

Report from Australia Yearly Meeting 2019 Representative to Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa / New Zealand 2023

Kia Ora, Friends.

After the COVID experience of the past three years and closed borders, I am very grateful for the opportunity to have been the 'in person' AYM representative to the Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand in May this year.

I was welcomed and met at Auckland International Terminal in the early hours of a Saturday morning by Lesley Young, a Past Presiding Clerk of A/NZ Meeting and current Clerk of Northern Monthly Meeting who graciously hosted me in her Mount Albert home at the beginning and again at the end of my time in A/NZ.

On Sunday I worshipped with Mt. Eden Meeting Friends and had the opportunity to share conversation and a shared lunch with a smaller group who stayed on. A glorious clear, sunny afternoon invited a steep walk behind the Meeting House to the summit of Mt. Eden where Lesley Young pointed me towards extraordinary views north to the Coromandel Peninsular, west to the far ocean horizon and islands, and south over a sprawling Auckland city and its suburbs. I later enjoyed a walk and morning tea exploring other parts of the city with a group of five Friends who regularly meet on a Tuesday morning. It was a precious opportunity to establish connections with them ahead of Yearly Meeting in Whanganui.

Lesley Young drove me and two other Mt Eden Meeting Friends on a wonderful scenic route to Whanganui. A normally 4+ hour drive took 9 hours with two planned stops, and slow progress through deep sometimes misty valleys, Tongariro National Park National Park and snow-capped volcanoes, sightings of birds and double rainbows. We arrived at the Whanganui Settlement with time only to drop luggage before joining others for a wonderful dinner hosted at home by Jillian Wychel and David James. My Whanganui Settlement host Jill Burdett had an electric blanket warming my bed at night, for which I was very grateful.

Preparation Day (two half day sessions on Thursday afternoon and Friday morning) is designed for Friends come to Yearly Meeting with hearts and minds prepared. It is not simply for those 'new' to or unfamiliar with Yearly Meeting. A/NZ Friends had just published a revised *Quaker Handbook of Practice and Procedure*. Every person was given a copy and others asked to take and distribute copies within their local meetings.

In the hands of skilled adult educators and weighty Friends (Jillian Wychel and David James) were taken on a wonderful historical journey through the origin, recording and compilation of Quaker practice, discernment and decision making. We were reminded that we gather and enter the space needed to reach a decision by co-creating deep silence. We were reminded that our local meetings are the seed beds for us to practice and grow our collective capacity for discernment. And we were invited to consider—individually and collectively: How do we hold community together? How do we 'move forward' in our processes? What do we notice that reassures us, or troubles us? To what do we hold fast? How do we support, include and mentor others into our business processes and decision making?

We reflected upon examples of times and circumstances underpinning earlier Yearly Meeting Minutes. The examples illustrated layers within discernment addressing different concerns.

We were guided to explore communication skills needed if we are to avoid hastening and responding too early. We were reminded of the value of tested processes such as Rex Ambler's *Experiment with Light*.

I found these sessions enlightening, enriching and grounding as we moved into Yearly Meeting Formal Sessions.

Caterers and helpers prepared wonderful vegetarian meals for about 80 Friends attending YM. We sat at small tables or a long table in a large room adjacent to the kitchen. A large open fire pit became a gathering point for a small group to gather for conversation during the day or into the evening.

Conversations around the future and sustainability of the Whanganui Settlement occupied A/NZ Friends at Yearly Meeting. A report from various working groups will be brought to A/NZ Yearly Meeting 2024. As a Silver Wattle Quaker Centre Board Member, I noted questions, comments, concerns, and processes that might be useful in conversations shaping Silver Wattle post COVID.

There was no Quaker Lecture this year. On Saturday evening Keith Beutrais spoke about his work as a member of *Te Kopuka*, a group set up under the terms of the Whanganui River settlement organisation. The group's task is to bring together *iwi* (Māori groups) and others who have a stake in the varied uses of the river, its health and wellbeing. *Te Kopuka* is an example of co-governance in practice. Both the legislation and governance model, now of great interest, are closely followed in other parts of the world. The presentation was energising and inspiring.

Rainbow Quakers reported to Yearly Meeting as a Group—each person reading part of their statement *Walking in the Light under the Rainbow*. This beautifully worded Quaker statement of commitment and inclusion was accepted in the Formal session and appears on the A/NZ website.

In the FWCC session we heard from Marj Anjalot (Bohol Worship group, Philippines) who attended in person; and Abhay Wilson (Bhopal YM, India) on Zoom together with his young son; and Adrian Glamorgan who joined on Zoom from Geneva and spoke of his recent travels and conversations with friends in Japan, South Korea, and now Europe. I gave a short presentation about AYM, some current activities and concerns. Linley Gregory—a Mt Eden Meeting Elder known to many Australian Friends—reminded the Meeting of the importance of FWCC and its work, and the need to support a diverse group of delegates to travel and attend the Johannesburg Gathering in September 2024.

Following YM, I travelled with Wellington Friends for a short stay at Friends House in the downtown CBD. I travelled then to Christchurch and met Friends Deborah Williams and her husband David who kindly showed me through the Hornby Meeting House resplendent with a bold new sign which cannot be missed as you drive by. This building replaces the one destroyed in the earthquake. I shared lunch and conversation with a group of Christchurch Friends—some of whom I had met in Whanganui. I returned to Auckland for one last night's stay with Lesley Young.

I experienced the generosity of A/NZ Friends and am grateful for all they offered me: silence, reflective time, deep conversations, prompting, leadings, questions, hopes, opportunities, Quaker and other spiritual practices.

I felt a strong connection with A/NZ Friends.

Ann Zubrick AYM representative to YM of A/NZ May 2023