

Walking in the light under the rainbow

A Quaker statement of commitment and inclusion

Offered by: The Religious Society of Friends in Aotearoa New Zealand - Quakers

Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri

Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand

We, Quakers in Aotearoa New Zealand, reaffirm our commitment to creating a loving and inclusive community where sexual orientation and gender identities can be expressed. We seek to ensure that all in our community can be fully who they are, and that all can feel safe and at home. Further, we reaffirm our stand to advocate for a society in which all people can contribute authentically to public and private life.

Our faith has grown from the radical Christian call, in the 17th century, to return to simple experience of the divine and of loving community. Central to Quakerism is that every person without exception has within them a source of spiritual guidance, sometimes called inner light, spirit, or 'that of God'. Therefore our welcome into membership, and our appointments to responsibilities, are open to all without distinction of sexual or gender identity or expression.

We recognise that in many times and cultures people who express sexual and gender identities and orientations which differ from the accepted norms have been rejected, condemned and persecuted. Their hard-earned rights are under organised attack, and we are deeply troubled by the presence in society of fanatical hatred and hostility. Christian churches worldwide, together with other faith traditions, bear a share of responsibility for this historic and more recent intolerance. Quakers came to Aotearoa within colonial settlement, and are affected by its values and conventions.

There is hurt and pain among us, and there are voices not yet heard. Most of the rainbow community have experience of needing to hide their own sexual and gender identity, due to being endangered by social disapproval, exclusion, violence, medical intervention and even legal prosecution. We recognise that individuals and groups, among us as well as in society in general, have differing life experiences and understanding of sexuality, gender and identity. Conflict may arise which, when we are open to a resolution, offers further opportunity for understanding and loving connection. The process of self-creation can be lifelong, for each of us, and for Quakers together.

As Quakers, we are called to examine ways in which our life and organisation may still be 'normative' and excluding, whether we take some forms of identity as standard, and in what ways we unintentionally make people feel unwelcome or 'othered'. Are we able to manage our own feelings about ways new to us and are we able to make space for people to be vibrant, vital and even flamboyant?

We honour all the work done by Friends before, during and since our 1992 'Statement of Affirmation and Reconciliation', including the learning process which led to that statement. Friends were active in support for the 1986 Homosexual Law Reform Act, which decriminalised sexual activity between men aged 16 and over. Our Yearly Meeting actively supported both the 2004 Civil Union Act, giving legal recognition to relationships between same-sex couples, and the 2013 Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Act recognising same-sex marriage. A Quaker marriage or civil union, irrespective of gender, has legal recognition, and several have been celebrated within the Yearly Meeting. We trust Quakers can continue to be part of the movement to recognise, uplift and protect the rights of the LGBTQ+/rainbow community along with the rights of all people. We seek for all to feel safe and protected.

The time is ripe to renew our commitment of 1992: "We affirm the beauty and equality of all people as a part of this planet. We will work for reconciliation within ourselves, within our Meetings and within society in general".

'Let us then try what love will do' (*William Penn*).