

Report from Quakers Australia Yearly Meeting 2024 Representative to Aotearoa New Zealand Yearly Meeting, 24-27 April 2024, Hamilton.

I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to join Friends in Aotearoa New Zealand for their Yearly Meeting (YM) at Sonninghill Hostel in Hamilton. It was a wonderful opportunity for fellowship and sharing.

Mindful of the travel guidance provided by the Working Group on Climate Emergency and Species Extinction, I decided to attend the hybrid Yearly Meeting virtually. Consequently, I wasn't able to participate in the Preparation Day (24 April) whose theme 'Faith and Play an Experiential Tool for Spiritual Reflection' incorporated Godly Play and Quaker Faith & Play Stories. During Yearly Meeting I missed experiences of informal conversations during meals or over cups of coffee, and joining the lively late-night Friendly debates which often seem to emerge as the sun sets. Traveling around Aotearoa New Zealand after Yearly Meeting to visit Meetings and Friends was also not possible. However, I fully enjoyed every opportunity to join chats in the break-out room, and valued the work of the technology team to ensure that we dozen Friends online were part of every session and discernment.

Well before Yearly Meeting I received from Anne and Alistair Hall, Yearly Meeting Co-Clerks, the White and Gold Documents detailing the issues coming to Yearly Meeting for discernment, including the relevant discernments/comments from Monthly Meetings. I was also linked to an Aotearoa New Zealand Friend, Judith Wishart, who was my online buddy. It was lovely to have someone to link with before and during YM.

It was an exciting time to be with Aotearoa New Zealand Friends as they launched their revised Faith and Practice: *On These Islands I runga i ngā motu nei Quaker Faith & Practice in Aotearoa New Zealand*. This version updates the 2003 content with new text and images, broadening their understanding of Quaker whakapapa (genealogy) in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The recommendation to migrate the Aotearoa New Zealand Friends' website (<https://quakers.nz/>) was carefully and fully explained by the Website Oversight Committee. While most Friends accepted their recommendations, the cost required was of significant concern, and prompted other questions: *Will this grow us in the Spirit? Could the funds be better spent in the communities and concerns we seek to support?* Following considerable discussion, and a period of deep worship, it was discerned that accepting the recommendation was the way forward.

The Whanganui Education Settlement Trust (WEST), WEST Quaker Sustainability Working Group and WEST Property & Finance Working Group outlined many issues around the future of the Settlement. This conversation among Aotearoa New Zealand Friends will continue for some time and touches broader issues of a changing Quaker population.





The 2024 Quaker Lecture, *A Queer Gift: Stepping Beyond the Mindset*, was delivered by some members of Rainbow Quakers. The deeply moving lecture included personal stories about navigating a queer life in a heteronormative world.

Filling the role of Yearly Meeting Clerk is challenging the YM Nominations Committee, and is prompting broader discussions about the future structures for the organization. I shared some of my experiences as part of a working group on restructuring the Australian Yearly Meeting Office, and the new Quakers Australia structure.

As well as my short presentation about how the Spirit is moving among Australian Friends, talks were also delivered by Herrad Heselhaus (Japan Yearly Meeting), Lindsay Fielder-Cook (QUNO Representative on Climate Change) and Kay Harrison (New Zealand Climate Change Ambassador). The climate change talks were particularly timely and provided Friends with useful insights in the lead-up to the UN Climate Change Conference in November 2024.

Friends were encouraged to register for the Friends World Committee on Consultation World Plenary Meeting 5-12 August 2024, in South Africa, with the theme *Living the spirit of Ubuntu: responding with hope to God's call to cherish creation – and one another*. Friends will be able to fully participate online with every effort being made to create a truly inclusive experience for everyone.

Plans are well under way for the Aotearoa New Zealand Friends' Summer Gathering between 27 December 2024 and 02 January 2025 at El Rancho, Kāpiti, with the theme *Meeting in the Middle*.

I'm writing this report the afternoon of the last morning of Yearly Meeting among Aotearoa New Zealand Friends. The warmth of their hospitality and F/friendship still surrounds me, and I am enriched and strengthened by my time with them. I have no doubt that the Spirit is very much alive among Aotearoa New Zealand Friends and value greatly our time together.

Margaret Clark
Quakers Australia Yearly Meeting Representative to Aotearoa New Zealand Yearly Meeting 2024