

Formal Session 5: Friday 8 July at 11.15am AEST

YM22.24: Opening Worship

The Presiding Clerk read from the Australian *Advices & Queries*:

Are your meetings for church affairs held in a spirit of worship and in dependence on the guidance of God? Remember that we do not seek a majority decision nor even a consensus. As we wait patiently for divine guidance our experience is that the right way will open and we shall be led into unity.

Advices & Queries no. 15

YM22.25: Minute of Record for the Backhouse Lecture and Reflection Session

The Presiding Clerk introduced the 2022 Backhouse Lecture, *Creating hope: Working for justice in catastrophic times*, and the Backhouse Lecturer, Yarrow Goodley. She told us that Yarrow was, among other things, a sociologist, an early childhood educator, an activist, and a non-binary person. As a Quaker, Yarrow is a member of SANTRM, where they were Clerk for a number of years. They had previously been Clerk of Hong Kong Meeting.

Yarrow delivered the lecture, with a quiet but passionate intensity, to a wide audience via Zoom and to a small audience of some of their fellow activists gathered in Yarrow's home for the occasion.

They led us through the broad sweep of climate injustice and humankind's contribution to that, beginning with the emergence of agriculture and accelerating through the progress of industrialisation and its associated activities. They shared the experiences of the activists in dealing with the inevitable despair they encountered. For some, it threatened to be paralysing, whereas some had learned "to sit with it ... because it comes with a lesson".

Rather than remaining lost in despair, Yarrow invited us to imagine a just future, and told some possible future stories of those for whom climate justice had become a reality – possible if we work towards that end, avoiding the paralysis of despair and the possible complacency of hope. Hope can, in the words of one activist, "shove you out the door", and Yarrow invited us to be so shoved.

We were encouraged to consider our actions as Quakers, and Yarrow particularly challenged our attitude towards finances, which we are carefully saving for some future use, whereas "we will never face a challenge this great".

Yarrow ended the Lecture by reframing George Fox's famous question into "What can we do?"

In the subsequent Backhouse Lecture Reflection Session, Friends expressed their appreciation of the way Yarrow had presented challenging ideas in such a carefully constructed, storied, even poetic, form. During the session, various themes from the lecture were identified and further explored, as those present added their voices to the story Yarrow had told in the Lecture. At the end of the session, Yarrow invited Friends to continue the process even further by helping to

construct more stories-from-the-future, a future we may reach through an activism informed by hope.

YM22.26 Minute of Record for the Summary of Epistles

We heard the Summary of Epistles compiled by Heather Saville (NSWRM).

Sixteen epistles were received, and like last year, with the exception of Aotearoa/New Zealand, all are from the northern hemisphere. Six came from the USA and four from Britain, two of which were from British Junior Young Friends. The two Epistles from Uganda included many photos, some of which Heather shared with us. As an overview, Heather identified the pandemic, racism, the climate emergency, and the peace testimony as themes common to many Meetings.

Unsurprisingly, as the pandemic continues, several Epistles continue to note with sadness the deaths of Friends who have been lost to COVID. Meeting in all-age, in-person gatherings is missed by many. Others find the opportunity to worship on Zoom and in hybrid meetings offers flexibility, enables participation by isolated Friends, and creates the opportunity to welcome international visitors.

It was broadly noted that young Friends are not interested in web-based connection. Junior Friends from North Pacific Yearly Meeting “reported a long list of what they miss about meeting in person, including cuddle-puddles and falling out of hammocks”, while Britain Junior Yearly Meeting was able to meet in person for the first time in three years, rejoicing that “we all left this event with a stronger sense of who we are and what we stand for”.

Many Yearly Meetings explored the difficult and uncomfortable conversations about what it means to be an anti-racist and anti-oppression organisation committed to creating “a sacred space in which healing and transformation can occur”. In some areas, environmental matters were upstaged by the pandemic, while North Pacific Yearly Meeting’s keynote topic was “Courage, Fear and Care: Creating Resilient Communities to meet Climate Justice” reflecting the direct impact of the climate change emergency in their region.

Working on racism, equality and climate justice are the common threads demonstrating Quaker commitment to peace building. Only North Pacific Yearly Meeting mentioned directly the work of Friends Peace Teams and their Alternatives to Violence Projects.

While a sense of fatigue is clearly reflected in the feeling that volunteers are stretched and several Meetings are taking on employed staff, the spirit of Quakerism as a faith grounded in action for positive change, is strong.

YM22.27 Minute of Record for the Meeting for Remembrance

A Meeting for Remembrance, held on Wednesday 6 July at 10am, was held in memory of those Friends who 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: Walter Davis, Marka Bonnici Selmes

NSWRM: Ted Angelo, Helen Ekin, Jenny Madeline Ible, Geoff McLean, Paul Rubner, Barbara Stephen

QRM: Mary Grbavac, Kathleen Merryweather

SANTRM: Christine Bellen, Margaret Bowker, Ruth Campbell, Rosemary Claring-Bould, Mark Kinnear, Virginia Lee-Bowie, Winsome Paul

TRM: Rosemary Brown, Harro Drexler, John Fenger, John Legg, Ian Lewis, Peter Mavromatis, Miriam Sayer

VRM: Dorothy Benyei, Betty Feith, Barbara Rautman, Anne Walker, Peter Williams

WARM: Michael Hennessey, Roger Walmsley

YM22.28 Second Reading of the Yearly Meeting 2022 Epistle

Christine Venner-Westaway presented a second draft of the YM22 Epistle. The Clerk reminded Friends that the Epistle draft can be found on the YM22 website

<https://www.quakersaustralia.info/yearly-meeting-2022/ym22-business/epistle-drafts> and that they can send their comments to Christine Venner-Westaway at venwest50@gmail.com.

The Clerk reminded Friends that this is the last reading of the Epistle, until the final version is read at our Closing Worship on Sunday 10 July.

YM22.29: AYM & QSA Relationship Working Group Report - continuation

Australian Friends value the work of Quaker Service Australia as giving practical expression to their desires for contributing to peace and justice in our region and the wider world.

AYM hopes that the principles for the relationship between AYM and QSA allow for:

- good governance and operational management of QSA
- Australian Friends to remain informed of the work of QSA and to contribute to the directions of its work.

We ask for two members of the QSA Management Committee and two other Friends to consider all recommendations in the Report, including which of the recommendations are for QSA to consider and which are for AYM to consider. We ask the AYM Nominations Committee to bring two names to Standing Committee in September 2022 for appointment by Standing Committee. We ask that a report on the way forward be included in *Documents in Advance 2023*.

The Formal Session closed with silent worship.