

MINUTES

Formal Session 5: Friday 7 July at 11.15am AEST

YM23.25: Welcome and Opening Worship

Elizabeth Kwan brought a reading from a Statement made by Yearly Meeting Officers in 1987:

On the occasion of the bicentennial of European settlement in Australia, we have considered deeply our role in any observances. We believe that, rather than being a time for celebration, this is a time for reflection and prayer; reflection on a history of cruelty and injustice to the original owners of this land and of broken promises by present and past governments over land rights legislation; prayers for forgiveness and for action to create an Australia where many races may live in harmony and where injustices towards Aborigines may be redressed...

The Yearly Meeting reminds Friends of our historical and spiritual witness in the field of social justice and racial inequality...and asks its members to seek ways of expressing a commitment to an Australian society where harmonious relationships between our diverse cultures are valued and where special regard is given to the rights and aspirations of the Aborigines.

From *this we can say* 5.20

YM23.26: Second Reading of the Epistle

Jenny Seaton (TRM) presented a second reading of the YM23 Epistle. The Clerk reminded Friends that the Epistle draft can be found on the YM23 website and that they can send their comments to Susan Rockliff, Maxine Cooper and Jenny Seaton.

YM23.27: Minute of Record for Backhouse Lecture and Reflection Session

The Backhouse Lecture Committee brings the minute:

Quaker song writer and media creator Jon Watts delivered the 2023 Backhouse Lecture on 4 July 2023 on the topic of *Quakers, the Internet, and What's Next*.

Tasmanian Regional Meeting Clerk, Mark Macleod welcomed Jon Watts to the community of Australian Friends, and remarked on the very long lead time for this visit due to the pandemic, and how right the timing seemed in 2023.

Jon began his lecture by speaking about the joy of his early experiences as a young person in a liberal Quaker community. During his college years at Guildford College he was confronted by the many other beliefs and practices that are part of the Quaker faith; and it led him to question whether Quakerism was a good fit for him. After a period away from Friends, he found inspiration in the stories of early Friends such as George Fox, James Naylor and the musician turned shoe maker Solomon Eccles.

Jon spoke of his surprise at a video that he had made, *Friend Speaks my Mind*, in which the meeting turned into a dance party, going viral on the then new communication platform called 'YouTube'. In a short period of time, Friends and others all around the world had viewed the video and posted passionate responses in the comments section to the theology in the song. From this moment, it seemed to Jon, that the internet was a space where Friends and other seekers may be able to encounter each other and learn more about the many ways of worshipping and following a spiritual practice.

Sensing that Friends needed prompting to tell their stories, Jon was led to work on a new project, 'Quaker Speak', in which he interviewed Friends about their experiences and beliefs as Quakers. Despite initial uncertainty, he came to see interviewing as a ministry, and a place in which the Quaker practice of deep listening could allow people to open up to the sacred in each moment. Jon also spoke about the parallels between early Friends who were generally young and were open to the newly accessible technology of the day—the printing press—and the opportunities we may have today if we embrace our new communication technologies. Jon introduced Friends to his newest project, the Thee Quaker Project and podcast (<https://theequaker.org/>), in which he is able to explore current Quaker practice and thought in more depth.

Jon finished his lecture with the thought: 'There are so many people in the world who are hungry for spiritual community, who are hungry for spiritual depth, or just hungry for quiet and deep listening. The more we offer that with open hands and open hearts to the world, the more we cultivate it in ourselves, the stronger we'll be as a Religious Society of Friends. And the stronger we'll be as people. I feel fully committed, in my life and my ministry and my work, to realising that possibility in my own way. And I want to encourage you to do that same thing in your own way. Whatever the Spirit is calling you to do: sit with Friends, listen deeply, go boldly.'

The Backhouse Lecture reflection session on 6 July began with grateful appreciation of Jon Watts' skills as a storyteller. Friends asked Jon about his creative process as an artist, and interviewer and producer as well as about the ways that his spiritual practice has led him from project to project. Jon spoke about the value of listening to God as he presents; and trying not to get ahead of the promptings of the Spirit. He spoke about the ways that he has also sought leading from the Spirit when discerning the kinds of projects he should work on. Projects may not have seemed to follow a clear path at the time, but in retrospect, he can see that there has been right ordering. He spoke about the early Friend, Solomon Eccles, and how his story and life influenced him as a musician and a storyteller. Jon also responded to questions about the limitations of contemporary technologies and acknowledged the ethical challenges that we must all grapple with when we use technological tools such as Facebook and Twitter. He suggested that there is value in reviewing and reflecting as a society on the usefulness of these tools for spiritual seekers.

YM23.28: Minute of Record for Meeting Remembrance

A Meeting for Remembrance, held on Wednesday 5 July at 10am, was held in memory of those

Friends who had died during the year. The following names were read aloud providing an opportunity for reflection on or ministry about the Grace of God expressed in their lives:

CRQ: Jeanie Gough, Heather Herbert, Gabrielle Watt

NSWRM: Meryl Bradford, Jean Hart, Isabel Jean Higgins, Joy Storey, Jean Talbot

QRM: Margaret Bruce, Carl Florer, Jenny Woodrow

SANTRM: Helen Inglis, Colin Jordan, Roger Keyes, Sonia Raupach, Humphrey Tranter

TRM: Jocelyn Bowden, Anne Galer, Roderic Grosvenor, Christine Mister, Ruth Raward, Jane Walker, Wilhelmina Walker, Peter Wilde

VRM: Brendan Caulfield-James, Paul Howard, Coralie Jenkin

WARM: Joan Hills, Doug Mathews, Heather Williams.

YM23.29: Thanksgiving Fund Committee Report

Topsy Evans reported that:

It has been an eventful year for the Thanksgiving Fund Committee. We have lost two members, David Barry and Kate Alessia, and welcomed two new members, Elizabeth Kwan (Darwin) and Mary Butler (Adelaide LM), who joined the two remaining members, Lee Harradine and Topsy Evans from SANTRM. We would like to thank David and Kate for their willing, hard work on the committee.

We are also grateful to those Friends who have asked for financial support in following their concerns and the AYM Finance Committee who have been able to release funds for them. This has been particularly hard for the Finance Committee to do this at a time of greater need to finance the AYM office.

Of the 16 projects which have received financial support, 13 are listed in Part A of our Report in *Documents in Advance*. Since that report was written, 3 more projects have been accepted by the committee. They are a management plan and IT support to extend the reach of the Gembrook Retreat in Victoria; the attendance of a Young Friend from Aotearoa/New Zealand Yearly Meeting to attend a global conference of Friends Peace Teams in New York; and the first of two tranches of funds to support the resettlement of the third and final group of Afghan activists to Spain.

Yearly Meeting endorses the Thanksgiving Fund Committee's policy that each Regional Meeting, or AYM Committee, which supports a successful grant application, ensures that a report of the outcome and acquittal of the funds provided be sent to the Thanksgiving Fund Committee and to the sponsoring body.

Yearly Meeting accepts that the unagreed items in the AYM Finance Committee's Draft Review of the Thanksgiving Fund will be addressed by new Unattached Bequests and Donations Working Group (Gerry Fahey, Topsy Evans, Ann Britton, Ray Brindle) which has already started its work and will report to YM 24.

We appreciate the quick discernment and action by the Thanksgiving Fund Committee, which has enabled fast responses.

We agree that, in order to correct several factual details in the Thanksgiving Fund Report to Documents in Advance, the following passage be included in the Minutes of this meeting:

It has been noted that Standing Committee asked the AYM Finance Committee in September 2021 to undertake a Review of the Thanksgiving Fund, not July 2022 as stated in the TGF Committee Report in DIA.

It is also noted that the Review consulted the previous TGF Committee at that time, but not the current Committee until later.

The Review was not presented to Standing Committee in November 2022, but a draft for comment was circulated to Regional Meetings and AYM Committees in April, 2022.

Draft Statement on AUKUS

Yearly Meeting receives a Statement from QPLC which expresses concern at trends in Australia's defence policies which now incorporate the AUKUS agreement.

We will consider the Statement again at a later Formal Session.

YM23.30: Presiding Clerk's Report

We hear the Presiding Clerk's report, which detailed the many activities in which he has taken part. We join him in thanking Jacque Schultze and the many other Friends for their service to Friends and to society in general.

His report will be in Documents in Retrospect.

The Session closed with silent worship.