

## Presiding Clerk Report Yearly Meeting July 2023

“Live up to the light thou hast, and more will be granted thee”. Caroline Fox, 1882

After one year as Presiding Clerk, I am more than ever aware of the importance of living in the Light, and how that inspires us to care for each other and to discern individual and corporate action in the world.

Like other Quakers, I've become increasingly alarmed at Australia's attachment to US foreign policy and its inability to steer a more independent course. So, I acknowledge with thanks that the Quaker Peace and Legislation Committee made a submission on behalf of Quakers to the Defence Strategic Review in September 2022. This expressed concern about the expansion of the production of weapons, the alarmist commentary about Taiwan and the inappropriateness of the AUKUS agreement. Peacemaking would be better served, for instance, by the use of diplomacy and boosting foreign aid.

I welcomed the opportunity to attend the AGM of Quaker Service Australia in February 2023 which was held at Wahroonga Local Meeting. The Thankyou/Farewell function for Jackie Perkins and John Dundas was on the same weekend. It was a rare treat for me to meet QSA and Wahroonga Friends face to face, rather than online. I wish Pia Reiersen, Executive Administrator, and all the QSA team best wishes as they take up their roles and face changes of all types.

I'm grateful that our Meetings are places where many gender-diverse people have found a spiritual home. In the words of Advices & Queries 22, I hope we can rejoice in “the wide diversity among us in our lives and relationships”. We have much to learn from each other. It's good to see a Quaker presence at some Pride festivals.

I've been fortunate to attend some of Em Chandler's story-telling performances. They're fun and full of creative ideas. Strong messages of respect for self and others come through these stories.

As well as regular Standing Committees in September, January and June in the last 12 months, there have been three other Standing Committees in August, November and May about specific issues. In May, Standing Committee asked that two working groups be established to consider Quakers Australia finances. These working groups are now commencing their work and will report to Yearly Meeting in 2024.

Some disagreement and misunderstandings developed amongst committee members in the last year. This sadly resulted in the resignation of a number of good people. I'm very grateful that several Friends stepped up and sought reconciliation and a way forward, and progress has been made.

It was inspiring to be at the Thanksgiving Fund Preparatory Meeting on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> May and to hear presentations on a varied range of projects which had been funded. A full list of funded projects appears in the Thanksgiving Fund report in Documents in Advance. I am thankful for these projects and for the people who remembered Quakers in their will.

And we were reminded: “We need to sustain our own hope if we are to sustain the hope of others”

In May 2023 I attended the Friends School as part of the Quaker Values Committee. Each year we visit classrooms and observe the types of learning processes taking place.

We were impressed that generally students were keen and involved and very ready to share their learning with us, total strangers. Classrooms seem to be safe places of mutual respect. We found the various “Gatherings” we attended places where students were assisted to find meaning in the silence and they were memorable experiences for us.

The school is enthusiastic about the appointment of the incoming Principal, Esther Hill, who will take up her duties at the start of 2024.

I express my gratitude to the current Principal Nelson File for leading the school for 11 years and who has been a strong advocate of the school’s Purpose and Concerns statement. This statement, amongst other things, endorses “fundamental values such as the intrinsic worth of each person, the recognition of ‘that of God’ in everyone, the desirability of simplicity and the need to establish peace and justice.”

Each time the Quaker Values Committee visits the school, we see plenty of evidence of people working to implement these values.

I found the National Council of Churches Meeting in June a friendly space where leaders of a wide variety of Churches listened to each other and sought common ground on issues such as peacemaking and an Indigenous Voice to parliament.

I pay tribute to our outgoing Secretary, Jacque Schultze, who has agreed to continue until September 2023. We all appreciate her 7 years faithful service in this role. She has been the go-to person for QA, both internally and externally and has offered assistance to QA Committees, Standing Committees, Yearly Meetings and Presiding Clerks.

I endorse what Ann Zubrick has said: “Jacque’s gentle presence has offered insight and wisdom through a time of transition and change in many aspects of our Yearly Meeting, committees and outreach.

“Jacque embodies compassion and generosity. She held so many aspects of our Yearly Meeting communication and processes together. She reminded me of the importance of attending to the many small things with grace and gratitude; to remain alert to Spirit—to approach change with faith in the future unfolding before us”.

Can I take this opportunity to thank Roger Sawkins for his careful stewardship of Quaker funds over many years and for standing in as Assistant Treasurer in recent months, to fill a gap, after his many years as Treasurer.

I also express my gratitude for the work of the former Finance Committee (Roger Sawkins, Carol Thornton, Steven Smith, Robin Walpole and Ray Brindle) which was conducted over many months in unusual and difficult circumstances.

I share the enthusiasm of many Friends in welcoming David Tehr to the position of Coordinator and Holly Dhynes to the position of Communications and Publicity Manager in the new office arrangement. We wish them well in these roles.

It was a real pleasure for me to be on the Selection Committee which appointed them, and I thank other members of this committee.

We acknowledge the enormous amount of work, especially by the Transition Implementation Working Group (TIWG) which led up to these appointments, and appreciate that they will continue to offer support to the office.

I look forward to the coming year. We're hopeful of a positive outcome to the Voice referendum as a step towards implementation of the Statement from the Heart. How will we respond to the challenges of the Climate Crisis, both individually and corporately?

I trust that we will be seeking the guidance of the Spirit in all we do.

I'm deeply impressed with the variety of ways in which Australian Quakers let their lives speak. I feel supported and encouraged to do the same.