid, and often angry, because those links which join animate and inanimate together are being broken with savage wars, extinction of species and forests, rending the fabric of that great relationship well understood by indigenous people, but insolently desecrated and trampled by others. Muriel Langford (1997).

I suspect that a real sense of belonging stems from more than an understanding of the group impact on the surroundings ... To know at one and the same time one's importance and one's insignificance, is to have entered a spiritual understanding of one's place in the scheme of things. Perhaps all who experience this sense of 'belonging to the land' have touched the sacred Oneness in the nature of existence. Mary Mathews (1995).

We do not own the world, and its riches are not ours to dispose of at will. Show a loving consideration for all creatures, and seek to maintain the beauty and variety of the world. Work to ensure that our increasing power over nature is used responsibly, with reverence for life. Britain Yearly Meeting Advices and Queries 42 (1994).

**Weekends at the Quaker Settlement,
76 Virginia Road, Whanganui 4500:**

15-17 September – Writing techniques as an aid to discernment

Facilitators: Jacque Aldridge, Jan-Louise Hamblyn.
Contact: Hannah Chapman-Searle
hchapmansearle@gmail.com

6-8 October – Treaty Issues

Facilitators: Treaty Relations Group.
Contact: Christine England
syntonychris86@gmail.com

27-29 October – With a tender hand

Facilitators: Elizabeth Thompson, Elizabeth Duke.
Contact: Joy Rising
risingjoy2004@yahoo.com

Summer Gathering 2017/18
will be at Ngamuwahine Outdoor Education Lodge
located in the foothills of the Kaimai Ranges
near Tauranga
Monday 28th December 2017 to
Monday 4th January 2018
Theme: "Back to Basics"

If you are interested, please phone
Dave Wicks: 07 307 7213 or email
summer.gathering.nz@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.