**Handbook Revision Committee**

**Preparatory Session**

**14 May 2022 3.30 pm AEST**

Committee members: Wies Schuiringa, Julie Walpole, Michael Corbett (ex Kay de Vogel)

Clerk: Vidya Recording Clerk: Jennifer Burrell Zoom Host: Michael Searle

Present: Wies Schuiringa, Julie Walpole, Michael Corbett, Vidya, Jennifer Burrell, Roger Sawkins, Ronis Chapman, Kerstin Reimers, Kay de Vogel, Jim Palmer, Margaret Clark, Vivienne Dawes, Alan Clayton, Sieneke Martin, Justine Shelton, Topsy Evans, Jude Pembleton and Michael Searle.

The meeting opened at 3.30 pm, after a deep silence.

Vidya read a moving acknowledgement of Country, also screen-shared.

*Quakers in Australia acknowledge that we live and worship on the lands of*

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, country which gives them physical*

*and spiritual identity and is filled with the spirit presence of their ancestors.*

*We acknowledge:*

*• the sovereignty of Australia’s First Peoples over the land we inhabit*

*• that the land was taken from them at devastating cost, with no just resolution*

*• that this trauma is ongoing and diminishes us all*

*• that our testimonies call us to be in right relationship with all peoples, the land and our environment.*

*Therefore, we seek in our daily lives:*

*• to educate ourselves about the true history and present reality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and uphold their right to self-determination*

*• to acknowledge within ourselves, and bring into the light, that which contributes to the debilitating effects of racism, insensitivity, lack of awareness and misrepresentation*

*• to work towards justice and peace, and healing for us all.*

*First Nations Peoples Concerns Committee 2017* as at the beginning of the Handbook.

Vidya introduced the Committee members and Weis introduced the Handbook Liaison Friends.

1. Wies introduced section **4.3.2 Planning a wedding or celebration of commitment.** CRQ raised a question about the legality of a Quaker Registering Officer marrying couples where there is ‘a less significant link’ with Friends. Alan Clayton brought our attention to The Marriage Act (Cwth), 1961 as amended, Section 2A(b), which appears not to narrowly limit Quaker Registering Officers.

Section 2A(b) *- It is an object of this Act to create a legal framework … (b) to allow ministers of religion to solemnise marriage, respecting the doctrines, tenets and beliefs of their religion, the views of their religious community or their own religious beliefs; . . .*

It is our practice that the solemnisation of a Quaker marriage is agreed by the Regional Meeting. We note that Regional Meetings do not merely give permission for marriages, but establish the Meeting for Worship for that purpose. Such marriages are in the care of the Meeting.

We agree in principle with WARM’s suggested rewording:

*Marriages conducted by the Quaker Registering Officer are normally for a couple of whom at least one partner is a Member or Attender.*

*Couples who have a less significant link to Quakers may be married by the Quaker Registering Officer. All marriages conducted by the Quaker Registering Officer need to have the permission of the Regional Meeting.*

We ask the Handbook Revision Committee to finalise the wording to include the points above and, if deemed necessary, to include a reference to the Marriage Act and bring the revised text forward for further consideration.

2. Julie introduced section 4.6.4 **Testimonies to the grace of God**. A new draft has been developed since DiA was originally published, and has been promoted on the AYM HRC webpage. We went through this section paragraph by paragraph.

* A new Guideline is suggested by the Committee; we agree that the second paragraph of this Guideline is unnecessary. The guideline will be:

*[Our Society] would be an empty shell without the living expression of our faith provided by generations of individual Friends. Our custom of writing testimonies to the grace of God as shown in the lives of Friends provides us with a wealth of material showing ordinary Friends living out their faith from day to day. These testimonies show us that, whatever our circumstances, God can be present with us, and they encourage us each to be faithful to our own calling.*  (From the Introduction to Chapter 18 of *Quaker faith and practice online*. Britain Yearly Meeting, 2022.)

* Para 1 – we agree the suggested NSWRM wording (as wordsmithed by the Handbook Revision Committee) is an improvement. We agree to remove the word ‘regular’ before ‘Attender’ viz: *When Friends learn that a Member or Attender of the Meeting has died that Meeting initially minutes that death in its next MfWfB. The minute may be brief and factual and is a record of that death.*
* Para 2 – we agree with the suggested NSWRM wording (as wordsmithed) viz: *The Regional Meeting also discerns whether to write a ‘Testimony to the Grace of God’ in the life of the deceased Friend. If agreed upon, ~~it~~ the Meeting needs to ensure that the Friends appointed to do so fully understand what is involved.*
* We are not in unity with TRM’s suggestions for additional content. We hear a possible rewording ‘*We are reminded that useful information for the Testimony may arise at the funeral or memorial meeting (meeting for thanksgiving)’*. We agree that ‘Archives such as the membership application letter may be useful’ is unnecessary detail.
* We agree that SANTRM’s suggestion that ‘a Testimony is a response to the spiritual gifts of the life lived’, while valuable, is already in the text.

We ask the Handbook Revision Committee to finalise the wording to include the points above and bring the revised text forward for further consideration.

3. Wies introduced the ***Australian Friend*** section. The issue in this case is the term for the type of committee, which is no longer a hosted committee. It is also not a representative committee.

The traditional name for a committee which has members chosen for their gifts or interest in learning would be an ’expert’ committee. The term ‘expert’ is awkward. The term ‘specialist’ has also been rejected by some Friends.

We brainstormed other possible names, e.g.

* ‘special gifts committee’
* ‘an AYM committee with members drawn from several Regional Meetings’
* ‘national committee’
* ‘specialist committee’
* ‘other committee’

We ask, do we need a name for every type of committee, or can we, where necessary, explain in the Handbook regarding the committee, and/or on the committee’s webpage? We agree this information is important, especially for the AYM Nominations Committee. (It is possible hosted committees will become rarer as we move increasingly online.)

We agree to leave this matter with the Handbook Revision Committee.

4. We note that all Regional Meetings were in unity in accepting the Committee’s proposed changes for sections:

* **4.5 Sojourners**
* **5.2.7 AYM Archivist**

We accept these changes and recommend them to YM22. We believe that all changes to the Handbook need to be approved by Yearly Meeting (with the exception of minor factual changes, as previously approved by YM).

We hear that all changes to the Handbook Approvals Flowchart also need to be approved by YM.

The meeting closed at 5.30 pm with a period of worshipful silence.

**N.B. In a meeting since this Preparatory session, the Handbook Revision Committee have opted to hold a Share and Tell about our work – focussing on the flowchart issues.** Background material will be circulated shortly.