

# The Australian Friend

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## Australia Yearly Meeting 2018



# Editorial

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**I**n July we held our Yearly Meeting, an opportunity for us to meet and worship together, to catch up with old friends, and to look at the state of our society. The State of the Society address, given by Sheila Keane, is included in this issue. We also have reflections on the Yearly Meeting from three of those who attended – Wilma Davidson tells of the joy and exhaustion of working with the Junior Young Friends, Gregg Heathcote tells us about his first Yearly Meeting, and Martin Fallding reminds us of the importance of Yearly Meeting for isolated Friends.

Yearly Meeting is an opportunity to look inward – to celebrate the lives of Members who have died, to draw on the wisdom of the Backhouse lecturer, to look at our structures and the work of our committees. But this leads us to then look outward – to consider the spread of militarism in our country, to give thought to how to support our First Nations people, to hear of the work of Quaker Service Australia, to see how we are led to support refugees and other persecuted people, to agonise over the care of our planet. Many of these themes are also taken up in this issue.

Once again we urge Friends to let us know what is happening in their lives and in their meetings. Being based in Sydney, the committee particularly welcomes news from smaller meetings and from other Regional Meetings.

## **THE AUSTRALIAN FRIEND EDITORIAL TEAM**



Jigadee Creek at Avondale

# Contents

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## FEATURES

- 4** State of the Society – 2018
- 7** A reflection on my time at Yearly Meeting
- 8** Growing up in a Quaker family
- 10** My Yearly Meeting experience
- 11** My experience of Yearly Meeting
- 11** Poetry *The Gathered Meeting*
- 12** Australia and refugees
- 13** Poetry *Making the image of God*
- 14** Prising open West Papua
- 20** Together toward life
- 22** Professional supervision for clergy and church workers

## REGULARS

- 16** QSA Notes
- 18** Book review – *From Fear to Hope: Alternative Australian narratives on war and peacemaking*  
By Pamela Leach



Cover photo: Australia Yearly Meeting 2018

# State of the Society – 2018

SHEILA KEANE | NEW SOUTH WALES REGIONAL MEETING

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## Introduction

*When I was first asked to give this address, I was at a loss on how to approach the task. So I did what all good Quakers do... I waited. Expectantly. I held it in a prayerful background state and eventually a question began to form: 'How does Truth prosper?' It was an improvement on complete writers block but not much of an outline.*

*So next I reflected on what is our expression of Truth, and that formed into five words which now serve as an outline for this talk. I offer these words in the hope that the Voice which spoke to Fox's condition those three hundred and sixty odd years ago can also speak to our collective condition now, our **State of the Society at the 2018 Australia Yearly Meeting gathering.***

### Community

The first word I offer is community. After all we are the Religious *Society* of Friends. Community is fundamental to who we are as Friends.

### Relationships

Universally, Friends report the importance of their shared worship, their relationships and their activities together: everything from twice monthly Friendly Friday discussion groups in Canberra to over 45 Friends celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Mount Lawley Meetinghouse in West Australia. Relationships are also fostered through our work together on committees and the ongoing tasks that support our meetings. A favourite way to build community is to share meals and discussions after meeting for worship. Darwin meeting chose 'conflict' as its discussion theme this year and reported having 'much and vigorous discussion' every fourth Sunday.

Another way that community is expressed is in our care for one another. Western Australia Regional Meeting took up a collection so that an attender could return home to Sudan for a family

funeral. In Queensland, Friends did the practical work of finding, purchasing and delivering a car to a member who needed help. Canberra held a mental health first aid training day. Victoria Regional Meeting hosted Standing Committee and had to turn back an excess of offers to billet visiting Friends. We also grieved together the passing of 16 Friends who died this year.

### Spiritual nurture

Community is also forged as we nurture the growth of spirit in one another. Annual retreats were held in all but two regional meetings this year, as well as many one-day gatherings held by local meetings; a mix of workshops and silent or quiet days.

Quaker Learning Australia moved from Tasmania to West Australia this year. During their period of care, Tasmanian Friends produced a fabulous website which deserves widespread attention. It contains links to online courses (including Quaker Basics), articles by Dale Hess, audio and video resources, Backhouse lectures, Quaker biographies, and resources for the spiritual care of children. We need to

spread the word about this wonderful resource. Meeting for Learning remains at capacity, with 12 Friends registered for Perth next year.

Friends School has affirmed its intention that meeting for worship be the heart of the school's values, and is exposing 1273 young people to the life-shaping experience of silent worship.

When Susan Clarke became ill and Silver Wattle was without a director for 7 months, 32 individuals off site and 22 resident volunteers stepped up to keep the Centre running until new directors were found. This is community in action. As well as working together, a mid-week online meeting for worship gathered them. Silver Wattle offered 8 courses and hosted Friends Fellowship of Healing, Friends in Stitches, the Easter Family Gathering and the Junior Young Friends (JYFs) summer camp.

All JYF activities were organised with equal responsibility between the JYFs and a group of about 8 supporting adults, including our Yearly Meeting Children & JYF Coordinator. The summer camp activities included creating a JYF statement, creating illustrations for *Who are Quakers What*

do we do?, leading epilogues, providing service to Silver Wattle, and enjoying a music session and Trivia night. Charles Stephenson, who was the 'Quaker Presence' volunteer at the Easter Family Gathering exuded his joy at their depth of spirit saying, 'Our future is in good hands'. I agree.

## The meeting as preparation and calling

Community also empowers and calls us into action. Canberra Regional Meeting is particularly good at this. They formed 5 working groups to attend to specific matters this year, and filled 71 positions from a field of 188 members and attenders. This level of activity is made possible by its large size and financial resources, but even smaller meetings could learn from their example of involving nearly 40 per cent of their members and attenders in the internal and external work of the meeting.

Community can serve to guide and to create collective wisdom. For example New South Wales Regional Meeting developed role descriptions for clerks, elders, treasurers, and members of Nominations and Ministry & Care/Oversight committees. Canberra Regional Meeting did a great deal of work exploring ecologically friendly ways to heat and cool their meetinghouse, and developed guidelines for Friends wishing to offer sanctuary to asylum seekers. Victoria Regional Meeting wrote a business plan for their new meetinghouse which could be of use to others who own property. For the most part this work was not widely shared. However, many meetings did benefit from NSW Regional Meeting's checklist about safety and legal obligations for upkeep of our meetinghouses.

## Dealing with property

Many (in fact, most) meetings hold their worship and activities in rented accommodation. This has advantages

and disadvantages. Where they exist, meetinghouses presented difficulties to some degree and used up financial and human resources. Devonshire Street Meeting house in Sydney is suffering greatly through the light rail construction just outside their front door, and Brisbane is dealing with neighbouring property development which threatens the tranquillity of the meetinghouse gardens. Canberra had two break-ins and possums in the roof. The new Victorian Friends Centre had water damage that was not covered by insurance, but this did nothing to dampen their delight with their new home.

Our meetinghouses are precious. They afford opportunities to host our worship and meeting activities, store our libraries, support other groups in their work for social justice and spiritual development, provide space for local community activities, offer accommodation for visiting Friends, and provide a visible presence for outreach. But they are expensive and labour intensive as well.

Many meetinghouses offset costs through facility hire. This year Canberra wrestled with whether to accept a lucrative extension of facility hire which would limit their own access to the meetinghouse for about 3 months. Clearly there is a balance to be struck between usage and finances. We should be thinking about what our meetinghouses are for, and it is clear that we need to be grown-ups about taking care of them.

## Conflict

Sometimes community fails us. To address this reality, the Yearly Meeting Safe Quaker Communities committee ran a useful workshop on Bystander Intervention. But conflict can also be constructive. Nothing exemplifies this more than Queensland regional meeting which spent much time this year healing from an ongoing major

conflict. Their reflections offer prophetic words to us all, and I quote:

*We accept our corporate responsibility for the pain that [people] have suffered, and apologise for our failings. We pray that we may find a way for healing, for [individuals] and for this whole meeting...*

*...In order to become community, we need to go to a deeper level with one another. We have ideals which we want to live up to but we have a sense of being rushed and too full of busyness. There was a sense that something has been lost – a grounding in love is an antidote to our sense of disconnection.*

*Being community takes commitment and we are being compelled by the Spirit to engage with one another by being ready to listen, being genuine and moving to a deeper level with those of us who are no longer visitors or newcomers.*

## Prophecy

Queensland has spoken a truth to us which needs our attention. And this brings me to the second word on offer: prophecy.

Our prophetic voice, the one that speaks truth to power, is a strong one. For example, in the past year the 15-member Yearly Meeting Quaker Peace and Legislation Committee issued ten action alerts and made detailed submissions on foreign policy, climate change, relations with North Korea, and citizenship legislation. They also ran a lobbying workshop for Friends, using this as an occasion to lobby for a nuclear weapons ban. The lobbying workshop had strong participation and financial support from all Regional Meetings, and the experience reverberated throughout the Yearly Meeting as Friends returned home.

The QPLC sub-committee on

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

marriage equality deserves special mention for their campaign work and drafting of an open letter which received widespread attention and served as a public witness and consequent outreach.

Many meetings wrote to protest the Adani mines and participated in vigils and demonstrations regarding the appalling treatment of asylum seekers on Manus and Nauru. For people whose spiritual life is grounded in silence, we sure are a noisy lot!

### Witness

And it's not just words either: we act prophetically as well. This brings me to the third word in this address: witness.

We have found many creative ways to 'pay the rent', including scholarships for Indigenous children and university students, donations to Aboriginal organisations, and supporting Indigenous community gatherings, conferences and protests. West Australia Regional Meeting held a 'Welcome Both Ways' smoking ceremony and meeting for worship, and Canberra Regional Meeting hosts a Listening Circle where First People come and speak to those who are ready to learn about the reality of living life as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in Australia.

Our activity on refugee concerns was equally vigorous. Victoria and Canberra Regional Meetings both offer sanctuary for asylum seekers, and a number of individual Friends help with language and practical support of individual refugees and their families. Victoria Regional Meeting hosts weekly tutoring and a monthly meal at the new meetinghouse, and supports a sewing group that empowers women to socialise and build employment readiness. Tasmania and South Australia Regional Meetings have small grant schemes and Canberra Regional Meeting organises care packages to be

sent to Manus Island.

QSA received a major bequest this year in support of refugees and Friends are now in discernment about how best to make use of their allocated portion. QSA also supports aid projects in Cambodia, Uganda and India.

The Yearly Meeting Earthcare Committee has challenged us to act on carbon offsets for travel by setting up a Regional Meeting 'dollar a refill' fund. This has not been widely taken up, instead leaving the earth care witness up to individuals. It is a weakness. However, Friends are increasingly using Zoom to reduce Quaker-related travel and our individual commitment to action is widespread.

There were several examples of individual witness being supported by meetings. For example, Queensland Regional Meeting supports the refugee support work of Abel Siboniyo as well as David Carline's work with Indigenous people at Cunnamulla. Tasmania, Canberra, West Australia, and NSW Regional Meetings all helped prepare applications to the Yearly Meeting Peace & Social Justice Fund for their members: Joss Brooks' tree-planting project in India, Dave Hodgkin's concern for a School of Peace in Indonesia, Jerrod McKenna's First Home Project supporting new Australians, and Aletia Dundas' work in Ecumenical Accompaniment in Palestine & Israel. Victoria Regional Meeting funded Jason MacLeod's Civil Resistance Guide and a project led by Lorel Thomas dealing with unexploded munitions.

Friends also provided financial support to a wide array of causes. The Quaker Shop in Adelaide raised \$74,000 for QSA last year. They have 55 volunteers and regularly run out of the pamphlets about Quakers which sit on the counter.

### Evangelism

This leads me to the fourth word: evangelism. I know that many Friends think that evangelism is a four letter word, and might prefer to call it outreach. But they are not the same. Outreach lets people know that we exist, and its aim is to increase our numbers. Evangelism is about offering opportunities for others to be changed as we have been changed through our shared worship, community and witness. Evangelism is about changing lives, with a side effect of increasing our numbers.

Though few, there were examples of outreach this year. Victorian Friends held an open day at their new meetinghouse in Melbourne; NSW Regional Meeting had a stall at Mardi Gras; and Hunter Valley Local Meeting in Newcastle hosted the WW1 peace exhibition for Quaker day, which resulted in 4 new attenders. The panels being created by Friends in Stitches provide a great resource for future outreach. But it is the example of **what we do and how we live** that is our best outreach. We could all do better at claiming our Quaker motivations and open a door for others to experience the goodness we have found amongst Friends.

### Numbers

We welcomed 17 adults into membership this year. Eleven resigned their membership, two of whom did so out of disillusionment with Friends. The number of adult members has remained relatively stable at 892. Children have increased by 8per cent and attenders have dropped by 2per cent to 755, making a total of 148 children and 1647 adult Quaker participants in Australia.

Numbers matter: we need critical mass to finance and empower our

CONTINUED ON PAGE 19

# A reflection on my time at Yearly Meeting

WILMA DAVIDSON | CANBERRA REGIONAL MEETING



*Oh to have time to reflect!*

Like many other Friends, prior to YM I am involved much of the year preparing and planning and solving problems and answering questions, and at YM itself there are meetings and planning sessions and children's sessions and JYF camp and All Age MfW preparation, and if I can, I have a chat to distant Friends over meals.

Because of the pleasure of hearing the wisdom of our children and being loved and laughed and teased by the JYFs, and the messages from the old friends I caught up with at YM and the early morning worship and All Age worship – and of course the Quaker way of decision making – I forget the rushing and take away warm memories and ideas.

My fantasy is that I arrive at YM with my timetable marked at the sessions I want to attend, and in between sit with dear distant Friends and a leisurely cup of tea. I spend time occasionally with the children, sharing an activity I've planned, or sit in on with the JYFs for an hour or so. I then go to bed after epilogue and awake refreshed to attend the early morning meeting.

Yet for my fantasy to happen other Friends will be responsible for the planning and organising, other Friends will attend meetings and take responsibility and cover the areas I am currently involved with.

I am very aware of the areas I am not involved with – the help desk, the accommodation, anything to do with

IT – and marvel at these friends who make up for skills and time I lack. YM only works when our myriad of different skills and interests are pulled together.

At our RM last week we talked about YM and the reasons we attend (or don't attend) YM. And like many others, I attend to fulfil a sense of community. And I imagine this will be the main reason I attend whether it's longer or shorter, in winter or summer or split into more than one gathering.

I do enjoy being rugged up to walk briskly to Early MfW on chilly mornings. At JYF camp, there was nothing like the blazing bonfire to draw us together. However I imagine there will be similar moments of comfort and belonging no matter the time, place or size.

Two regular features of YM meant much for me this year:

## **Backhouse lecture**

The Backhouse lecture was enlightening and introduced many new concepts for me to take in. I found particular assistance from the book. I do find the connection between Buddha thinking and the Quaker Way, with focus on presence and impermanence, works for me, and to hear someone who goes even deeper into meditation and silence was refreshing.

## **State of the society address**

Oh what a pleasure to hear the children and JYFs, who they are and what they contribute, named and valued. I

know Friends feel a close connection to this (hopefully) next generation of Quakers, however their role within the community as a whole and their contribution within intergenerational forums is important and to be recognised.

Which takes me to the JYF statement, read to a full room by two JYFs. It was such a pleasure to watch the audience and see their reaction to these important words. Through this statement they have told us who they are, what being a Quaker means to them and where they see they fit in the Quaker community. May this inspire us all to ask ourselves these questions.

Now YM is a few weeks gone and threads are still connecting me with people and thoughts and outcomes. I have had time to reflect on its gifts, and also attended a session about the direction options for future YMs. YM in principle is important, this YM was extra special for me because of the excellent venue, however, can we really meet the expectations laid upon us, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually, and do all things, be all things in this one week?

We are an ageing community, YM numbers are dropping and less of us are sharing more tasks. Where to now? Maybe we need to ask the children and JYFs what they think.

AF

# Growing up in a Quaker family

MARTIN FALLDING | NEW SOUTH WALES REGIONAL MEETING

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During my days at 2018 Yearly Meeting I was asked to write a reflection on being a child in a Quaker family. Being remote from day-to-day Quaker contact, I find it good to spend time with others having similar ideas and values. Reasons for attending Yearly Meeting were also that it was reasonably close to where we live, and an opportunity for our 13-year-old son to experience more of Friends and to meet and share time with other children of difference.

As a child, I grew up among a loose network of many strong, talented, individualistic, and generally non-mainstream people with whom my parents maintained contact. Many of these personalities had connections with Quakers, the peace movement, bushwalking and conservation. While this seemed normal at the time, in retrospect it was not.

Born a late 'baby boomer', my story begins as Australia returned to stability following the stress of two world wars and the Great Depression. My parents encountered Quakerism as young adults, each at a different end of the planet and deeply influenced by the social upheaval they had experienced.

My deeply spiritual mother Vreni grew up in a strict Moravian missionary family in Switzerland, uncomfortable with such narrow Christian belief and practice. She trained as a teacher, and was moulded by the aftermath of World War 2. Her experience as a relief worker, and then an au pair for

a Quaker family in Britain strongly influenced how she raised her own children. Two summers were spent at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre near Birmingham, followed by work for Friends Relief Service in war ravaged Germany.

Leaving Europe in 1952 for a new life in Sydney, she met my father John Fallding at Devonshire Street Meeting in Sydney. Raised as a Methodist, his conviction to pacifism led him to conscientious objection to military service during World War 2 and time in a Forestry Commission camp in the Watagan Mountains with others similarly inclined. During this time he found a like minded Quaker community, was strongly influenced by Gandhi, and in 1949 made the lengthy journey to India to attend the World Pacifist Conference. Interestingly, several generations of his mother's family in England were early Quakers and contemporaries of George Fox.

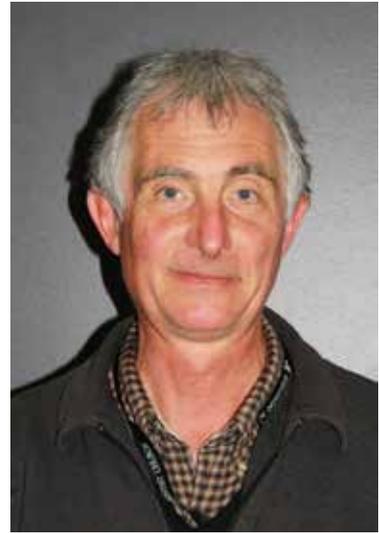
Diverse interests and friends brought a rich, and often understated, mix of ideas, values and influences at home. I watched osmotically from the sidelines as the post-war environment of optimism and freedom evolved, superimposed on narrow minded suburban uniformity and cold war fear, and this fertile ground brought 1960s experimentation, challenge to authority, and an explosion of popular culture.

Growing up, my sister Heidi and I often felt like outsiders. It was a time of divided dominance between

the Church of England and Roman Catholic faiths, and you had to have a label, especially for compulsory school scripture. In primary school, I went under the Methodist umbrella, in high school it was 'non-scripture', where I joined a small number of mostly Jews spending enjoyable and quiet time in the library.

We frequently went to Sunday school at Devonshire Street meeting, where there were quite a few children. I particularly recall participating in, and performing the Christmas story. When we owned a car, my parents regularly attended the then recently established Wahroonga meeting. This was new and fresh, lacking the darkness and aged urban surfaces of the inner city. The best thing for me as a child was the bush setting, and the view from the meeting room window into nature. Although there were always a few children there, I had the impression that most were older or younger, and being a child at meeting felt awkward.

For many years during my childhood, the Vietnam War provided a significant backdrop and social challenge. We were introduced to oppressive authority, protest and the personal and social risks this presented. In others, we observed the limits and costs of personal conviction and social division. I have distinct memories of the dread of being asked what I thought of school army cadets, and the uncertainty and social insecurity that the morality of this question raised.



Both interesting and formative was the frequent personal stories, and discussions held around the dining table at home with many visiting Friends, often from overseas. The value of this became clear when we travelled to India and Europe for 7 months in 1967 visiting many Quaker connections and experiencing places and people that had been formative for our parents.

Our Quaker parents had strong opinions, and an authority built on life experience and clear values. As children we were expected to behave, to be responsible and think independently, but not directly told what to do. My response was to be patient, and to go with the flow.

Meetings for worship were often boring for a child, and sometimes full of suspense or confronting. Sitting still and quietly became a natural thing to do, and incredibly difficult for some. Yet, it was a wonderful time for reflection and thought. This is something I still value, and all too often absent in the modern urban world.

I cannot remember exactly when, but it must have been in the early 1970s when with some hesitation I joined a Young Friends week of being immersed in Aboriginal Redfern, visiting the Aboriginal legal and medical services, learning about injustice, inequality and activism, attending the local court, and singing 'House of the Rising Sun' late at night. A group of us also unexpectedly met the police during a midnight walk around Redfern Park when this was

definitely not a wise thing to do.

While a student in 1976, I lived as a caretaker in Hanna Lemberg's house next door to Wahroonga Meeting House for some time while she was overseas. This brought regular participation in that meeting. After that, studies, interests and physical location conspired to remove me from any direct involvement with Quakers for a long time.

Since then, my contact with Quakers has at best been intermittent, punctuated by an occasional visit to Devonshire Street meeting on a trip to Sydney, and our memorable wedding conducted by Norman Talbot from the Hunter Valley meeting at the former Morpeth Anglican conference centre. We have also hosted a small number of Hunter Valley meetings at our Callicoma Hill eco-cabins, and participated in meetings at the Easter National Folk Festival in Canberra.

Having been born into a Quaker family has given me a lifelong insight and appreciation of important values. I have had a largely accidental journey, enjoying casual and opportunistic Quaker connections. I continue to appreciate the continuing, if distant community of interest. The silence, shared reflection, common shared values, and openness are an approach with which I feel comfortable, and very relevant to the contemporary world. Embracing social justice is also hard to forget for someone with Quaker roots.

When casually walking past a

Quaker meeting house on Gloucester Road during a 2015 visit to Bristol in the UK, the succinct statement in the artwork on the wall facing the street caught my attention – peace, equality, simplicity, and truth. These words and values resonated strongly.

With a third generation of our family now being introduced to Quakers, I wonder whether and how these values fit in a world that is increasingly rapidly changing, filled with conflict and tension, growing in inequality, over complex, and full of spin and superficiality. Most people are also disconnected from nature. Surely, the values that bring Quakers together are more relevant than ever. The strength of silence and reflection must be used to project a realistic alternative to the doubt and disillusion that exists with so many institutions, practices, and cultural norms. Perhaps this presents an opportunity.

The challenge is how to make the Quaker way and community accessible to more people, and to create a platform where its ideas, values, and institutions can build an alternative to the insecure and crumbling established world around us. Showing integrity, respect and dignity while challenging today's norms and often aggressive and unethical behaviour, provides a unique opportunity for Quakers going forward.

AF



# My Yearly Meeting experience

ALLAN KNIGHT | NEW SOUTH WALES REGIONAL MEETING

David, Can you write a different heading for one of these - they are too alike?  
S.

For me Yearly Meeting was characterised by apprehension, realisations, learning, relief and gratitude. As well, thanks to great catering it was a more weighty experience than I might have wished.

My Yearly Meeting experience this year was quite different from my previous ones. In a sense it started before July 7. With the need to find alternative clerking arrangements for Standing Committee and Yearly Meeting formal sessions, I agreed to clerk Standing Committee and the first two and final formal sessions. Almost immediately after agreeing, the doubt and “what have I agreed to” thoughts emerged. After a period of apprehension about this, a confidence arose; not in what I might bring to the clerking role but rather that Friends would be caring and supportive regardless of what I brought to the role. This confidence was not misplaced.

In preparing to clerk Standing Committee and the first two formal sessions at Yearly Meeting I realised how much of the processes and formalities I had participated in at previous Yearly Meetings had in fact not entered my consciousness – so many things seem to have just passed over me. This led me to a renewed gratitude for Quaker record keeping and minute taking practices; a review of previous Standing Committee minutes and Documents in Retrospect helped to start clear some of the fog.

I was also reminded of the importance of coming to Meeting with heart and

mind prepared. The discernment we undertake in our business meetings is well supported by hearts and minds prepared to be open to the leadings of spirit, and hearts and minds abreast of information relevant to the matters under discernment.

I learnt much more of the processes that go on quite often unseen, and possibly unrealised, “behind the scenes” to make our Yearly Meetings function as smoothly as possible. This was from the work of Friends in the host Regional Meeting to the work undertaken by the AYM secretary and presiding clerk, convenors of preparatory sessions and committee convenors. I left Yearly Meeting with a deepened appreciation of the work undertaken by many Friends to make our time together one that can speak to our conditions and strengthen the bonds of our community.

As has often been my experience of Yearly Meeting, it is the opportunities to sit with others over a meal or cup of coffee and engage in conversations that allow us to get to know each other both in things temporal and things eternal that are so enlivening. The rural setting also provided for walks and chances to converse with cows, sheep and goats – although it must be said these were rather one-sided conversations.

Another reflection that has continued to stir in me following Yearly Meeting is the strength we have in Quakers’ diversity of faith belief and the binding strength in our Quaker

processes. I left Yearly Meeting with a quickened joy in our manner of worship and ways of making decisions where we try to answer that of god in all people so that we may unite in spirit even in the knowledge we have differences. A piece of vocal ministry given at the Meeting for Remembrance and based on Hebrews 12:1 has remained with me since Yearly Meeting. We were reminded that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. Not witnesses in the sense of others watching us, but rather Friends whose lives witnessed to that measure of light given them. In the light of their lives we too can find guidance and insight to “run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

But my overriding experience of Yearly Meeting is that of gratitude. Gratitude for the grace, love and patience shown by many Friends in the conduct of their work during Yearly Meeting, not least that of our AYM secretary Jacque Schultz; gratitude for the work of Friends who serve on our committees; gratitude to Friends who take the time to stop and ask “How are you?” and then show the patience to hear a response that may go beyond the simple “I am well”; gratitude for the way so many Friends let their lives speak on a daily basis.

AF

# My experience of Yearly Meeting

GREGG HEATHCOTE | NEW SOUTH WALES REGIONAL MEETING



## *The Gathered Meeting*

Silence  
we sit and wait  
the Light shines  
as we grow porous  
it begins to flow through us  
this Light—invisible  
beyond our speech or thought—is  
small as a single grain of finest salt  
expansive as the breadth of cosmic space  
sharp and specific with concerns  
gentle with the healing hand of peace  
streaming from the Source  
and back and forth between us  
the glow intensifies—  
enwraps us all  
the ones who drift as well as those who  
watch  
without our understanding or design  
a radiance grows  
we cannot know  
of all the places  
Light it generates  
will shine

Anne B. Udy

Having been able to attend the first three days of Yearly Meeting 2018 was for me a wonderful opportunity. Though I've been attending Hunter Valley Meeting for around ten years this was the first time I'd been able to make it along to a Yearly Meeting.

Avondale College was the excellent YM2018 venue. In spite of the fact that nearby Newcastle has been my lifelong home town I'd never before visited Avondale College, so it was also a welcome opportunity to explore such an attractive local campus.

An immediate benefit of meeting with Friends from all over the country, and beyond, is the enriching fellowship it affords. Convivial encounters with fellow Quakers from all points of the compass resulted in the sharing of so many individual and collective stories. It's inspiring to hear of these many and varied journeys which individual Friends, and meetings of Friends are embarked upon.

The various concerns of Australian Quakers were given due consideration in the Preparatory Sessions which examined Earthcare, Peace Reports, the activities of QSA etc. etc.. The airing of these worthy matters gave a fine sense of the grand venture that is contemporary Quakerism. However the spirited communion of Friends naturally touches upon more than just the thoughtful exchange of words. I had

never before joined in Meetings for Worship so abundantly attended. Being gathered in silence with so many Friends was a thrill.

Intermittently during my life I have found myself drawn into the spirited exercise of composing poetry. In poetry words can truly reach beyond words. A conjunction with the silent sublime may then be attained. Consequently I found myself irresistibly attracted to a particular Winter School elective offered at YM2018, a workshop elective exploring the 'turning points' which poetry brings about within individual lives, and within the arc of human cultures.

Poetry can be a great vehicle for the mystical. Consonant with this was the subject of the 2018 James Backhouse Lecture, delivered on the third day of Yearly Meeting. The Lecture was titled 'An Encounter between Quaker Mysticism and Taoism in Everyday Life'. It was presented by Cho-Nyon Kim, a Korean Friend and a professor of Sociology. Professor Kim further shared with his audience the place of pluralism within the Korean religious landscape, and the part which mysticism of one ilk or another can play in support of pluralism and deeper unity.

All in all I am heartily grateful for the blessing which YM2018 turned out to be.

AF



# Australia and refugees

DAVID PURNELL | CANBERRA REGIONAL MEETING

AND QUAKER PEACE AND LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Recently Sister Jane Keogh, who has been very engaged by the trauma of those held at Manus Island Detention centre for years, expressed a sense of ‘fatigue’ caused by the bad news and suffering witnessed on a daily basis. She called on us to work harder in the time before the next Federal Election to change the policy – ‘to save many lives, and restore some semblance of humanity in our country’. She and others have compiled a booklet of personal stories of real people and real situations to help educate Australians and put pressure on politicians to respond. Their slogan is STOP THE VOTES for deliberate cruelty. Despite both Labor and the Coalition being cruel in their approach, Labor does have better policies around permanent visas and citizenship for the 30,000 already in Australia.

Jane Keogh reminds us that Australia is suffering a crisis in humanity. Manus and Nauru are both in crisis:

- Thousands in Australia thrown out into the streets with no support
- Families are being split as a matter of policy
- Large numbers are being deported to where they cannot survive
- 14 children on Nauru have made serious attempts at suicide and we had to fight our government in the courts one by one to get them help.
- The families living in mouldy tents on Nauru are being temporarily moved while the international forum is on so their situation cannot be witnessed.
- The numbers of refugees in PNG who have already lost their minds is very high and violence is rife. They are driven mad, denied help, then blamed

for their symptoms.

- Medical help is being denied to many seriously ill with such things as broken bones, kidney stones, loss of sight, ulcers, cancer, and heart conditions, on Nauru and Manus
- Pain medication needed by the Manus men is not available
- Levels of depression are worse than ever before even among the most healthy
- The US deal will take many years as only 105 have left from PNG in over a year. Many nationalities have been excluded and many will not survive the wait.

Anyone who wants further details about Jane Keogh’s project can email her at [janeikeogh@gmail.com](mailto:janeikeogh@gmail.com).

Thomas Albrecht, the UNHCR Regional Representative based in Canberra, gave a major speech at ANU on 24 July 2018 on Australia’s role in the international refugee protection system. He made the following points:

- Australia has had a remarkable role over many decades, drawing on the fundamental values and principle of protecting human beings who have had to flee their homes because of fear of persecution owing to race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group.
- After playing a leadership role in establishing the 1951 Refugee Convention, Australia accepted many displaced people in the post-WW2 period – about a million. Its resettlement programs are excellent.
- The recent decision to raise the humanitarian intake to 18,750 for 2018-19 is welcome in the context of refugee needs worldwide. It follows a

period since 2013 when the intake was lower.

- The emergence of greater focus on border control, while understandable, puts at risk the importance of protection for those seeking asylum. We cannot expect refugees to stop taking risks of using smugglers and traffickers if we do not provide safer ways.

- The key question for Australia is – how can Australia fairly and compassionately address the challenges and implications of a truly global displacement system? The use of ‘off-shore’ processing falls well short of an adequate response, and has caused for many in Nauru and Manus greater suffering than their earlier trauma in the place they left.

- Efforts to enhance comprehensive regional approaches, based on sharing responsibility, are most significant. The Bali Process, with 48 members including UNHCR, is a good example. Australia has given its support to the protection language used in the Bali 2016 Declaration, and needs to follow up with policies that reflect those sentiments. The current ‘operation sovereign borders’ leads to turning back a much higher proportion of asylum seekers than ever before., creating a greater risk that more people will face danger or persecution when returned.

- The people on Manus Island in particular have been given minimal information about their situation, and have been denied health and welfare facilities. In Nauru the situation is exacerbated by the significant numbers of women and children involved.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

# Making the image of God

## Part 1

My god was like an old, old man  
(But vigorous still, and strong)  
Who sat upon a golden throne  
Surrounded by a throng  
Of angels, dressed in purest white  
(And never other hues).  
And as god didn't move a lot  
But mostly sat in this same spot  
The angels darted to and fro  
And brought and carried news.  
My god was like an ancient sage  
Who wrote a sacred text  
Which humans – not so very bright –  
Could read, and look perplexed  
And not agree on what was meant,  
Although they surely knew  
The words were wise beyond compare –  
There one could find, and only there,  
What to believe and do.  
My god was like a mighty judge  
Presiding in his court  
And frowning, for the things folks did  
Were not the things they ought.  
And punishments were justly given  
For every naughty deed  
(Like rising late, and chewing gum  
And giving cheek to dad or mum)  
And every naughty thought.

## Part 2

Well, I grew up, rebelled, and learnt to doubt,  
And so I put away these childish things.



I asked 'So where is God, and what's He doing?'  
God left his throne, and filled the universe  
And all the host of heaven flew away.  
And looking at the sacred texts I asked  
'Who really wrote these words, whose thoughts  
are they?'  
And armed with modern text analysis  
Saw not the Word of God, but words of men,  
Words of their time, and not forever true.  
And looking at the folk that God would judge  
I asked, 'How will He part the good from bad?'  
For some from foulest motives did good things,  
And some the worst things in the name of love,  
So none could merit either heaven nor hell.  
I damned the Day of Judgement, and St Peter  
Closed his book, and threw away his keys.  
So God became the Ground of all our Being,  
The Page on Which the Universe is Writ,  
The Moral Framework of the Universe,  
The Primal Cause, and many other things  
Which needed to be typed with Upper Case.

## Part 3

But when God surprises us with a burst of  
magpie song,  
An ultrasound showing a tiny heart beat,  
With a butterfly that looks like a little green leaf,  
An ugly black fly that has six golden feet,  
Then all images of their creator blur and fade  
And all words lose their power of suggestion.  
God is the answer, now all that remains  
Is to frame the right question.

*Rae Litting*

### CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Regardless of claims that these people are now the responsibility of the PNG and Nauruan governments, legally they remain the responsibility of Australia until they are adequately housed and settled. Even within Australia itself there are serious concerns about the withdrawal of services for the 30,000 refugees and asylum seekers held in limbo about their status.

- People seeking asylum should be detained for the minimum period

needed for health, identity and security checks, and subject to judicial safeguards. Fast-track processing that bypasses proper legal processes should not continue. Those found to be refugees should be given permanent not temporary status, and enabled to be reunited with family.

- It is encouraging that more Australians now see that 'the end does not justify the means' and are calling for changes in policy and practice.

Australian Friends have supported many public expressions of outrage and concern about how the current policies have been contrary to the ideals and expectations of most Australians. It is now time for us to renew our efforts to make sure that the next election delivers a government that is committed to significant change in refugee/asylum seeker policies.

AF

# Prising open West Papua

## *A Quaker-led Peace Pilgrimage, March 2015*

JASON MACLEOD | QUEENSLAND REGIONAL MEETING

AND DALE HESS | VICTORIA REGIONAL MEETING



In January and February 2015, eleven people – six Quakers, a Mennonite, three Catholics and a Methodist – from three countries (Australia, the United States and Fiji) travelled to West Papua. Officially, we were invited to attend the 160th anniversary of the Gospel arriving in the Land of Papua. However, the genesis of the delegation – what we termed a peace pilgrimage – was a longstanding relationship the co-leaders of the pilgrimage had with Reverend Dr Benny Giay, the Moderator of the Kingmi Church in West Papua.

Two years prior to the pilgrimage, Reverend Giay wrote a letter to two of the leaders of the pilgrimage. In that letter, he said that Church leaders in West Papua feel as if they are ‘surrounded by violence’ and ‘cannot escape.’ Reverend Giay went on to ask if outside people of faith could accompany the church in some way. That question stayed with the co-leaders. It kept them up at night until slowly the idea of a peace pilgrimage to West Papua emerged.

West Papua is located on the western rim of the Pacific. It is one half of the island of New Guinea. The eastern half is Papua New Guinea, an independent state since 1975.

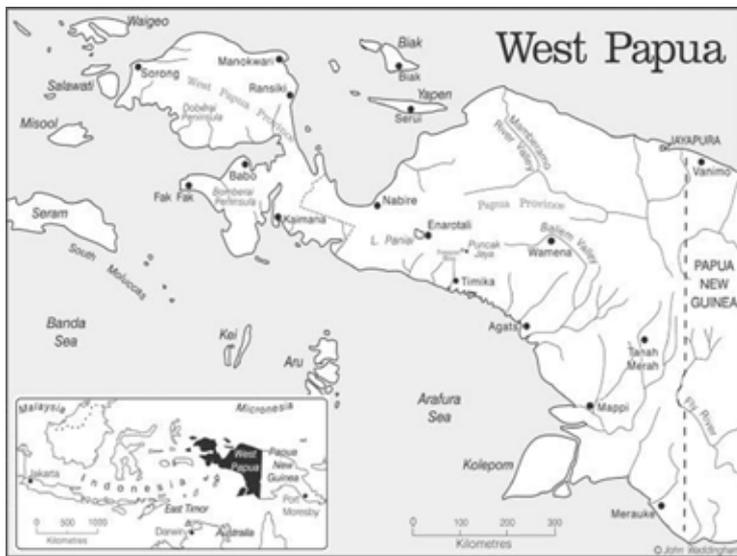
The western half is West Papua, made up of two provinces, Papua and Papua Barat – The land of Papua – which is another name West Papuans give to their country that has been forcibly occupied by the Indonesian Government since 1963. It is the Pacific’s Palestine, less well known by Australians but greener – 75 per cent of the mountainous interior is cloaked in rainforest – and much closer. From Boigu Island in the Torres Strait, Australia’s northern most island, you can wade across to Papua New Guinea. From there it is a few days walk to the West Papuan border. West Papua may only be a swim and walk away from

Australia, but it may as well be the dark side of the moon. The country is what journalist, Mark Davis, called a ‘secret story’, hidden from the outside world by the vagaries of geopolitics and a policy of keeping foreign journalists, human rights workers and even diplomats out.

### Recent events

Rev Dr Benny Giay was not being dramatic in his letter. Only a month before we travelled to West Papua, four young people, some of them in primary school, were shot dead by the Indonesian Police in Paniai, in the remote highlands. One of the young people had been savagely beaten by the army the night before. He and his friends had been holding a vigil at a makeshift roadside chapel when a car drove by without its lights on. The young people yelled at the driver to put his lights on. The car stopped and soldiers hopped out and proceeded to beat the boy.

The next day, on 8 December 2014, the boy’s friends went to protest the beating. When they arrived in town, they saw the car driven by the soldiers. Angry, they started hitting the car. That is when the police opened fire with live ammunition, killing four. Despite calls by civil society for a thorough and independent investigation, no action against the police had been taken. The



The Indonesian military post and roadblock at the 100 km mark on the Nabire-Timika road. Each car pays 100,000 Rupiah (\$10 AUD) sometimes more. Troops can be seen playing volleyball in the background

response of Joko (Jokowi) Widodo, the current Indonesian President, has been tepid.

### The purpose of the pilgrimage

The pilgrimage's four objectives were to:

1. Build relationships between pilgrims and Papuans;
2. Offer moral encouragement that in small ways helps break down Papuans' experience of international isolation;
3. Engage Regional and Yearly Meetings of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia, the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Brisbane and the Pacific Conference of Churches in learning more about West Papua and exploring interest in advocating with and on behalf of Papuans;
4. Identify if Papuans and outsiders are willing to explore what it might mean to accompany West Papuans in their nonviolent struggle for justice and to maintain long-term relationships with a shared concern for nonviolent struggle, peace and justice; and if there is interest in this aspect, exploring what accompanying Papuans and the nonviolent movement for freedom and rights might look like.

Significant progress was made on all these objectives. As organisers and pilgrims, we feel that the visit surpassed our expectations.

### Some initial outcomes of the visit

We can already discern some significant outcomes from our visit:

- We were a nonviolent presence and source of moral encouragement for people looking for ways to cast off fear. That encouragement was most visible in Byak and Paniai where the weight of repression has fallen heaviest. Papuan human rights defenders and community advocates told us repeatedly that our visit communicated tangibly that they are not alone, that outsiders care about their plight.
- In small ways, our presence expanded – even if momentarily – the political space for those we met. That effect seemed to linger long after we left.
- Our visit also contributed to eroding West Papua's international isolation. By intentionally not cooperating with the *Surat Jalan* system – a system of requiring written police permission to travel throughout the country – we have contributed to the Papuan-led opening-up of West Papua to access by foreign media and international human rights organisations.
- We also helped contribute to village development. As part of the preparation for the visit to the highlands, we constructed a toilet and shower block for the village. When

the Nabire-Timika road is sealed, that will make it easier for the village to open a small guest house for travellers. Our visit, which concluded with a pig feast on the last night, was part of an important cultural practice of exchange and mutual obligation through which wealth is redistributed.

- The visit led to an opportunity for significant ecumenical dialogue between churches from West Papua and other parts of the Pacific and directly led to Benny Giay's church, the Kingmi Church of Papua, becoming a member of the Pacific Conference of Churches.

As pilgrims, together in a momentary community, we also learnt much about ourselves and each other. In very stressful settings, we tried to extend care and trust to one another. Even when we failed and hurt each other, we were held in love by the group. The way we all tried to practise fearless conversation, listened, sought to transform the ways we have internalised the forces of empire, and extended forgiveness and mercy was an inspiration and a source of hope, even when we fell short. The friendships we made and experiences we had will continue to resonate for years to come.

In Byak, we met with a community of survivors of State violence, survivors from the 1960s when the Indonesian

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23



# QSA Notes

## What we told Yearly Meeting

AI LEEN QUAH AND JACKIE PERKINS | QSA



**Above:** MSRI's education program provides respite for both refugee children and their parents. Photo: MSRI

**Right:** One girl's ideas for using solar power to pump water for crop irrigation and to provide lighting in a bullock cart when travelling at night. Photo credit QSA



During Yearly Meeting 2018, QSA reported on the progress of many of the overseas projects that have been supported by Friends and the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. A power point presentation focused on the work being undertaken by project partners on climate change and environmental restoration. Some major aspects were:

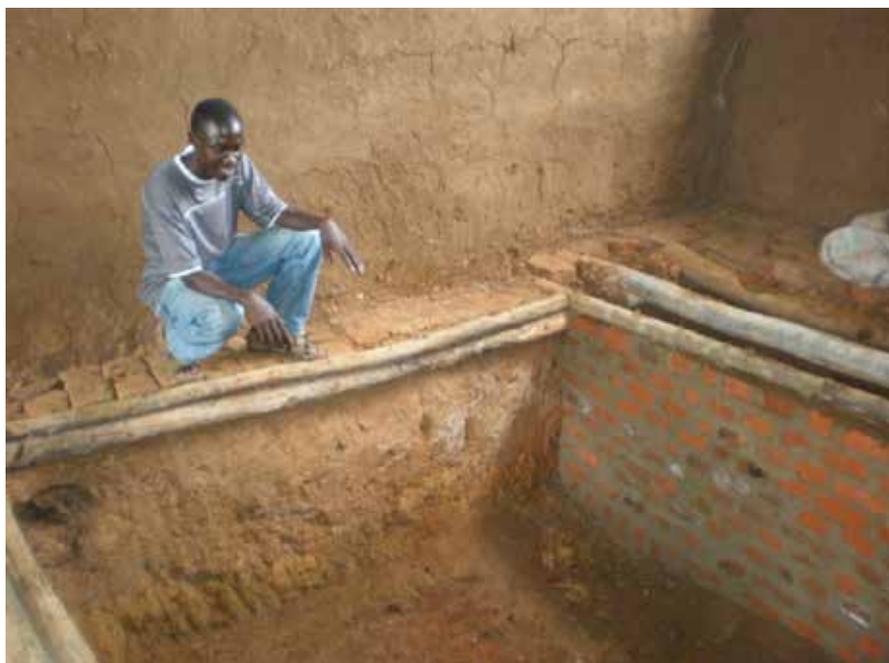
- Raising awareness about the local environment, with study classes for school students, discussions between farmers and study visits to different locations.
- Learning how to care for the environment as part of the project activities, including a school project in Tamil Nadu to design possible ways of using new technology.
- Understanding what climate change is and how it could impact on the local area
- Learning what can be done to reduce the impact on the region, on agriculture, on livelihoods and on food and water security. Project activities

included participation in regional planning and discussions; training in food processing and seed saving to help in the future; learning different ways to help with water security such as underground tanks instead of walking large distances to collect water from a tap and understanding ways to keep the water supply pure. Climate change and environmental considerations don't only impact on the work of project partners. QSA has also been assessed this year to be sure it is acting in the most environmentally aware manner, and during Yearly Meeting, Zac Bonham from NSW RM gave a presentation on the results of his survey as part of his work for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. Zac was able to suggest some areas for improvement, but on the whole we are on track, with our carbon offsetting via reforestation projects in Tamil Nadu; use of electricity, phone and paper resources to name a few. This Yearly Meeting also noted the commencement of several projects to

support refugees and asylum seekers in Australia through Regional Meetings and in Malaysia in collaboration with the Refugee Council of Australia. Friends heard of the provision of small neighbourhood grants to refugees and asylum seeker groups in Tasmania; support for a drop-in centre program for refugees between the ages of 12-17 years in South Australia; weekly community-based opportunities for support and mentoring for refugee university students and also a sewing circle of refugee and asylum seeker mothers of young children in Victoria; and support for 'It Takes a Village' project in West Australia. Friends' School in Hobart have also been involved in creating opportunities for school students to network with students from diverse backgrounds who are part of the Young-Migrant Education Program, and QSA has already received some feedback about this project.

One student has written:

*We were divided into groups and*



Above: In Uganda, using underground water tanks to store water. . . Photo: QSA



Above right: ... or the alternative – queues at the neighbourhood tap. Photo: QSA

*provided the opportunity to work with students from all over the world, and assist with their learning ... and had the opportunity to help many individuals broaden their knowledge on a variety of topics, including future careers and the workplace. We were also fortunate to be involved in the process of 'Students Against Racism' performance, and I felt extremely lucky to be able to involve myself in the performance, and listen to all the students' emotional stories about their life (both before and after moving to Australia). A highlight of the day would be the games and activities*

*we were able to play as a group, it gave us a chance to connect with the students on a deeper level and I know I was able to find many things in common with many of the students. Lunchtime brought an immersive experience of culture, as the students prepared a range of delicious dishes from countries all over the world for us to try ...*

This is exactly the sort of interaction QSA was hoping would result from the funding opportunities, and we look forward to hearing more from other Regional Meetings about their projects.

The project in Malaysia is supporting

early education and psychosocial support for refugee and asylum-seeker children from minority backgrounds aged 0-6 years who do not otherwise have access. Malaysia does not recognise the 1951 Refugee Convention, yet has the highest number of refugees and asylum seeker populations within the Asia Pacific. The vast majority of refugee children in situ are thus likely to spend a protracted time in limbo given the precariously low levels of resettlement. Thus this project will help these children to build resilience and develop essential life skills while preparing them for primary education.

QSA is a member of the Australian Council for International Development and is a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct. The purpose of QSA is to express in a practical way the concern of Australian Quakers for the building of a more peaceful, equitable, just and compassionate world. To this end QSA works with communities in need to improve their quality of life with projects which are culturally sensitive, as well as being economically and environmentally appropriate and sustainable..

Unit 14, 43-53 Bridge Road, Stanmore, NSW 2048 Australia • administration@qsa.org.au  
PHONE+61 2 8054 0400 • FAX: +61 2 9225 9241 • ABN 35 989 797 918





## From Fear to Hope

### *Alternative Australian narratives on war and peacemaking*

BY PAMELA LEACH

Printed copies of the book, and payment arrangements, can be obtained from QPLC at [CQPLC@quakersaustralia.info](mailto:CQPLC@quakersaustralia.info)

This book by Pamela Leach is the result of a project undertaken by the Quaker Peace & Legislation Committee (QPLC) – with an Anzac Centenary grant – to focus on alternative perspectives on war and peace, and to encourage dialogue about peacemaking. A series of talks was held in 2015 at the Friends Meeting House in Canberra, and this publication has been based on the material collected there. Pamela Leach was invited by QPLC to work from this in her own way, and the result is a substantial presentation of research, stories and analysis. Pamela (a member of Tasmania RM) was born in Canada. Her academic career has been in the field of political studies, and she is also a poet.

At the launch of the book at YM 2018, Pamela said in a message to Friends: 'I have brought a particular lens to this project. As a Canadian academic...I have become an Australian during the course of writing. So I offer fresh eyes on the practices of war and peacemaking in which Australia has engaged and built its identity'. In the introduction to the book, Pamela writes that 'it seeks to scrutinise peace and

war, to wring greater understanding from these concepts, or perhaps the reverse: to inject deeper meaning into terms that have been so widely used that they have come to mean anything and nothing'. In particular, it draws attention to significant alternative views and facts that may raise questions about the more dominant stories told about Australia's part in World War 1 and armed conflicts since.

The chapters encompass the experience of WW1, its impact during and after, resistance at home, artistic responses, Australians building peace, and ways forward. The emphasis on the human story of war, both at the battle sites and at home, is a major strength of the book. It reflects the marked divisions of the Australian community throughout WW1 and in later conflicts (e.g. Vietnam). The theme of Fear is developed by stories of WW2 when civilians became military targets as never before in order to terrorise – a grim foretaste of what happens today. Some common themes of all war are explored in the book – the tendency for combatants to be ignored or neglected afterwards, the unequal treatment of different ethnic groups (especially First Nations people), the 'hiding' of records of real pain and suffering to soldiers and their families and children, the post-traumatic shock and suicides, the uneven reporting that blurs what really happens in war, and the unwillingness to learn and apply nonviolent ways to respond to conflict and crisis in world affairs.

The contribution of Quakers – alongside many others – is included in the narratives. This includes the experiences of conscientious objectors, the protests against military training for boys, the ambulance work in war zones, the expressions of sympathy to Japanese people after the atomic bomb devastation, support for refugees, and ongoing opposition to increased military spending. Friends have an important record of seeking peaceful outcomes based on the affirmation of basic human dignity.

Overall this is a most valuable resource for study and reflection, for senior school students as well as adults. It can be used to continue QPLC's aim of promoting dialogue among citizens about how Australians can become more aware of the real costs of war and act in hope to change things for the better. The challenge, as Pamela Leach says, is 'for those who want to be peacemakers, by means other than militarism and weaponry, an additional task of reclaiming this 'peace building' term, to mean something greater than control through the threat of force'.

DAVID PURNELL

*Canberra Regional Meeting*

For on-line access see [https://ipoz.biz/ipstore/index.php?route=product/product&product\\_id=503&search=Pamela+Leach](https://ipoz.biz/ipstore/index.php?route=product/product&product_id=503&search=Pamela+Leach)

# Noted

**This is our regular feature in which we briefly record interesting publications and websites that have come to our attention. Inclusion of an item in this format does not preclude a possible longer review in a later issue. We welcome suggestions for inclusion.**

## *Subtitle*

David, do you have something to fill this space?

### STATE OF THE SOCIETY – 2018 - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

witness and our spiritual nurture in the world. Where are we growing? What are we doing right? These are the useful questions. Also, where are we shrinking, and why?

#### **Condition**

This brings me to the final word I offer: condition. Think of it is something a doctor would say to a patient. We all have a spiritual condition that needs diagnosis and treatment. We can also be in 'good condition'. Usually it's a mix of both something to celebrate and some shortcoming to be revealed and allowed to heal in the Light.

The lack of growth in our numbers may reflect a certain spiritual stagnation. If our spiritual base is vibrant, we will attract more. Lots of people speak truth to power and do good works. We have to be more than that. We need to enhance and display the spiritual basis of these activities in order to grow meaningfully as a society. The number of Young Friends in particular is small, and they need our care and nurture. Maybe they can help us upskill in IT usage which will be needed to address our ecological witness.

But I think the greatest ailment we

have now is our temptation for creedal debate: including stubborn conflict about what is or is not 'Quakerly' and heated debate between atheists and those who speak of God. To this I offer the following story:

*One evening a guest was sharing supper with two elderly Friends. He asked them how Friends understood God. One of the elders answered, 'Well now, I guess I don't really know. I know what I think'. Then, turning to his friend, he said: 'Thee and I have been worshipping together for almost fifty years. I don't know what thee thinks about God. I don't think we've ever talked about it.' The other Friend agreed, adding: 'I really don't think it matters much. If thee shares the experience in the worship, it doesn't much matter how thee puts it into words.'*

As Queensland has advised us, we must speak with another one another under the discipline of the spirit. It may be helpful to use the same rules as in meeting for worship for business:

- Speak your truth, but listen too
- Be prepared to be changed by the

encounter

• Be prepared to live in a patient uncertainty, perhaps for years, enabling disagreement without animosity

• Set aside self & ego in deference to Truth.

#### **Conclusion**

And so I return to the questions I was given in preparing this talk.

How is Truth prospering?

How do these expressions of Truth prosper in your meetings? Community. Prophecy. Witness. Evangelism.

If a Voice could speak to our condition, our *state* as the Religious Society of Friends, what would it say to us? I pray that we may hear that Voice, and that we may follow its counsel.

*Open our ears that we may hear  
Voices of truth thou sendest clear  
And while the wave notes ring in  
our ears  
Everything false will disappear.  
Silently now I wait for thee  
Ready my God thy will to see  
Open my ears, illumine me  
Spirit Divine.*

AF



# Together toward life:

## *Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*

PETER H BENNETT | VICTORIA REGIONAL MEETING

*It has recently been my great honour to represent Friends on the Faith and Unity Commission of the National Council of Churches in Australia.*

*The Commission met on the 20th and 21st June at the Centre for Ministry and Theology at the University of Melbourne. Churches represented were the Anglican Church, Churches of Christ, Greek Orthodox Church, Lutheran, Roman Catholic Church, Salvation Army, Uniting Church and the Religious Society of Friends. The focus of our deliberations on this occasion was to provide a theological response to the World Council of Churches' monograph 'Together Towards life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes'. Preparing a Quaker response was particularly challenging as the monograph was firmly grounded in mainstream theology, such as a belief in and commitment to a Triune God, as well as mainstream approaches to evangelism*

### What Canst Thou Say?

The World Council of Churches' monograph 'Together Toward Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes' explores and gives expression to core and mainstream Christian beliefs and a powerful rationale for the wider Church's mission in the world. In response this brief paper provides a Quaker response to some of the matters raised in that monograph.

### Credo

It is a complex task to give expression to the beliefs and theology of The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) as it is encountered in the unprogrammed tradition found in Australia, the United Kingdom and many American Meetings. The faith tradition is apophatic (apophatic theology holds that the nature of God is beyond description and analysis) and as such, providing an explicit statement of fundamental beliefs is very difficult, though not impossible. Many Australian and English Quakers would walk with Wittgenstein when he said 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent.'<sup>[1]</sup> Quaker hesitancy to ascribe attributes to God and the absence of a creedal statement of beliefs does not mean that the Society is in chaos nor does it mean that

there are no shared beliefs and values; it just means that mapping those beliefs and prescribing some sort of moral imperative to them is not warranted.

In the absence of any Creed and in the presence of an apophatic tradition one is led, not unsurprisingly, to the question 'What do Quakers believe?' One way to understand Quaker beliefs is to see them as analogous to the relationship between Common Law and Statute Law. Some mainstream churches have highly developed and evolved creedal statements (Statue Law), others less so. The Religious Society of Friends has no Statute Law, but it does have a number of shared beliefs which have emerged over the last four hundred years. There is no moral requirement that one ought to embrace these beliefs, but many Quakers would give their assent to them. They are:

### There is that of God in each Person

Friends believe that God is present in the life and being of every human person (John 1:9 – the so-called Quaker verse). This existential belief has profound implications for how Quakers see the 'other' and impacts Quaker belief on how others should be treated and encountered. It also has implications for how Quakers see themselves. The belief lies at the heart of Quaker

pacifism. 'Together Towards Life' powerfully affirms belief in a Triune God. Underpinning this language lies an orthodox conception of a God who may be said to be Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient, Omni-benevolent, Transcendent and Immanent. An apophatic tradition is unable to engage in or give assent to such a characterisation and instead is likely to speak euphemistically of God with terms such as the Light and Spirit and Love (1 John 4:16) 'God is Love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him/her.' (NIV) For Quakers, God is that which is experienced and yet is beyond saying.

### The Priesthood of all Believers

In the unprogrammed tradition Quakers have no ministers, priests or episcopate, or perhaps, it may be more accurate to say that for Quakers, ministry is ubiquitous in that all Friends are ministers. In addition to preaching the gospel without words, Friends are welcome to speak during silent Meetings for Worship, if one is led by the Spirit. These spoken ministries are sometimes referred to as 'leadings', 'testimony' and 'ministry'.

All of life is Sacramental Quakers have no sacraments yet believe that all life is sacramental. Friends do not celebrate any Mass or Eucharist

yet believe that every meal is sacred. Friends do not celebrate any baptism yet believe that every act of ablution is rebirth. No day is more sacred than any other but all days are equally sacred. God is also believed to inhere in all creation

### The presence of God may be discerned through silence and stillness (Psalm 46:10)

In the unprogrammed tradition, silence and stillness lie at the heart of Quaker worship. In these moments Friends wait patiently on God. The Meeting for Worship is a time of discernment, and seeking leadings from the Spirit. These leadings may result in an inner dialogue (prayer), spoken ministry or a deep non-verbal inner stillness. Quaker ways of worshiping are contemplative, mystical and experiential. In the silence, God is a living inner presence

### Let your yes be yes and your no be no (Matthew 5:37)

Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' 34 But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

Friends will not swear oaths in day-to-day life, courts of law or other forums, nor will they attach superlatives to their assertions or denials, believing that to do so is to imply that one's avowals or disavowals can be qualified. This remarkably simple admonition by the Christ, and Friends' widespread adoption of this teaching saw early Friends develop a reputation for being scrupulously honest. This reputation, in turn, saw Friends' business enterprises become extraordinarily successful.

It is notable that none of these shared beliefs go to existential questions about the nature of the Godhead and therefore

no beliefs can be enunciated about what would follow from such an ascription. Theistically grounded Friends will have worked out individually what they mean by 'God', but there is no corporate unified belief. God is that which is beyond saying.

Nonetheless, and despite these limitations, Friends are at work in the world, and always have been.

## Praxis

### Let your life Speak

Modern Anglo/Australian Quakers have an antipathy towards proselytising and evangelism yet hope that by example their lives may speak to that condition which sees Christ manifest in each woman and man. Among modern Friends, mission and evangelism have a low priority. In Victoria, Australia, for instance, there are no committees for mission and evangelism. The closest modern Quakers (in Australia) come to mission is in the establishment of Outreach Committees. The primary focus of these committees, however, is more to do with publicising Friends' existence in the world and holding days when enquirers can visit Friends' Meeting Houses and learn about Quakers. Even when Enquirers do come to Meeting for Worship there is a general reluctance to say or do anything that might be interpreted as evangelism or proselytising. Enquirers come to Friends from a vastly diverse alumnus of religious and secular experiences. Many assert that these experiences have been painful, disorientating and spiritually toxic and as such Friends are reluctant to say or do anything that might exacerbate these negative experiences.

It was not always thus, however.

Early Friends were evangelical and travelled throughout the English countryside and later the wider world preaching and evangelising. This evangelical drive saw Quakerism established throughout the Americas, West Indies and later in Africa. Right from the earliest days of the movement, however, evangelism was underwritten by a powerful social justice imperative.

This included incredibly significant relationship building with the first peoples of North America, abolition of slavery, prison reform, and the enfranchisement of women. 'Friends were so adept at meeting the material needs of victims of war that the organisation was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947'[2].

Modern Friends continue to be deeply focused and committed to issues of social justice. Today causes such as the treatment of refugees, care for the environment, nuclear disarmament, rights of LGBTIQ people, rights of indigenous peoples, racial and gender equality are all primary concerns of Friends. Underpinning Quaker ways of being are the six Testimonies which may be thought of as avowed dispositions to guide daily living. These are::

- Simplicity
- Peace
- Integrity
- Community
- Equality
- Stewardship/Earthcare

The Testimonies are viewed as providing a sort of scaffold by which belief (theory) is driven and delivered as practice.

In this short paper I have tried to do three things – first, explicate the nature of fundamental Quaker beliefs as much as they can be explicated within what is essentially an apophatic faith tradition. Second, I have sought to give an account of Quaker approaches to mission and evangelism within the Anglo/Australian context. Third, I have tried to show that mission and evangelism are intimately linked to issues of social justice. For Australian Quakers, mission is social justice delivered within a worshiping tradition based on silence and stillness.

[1] Wittgenstein, L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* p.89

[2] Welling, Jacalynn Stuckey in 'Mission' *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies* (2015) p. 313

# Professional supervision for clergy and church workers

JENNIFER BURRELL | NEW SOUTH WALES REGIONAL MEETING



What does this have to do with Friends? I asked myself as I entered the understated but corporate-feeling surroundings of St James Hall in Phillip Street, Sydney, for a workshop sponsored by the National Council of Churches. It's a question I'd answered by the end of the workshop: Yes, it does relate to us; but, still unanswered: how will we decide how to make it fit with our practices?

I attended this round table workshop in July 2018, on behalf of our Presiding Clerk, Jo Jordan. The NCCA and its member churches are still reeling from the impact of the findings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses into Child Sex Abuse. The recommendation that inspired this workshop is Recommendation 16.45:

*Consistent with Child Safe Standard 5, each religious institution should ensure that all people in religious or pastoral ministry, including religious leaders, have professional supervision with a trained professional or pastoral supervisor who has a degree of independence from the institution within which the person is in ministry.*

Why this recommendation on 'supervision'? The workshop presenters never explicitly answered this question, perhaps because it is too embarrassing. It's because clergy and church workers cannot be trusted to create and maintain a safe space. That's why.

Yet 'supervision' in this context has a

specific meaning, and this was defined and discussed by the presenters. In this context, 'supervision' is not line management, where the boss ensures their subordinate is toeing the line. It's not spiritual direction either; spiritual direction focuses on the participant's relationship with God. Nor it is only pastoral care – guiding, healing, sustaining, reconciling, nurturing, empowering, advocating – although pastoral care and spiritual supervision overlap.

Supervision, in this sense, takes something from all of these existing practices. Supervision creates a safe space with boundaries between participant and supervisor, and challenges the participant to exert their own spiritual discipline. Supervision is a tool to hold us to account for the way in which we co-create God in our own lives. At its best, supervision is a tool for ongoing spiritual learning and growth.

All very well, but how does this relate to Friends? In Australia, we don't have clergy. We do have 'church workers', but they are almost without exception volunteers. Quakers abolished the laity long ago when we insisted on the priesthood of all believers: we do not need a priest to mediate between us and God, we ourselves accept this role.

Are we exempt from a call to greater spiritual self-discipline? Can we trust all Friends to create and maintain a safe space at all times? I don't think so. I think we are all too human. I believe that the spirit of the Recommendation

does include us and therefore that it should inform our practice.

How do we live our testimonies? Who calls us to account when we let ourselves and others down? In the distant past, in Britain, the Overseers were charged with this duty. I'm not sure this ever really happened in Australia. I don't believe our Ministry & Care Committees would understand this to be their duty now, or that all individual Friends would necessarily welcome a call from them to exert stronger spiritual self-discipline.

It is true that we still have some vestiges of 'supervision'. Support groups and clearness meetings assist individual Friends and committees to fulfil their leadings and terms of reference. Some groups specifically request that an Elder work beside them. Our safe Quaker Community Contact Friends, and Child Protection Contact Friends, also work quietly in the background to ensure right ordering. But these are the exceptions, not the norm. Perhaps we are not, as a Religious Society, very open to personal and corporate accountability.

I think that the Royal Commission has reminded Friends, as well as other churches, that we are imperfect, that our spiritual lives are not static. We change throughout our lives; we should grow, not regress or stagnate. We all know that we have not reached perfection, and sometimes we do harm – often

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

unawares, unmeaning, sometimes with malice, for which we are rightly ashamed. Individuals need loving Friends to support them and hold them to account.

I believe that Recommendation 16.45 of the Royal Commission is a call for us all to re-examine our practices. How, corporately and together, would the Religious Society of Friends in Australia find a way to encourage us all to hold ourselves and others to account?

How could we, in a loving way which respects individuals' right to privacy, recreate the old-fashioned role of the Overseer in 'helping each other up with a tender hand'?

A problem is the attitude 'I answer only to God'. But there is a whole-world context in which we live and act and affect others. There are reasons why ordinary people think that the recommendations from the Royal Commission are important. Are we too

proud in our own esteem to think we need to learn?

You can see the Royal Commission's full recommendations at [https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final\\_report\\_-\\_recommendations.pdf](https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final_report_-_recommendations.pdf). Chapter 16 deals with religious institutions.

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military forcibly annexed West Papua as well as survivors from the 1998 Biak Massacre. Our group was taken to a meeting house used by customary leaders where we experienced a traditional welcome. Perhaps it was only 15 minutes into our discussion when the local police, members of the intelligence services and head of Immigration arrived. Seven of us were interrogated at the Immigration Headquarters, and then released without charge. The next day a Papuan member of our group was intensely questioned at our hotel, until she rang Ruben Magay MP, a senior member of the Provincial Papuan Parliament, who explained to the Immigration Officer the finer points of Indonesian law and the Indonesian Constitution which, in theory at least, guarantees basic freedoms.

In Jayapura we had an opportunity to meet with Catholic peace, justice and human rights defenders, with student activists and resistance leaders. They spoke movingly of the way they are accompanying political prisoners, seeking to make visible humanising values, and their hopes that the Church will stand in defence of Gospel values

in what is a very difficult and delicate situation.

We also travelled to Paniai in the remote Papuan highlands. To get there we had to pass through a military roadblock and pay an illegal toll. The sign above the military post boldly declared 'warriors protect the people'. It is not clear what 'people' the words referred to. The mothers of the children shot dead last December certainly did not feel protected. Underneath were the words 'bravery, honesty and responsibility'. Amongst those who work for the Indonesian State, particularly the security forces, these qualities are in short supply. We all sank lower into our seats in the car hoping that the black glass really was impenetrable to the armed military officers' gaze. After the 8 December killings, the situation was extremely tense. It now seems that this will be one more example in a five-decade long list of cases of security force impunity. It did not take much dialogue to peel back a layer of fear amongst many of the people we talked to in Paniai.

Our final visit in West Papua was to Mansinam, a small island off the coast of Manokwari. We were invited

guests for the 5th of February festivities celebrating 160 years of the arrival of the Gospel to the Land of Papua. The army, navy, paramilitary police and regular police were all there. We even saw a man wearing a militia t-shirt filming the thousands of guests.

Our report was presented to the NCCA executive by Julian Robertson shortly after the pilgrims returned. Church leaders were moved by Julian's presentation and decided to send a delegation to lobby politicians in federal parliament and another delegation to West Papua.

The parliamentary delegation, led by Kelvin Alley of the Salvation Army, included three Friends – Julian Robertson, Dale Hess and Jason MacLeod – as well as fellow pilgrim Peter Arndt, Executive Office of the Catholic Commission of Justice and Peace of the Archdiocese of Brisbane. The pilgrimage has led to further visits and ongoing small efforts to transform the conflict.

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# The Australian Friend

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**Coordinating editor:** David Swain

**Editorial panel:** Garry Duncan, Rae Litting, Wies Schuiringa

## Production

**Mailing list** CAustFriend@Quakersaustralia.info

**Layout** Sheelagh Wegman, Hobart TAS.

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