

We send loving greetings to Friends, everywhere

Quakers in Australia gather from 1-9 July 2023, online and in regional pods. We meet on the unceded country of many nations all around this land now called Australia. We welcome a number of Friends from across the globe.

The theme for the gathering is “Integrity, Voice and Right Relationship”. This is a momentous year when Australians will vote about a change to the constitution to establish an Indigenous Voice to Parliament. We are welcomed by Ken Pengarta Lechleitner, Aboriginal elder from Anmatyerra country and Deb Buckskin from Kurna country, who teach us *Ta marra*, the gesture of two open hands which offer peace, friendship and unity. Aboriginal people again make a generous offer, and ask us to work together to build a better nation for us all.

In the State of the Society Address Mark Macleod (Tasmania RM) reminds us not to focus on numbers, statistics and percentages, but on the qualities of our community as Quakers. This is the fourth year that Yearly Meeting has been held online. Our regional meetings weathered the pandemic, and learned that online meetings are accessible to remote Friends and people with disability in ways that in-person meetings are not. But children and young people relish in-person contact, and children are often absent from online meetings. Let us remember to plan more activities for our children and young people. A beloved attender, mourned by her Meeting, encouraged Friends to “Have fun! Be kind! And laugh!”

There is so much to choose from in a full and varied program of opportunities to worship, socialise, learn, share, and conduct our business. The Presiding Clerk reminds us to maintain an unhurried pace throughout the week, making time to listen. Listening is a recurring theme. ‘Speak softly, listen well’. Listen to the speaker. Listen to Spirit. Listen to yourself.

American Quaker Jon Watts delivered the Backhouse Lecture, “How my 2009 Viral Video Transformed my Perspective on Quakers, the Internet, and What’s Next”. He reflects on the example of early Quakers who began the practices of listening deeply and speaking as led by the Spirit. Young Quakers embraced their new technology – the printing press – and spread the news about Quakerism through pamphlets. Jon Watts founded the YouTube channel QuakerSpeak, and encourages us to embrace the technology available to us - the internet - to connect with all those people who are hungry for community, depth, quiet, and deep listening. “Sit with Friends. Listen deeply. Go boldly.”

We learn that the foundation of our action is individual spiritual growth, nurtured in community. Yearly Meeting provides many opportunities to learn and share in small groups. Friends continue to be actively involved working for many and varied concerns, including the promotion of peace-making around the world and in our region, the climate emergency, integrity in public office, and gender rights. In our special meeting for remembrance, we give thanks for the Grace of God in the lives of our dear Friends who have died. It showed in their kindness and persistent advocacy for many social justice issues.

Elizabeth PO’ (West Australian RM) shared “precious gleanings” from twenty-nine epistles from Quakers around the world. Common to many is the sense of urgency that all of the world’s people feel about the climate emergency, the dismantling of empires, and the desperate need of refugees to re-settle. Epistles also bear witness to harm that has been caused to First Nations people across generations, even through Quaker practices, and the avoidance of responsibility for oppression.

The foundations of our business practices are still there, but Friends sense the need for some changes in our processes and structure. In our Formal Sessions, we are challenged to discern the right way to interact with overseas Friends, given the impact of air travel on the planet and its

inhabitants. We hear the challenges of finding names for roles, and we welcome new and imaginative ways for Friends to serve Quakers Australia.

Some Friends hear the 2023 Salter Lecture given to Socialist Quakers in Britain by Rupert Read. Titled "How the love we are will guide us through ecological collapse" it is about the inevitable polycrisis which will force radical change on us in the cause of love for our communities and world. We embrace the faithful Friends who feel compelled to take non-violent action, as we also hear of increasing government actions to outlaw environmental activism.

As always, we are challenged to decolonise our thinking and walk with Aboriginal Australians in search of equity in our relationships. We are reminded that *Dedirri* is the Aboriginal word for deep listening. Can we do that? We are asked what our response will be, as Quakers, to the result of the referendum: are we prepared? One Aboriginal Friend says, "If the YES vote is carried, it will make it possible for all of us to participate in the dialogue, and to walk proudly."

We look forward to Yearly Meeting 2024, hosted by South Australia and Northern Territory RM, in Adelaide where it will be a hybrid meeting with both in-person and online meetings.

We share this gift from Justin Simpson (New South Wales RM)

Here we are

Here

*together in our meeting place
in this sacred space.*

Now

*together for our appointment
this special moment.*

*In love and purpose
mystery and wonder
here we are.*

Australia Yearly Meeting