

# The Australian Friend

ISSUE 0322 MARCH 2022 ISSN 1326-0936

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## Holding in the Light



# Editorial

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A commonly used Quaker expression which has added significance in these troubled times is 'holding in the light'. Sometimes it just seems to mean 'I'll be thinking of you', but some Friends find a much deeper and personal meaning in the words. In this issue we have two articles giving the spiritual experiences that Holding in the Light have for some of these Friends.

We have a contribution by Tim Gee, incoming General Secretary of the Friends World Committee for Consultation. Tim has offered to contribute more articles for future issues. And we have two 'Know thy Friend' features on highly valued Quakers.

We know Christmas is over, but it is worth looking back to it – even back two thousand years or so. What do the Christmas stories mean in our Quaker culture? Helen Gould has written a helpful overview.

On a far less pleasant note, we have the story of an abused woman and her escape to a better life. Was this through God, or just 'luck'? And Peter Bennett offers a brief meditation on alienation of the soul from God.

Our late Friend Jan de Voogd has left money to set up a fund for peace activities. In this issue we have the details of the purpose of the fund, and how to apply for money from it.

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## Letter to the Editor

Dear Friends,

I am writing to *The Australian Friend* because I would like Australian Friends to know about the following two Lebanese charities based in Lebanon. Both of them are worthy of Australian Friends' support financially.

1. Beit El Baraka:

[www.beitelbaraka.org/](http://www.beitelbaraka.org/)

2. Lebanese Food Bank:

[www.lebanesefoodbank.org/](http://www.lebanesefoodbank.org/)

Yours sincerely,

Mathew Harding,

10 Purnell Street,

Wanganui 4500, New Zealand.

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Cover: Holding in the Light, Meeting House in the bush



# Holding in the Light

## *My experience*

MOIRA DARLING | CASTLEMAINE WORSHIPPING GROUP

**I**t was the experience of being held in the Light during a time of discord and misunderstandings in my local meeting that convinced me I was a Quaker. It was many years later that I realised it was the person I had the disagreement with that was holding me in the Light. It was an act of spiritual discipline and love that I deeply respect and aspire to in my own practice. Although I knew I was being held in the Light, I thought it was some quiet Quaker in some corner of Australia doing this for all Quakers. I didn't connect it to an intentional action directed towards myself, yet I could feel it.

Quakers hold each other in the Light during times of duress and debility and many of us have felt that loving embrace during our times of trial. I recall the experience many years ago of being held in the Light following surgery. It was a tangible feeling in my body that I connected to the intentional action of friends in my local meeting caring for me. It was at that time that I learnt to know consciously what it was to be held in the Light. Over the years Quakers have spoken with gratitude of being held in the Light and knowing they were held from feeling the sensation in their bodies.

The healing power of being held in the Light is something we often speak about or engage in. Less frequently do we speak of holding each other in the Light as we embark on a course of work or engagement in the world. I learnt the power of this when, during a period of deep burn-out, I visited Friends General Conference (FGC) in the USA to attend a course on Spiritual Experience. (I just want to note that I had committed to the course before I became burnt out.) I had, with some encouragement, applied to the Thanksgiving Fund for support and been granted financial support for the journey.

However, the most unexpected, and greater, level of support I received was being held in the Light by a group of faithful and mostly unknown Quakers whilst on my trip. It was on the way to the airport that I noticed that familiar

feeling and said to my partner, 'I think I'm being held in the Light.' As I finished saying that, a text message came through from the Thanksgiving Fund Committee to say that I was being held in the Light. It felt like a miracle.

The miracle continued at FGC. The whole conference and venue felt like a crucible of love and Light. It was palpable from the moment I arrived. At the opening night session there was a line of people sitting on chairs across the stage. When I asked what they were doing, I was told they were holding the session in the Light along with others scattered around the room. Being held in this way at the gathering and by Friends in Australia made the week at this conference such a powerful experience.

Usually I am extremely uncomfortable at any large gathering, yet here amongst 1,500 strangers I felt comfortable and at ease. Every conversation was important and I was able to use my time well with both the formal and informal sessions. It felt like another miracle.

There have been other instructional experiences around holding in the Light. One time another Friend and myself were holding a workshop group in the Light for Elaine Emily. As the participants broke up into small groups, it was as though a wild storm erupted around and inside each of us. It took great concentration to hold ourselves physically stable and maintain focus on holding the group in the Light until

they settled into their work and came back into the large group.

It was quite exhausting and proved a lesson on how much energy and focus is required to effectively hold others in the Light. Sometimes it happens that no matter how much we want to, we are not able or ready to hold others in the Light. We have to have done our own 'inner work' in order to do this work.

This was starkly brought into focus for me when I tried to support the work of the First Nations Committee at their first workshop with Indigenous and Quaker participants by holding it in the Light as an additional support. I failed miserably. As the workshop progressed my mind was filled with images, remembrances and connections in my own life and ancestral line that needed to be known and worked through in relation to our impact on the first nations people of this land. The Elder at the workshop, who was holding it in the Light, was a great support in helping me understand the importance of the 'inner work' in enabling a deeper engagement with the spiritual work and providing a foundation from which it is possible to hold others in the Light. In subsequent workshops with First Nations People I was able to contribute more deeply and hold the people and space in the Light.

One last thing to be aware of is the importance of a gentle release so the folks being held don't have a bumpy landing. I am sure there are many ways of managing this transition. I tend to tuck my image of those I'm holding in the Light into a pocket of my heart.

Although I have spoken about the energy, effort and focus required to hold others in the Light, there are also exceptions.

At one AYM I was called into a

business meeting working through issues around the development of Silver Wattle Quaker Centre. This was very contentious at this time amongst Quakers. Even though I rarely went to business sessions I was strongly called into the session on Silver Wattle. I found a seat in the room and sat. I wasn't called to speak. I just sat, and while I sat I could feel a strong stream of energy entering the top of my head during the meeting. It was extraordinary. I stayed for the course of the meeting and was most surprised at the end of the session when the Clerk thanked all those holding the meeting in the Light and looked straight at me. I was astounded – was this what I had been doing, while I just sat here in this meeting, feeling this energy come through me?

Sometimes we are just called to sit and direct our focus in some particular direction and it is up to us to obey. In this instance I was energised and blessed.

So it has been that I have learnt the power of holding each other in the Light to facilitate healing, growth and engaging in the world. The act of holding each other in the Light is a deliberate and intentional action that takes practice, focus and energy and can effect a major transformation on others, their capacity for action and what happens in the world.

It takes time and practice to build this skill and develop confidence in it. People new to Quakers are largely left to figure things out for themselves. A simple yet powerful activity for us as Quakers would be to regularly practice this holding of each other in the Light in pairs, taking turns and providing feedback to each other about the experience of holding and the experience of being held.

In undertaking such an exercise it is important to have a sense of connecting to Spirit and being a part of something outside your direct control – the words 'Thy will not my will' come to mind. Steps that help with this include ...

- being grounded, centred and relaxed in the body.
- calming the mind and as holder focusing on the other.
- coming from the heart and practicing holding the other without attachment to outcome.
- having the gathering well held. Participants could take turns in holding the whole group and share how that experience was for them.

An important part of developing confidence in the development of this skill is providing feedback and sharing with each other what the experience of being held and holding was like.

- How was the experience? (taking turns for the holder and holdee to speak)
- What sensations were felt?
- If there were lapses in concentration / focus how did it feel to both the holdee and the holder?
- Was it easy or difficult?
- Was it similar or different to other times?
- How much energy / effort did it take?

It is my hope that we share in practical ways our knowledge and experience of holding in the Light, especially with people new to Quakers. In doing so we will be taking time to deepen our spiritual practice, skills and understanding as well as contributing something unique and powerful to meeting the current challenges of living in our world.

AF



# Holding in the Light

DUNCAN FREWIN AND MICHAEL CORBETT | QUEENSLAND REGIONAL MEETING

Quakers often use the term 'holding in the Light'. Holding someone in the Light seems to replace the prayers of intercession used in other churches. The phrase has a vaguely comforting feel to it, but what do we mean when we say we are holding someone in the Light? Our late Friend Mary Grbavac, over many years in the Friends' Fellowship of Healing, made a practice of holding in the Light a number of Friends and others who were in need of healing - physical, emotional or spiritual healing.

We also speak of holding a meeting in the Light. A number of Friends such as Michael Corbett make a practice of arriving early for worship, for instance, to hold the Meeting in the Light - both the group of people and the activity of gathering for worship or business.

Last Year the elders asked Mary and Michael to speak of their experience of 'Holding in the Light' at our spiritual refectation time on the third Sunday in November. Unfortunately, Mary's health prevented her from joining is, but she did send a short, written reflection a couple of weeks before she died. Michael also wrote out what came to him on the topic. Mary and Michael have offered these experiences and their insights into what it means to 'hold in the Light' individuals and groups as they pass through the vicissitudes of life.

## Holding someone in the Light

*by Mary Grbavac*

I have a few thoughts to share with you on the topic of 'Holding in the Light' of God.

My introduction to this concept has come to me later in life. I attended several AYM sessions of Friends' Fellowship of Healing, which informed me of the history of Quaker healing, going back to George Fox's healing activities, leading on to the movement of Healing among Quakers, Friends Fellowship of Healing, which I found fascinating.

When I started the practice of 'Holding in the Light' myself, imagining a searchlight of light from God to soothe and heal pain was suggested, I found it very spiritual and absorbing. However, I was unsure of the actual experience of the receipt of the loving offering.

I found it hard to describe the concept effectively to others, until I had a recent REVELATION.

As I was sitting recently looking at a multiple collection of flower displays from friends, I had an overwhelming

feeling of love floating over me. It instantly occurred to me, that I decided this feeling was a transference of LOVE from God through my friends' love offered to me.

It was a very strong feeling, at a low point in my life, a REVELATION that convinced me that this was the purpose and function of sending God's healing LOVE [LIGHT] on to others.

This has proved, revealed to me, that 'Holding in the Light' can be immensely beneficial, as I felt it strongly; it was overwhelming.

There is also another aspect of that practice, which is used in Meetings for Worship, which asks for guidance in our discernment in our business affairs at all levels to request a spiritual element to our life choices.

## Holding someone in the Light

*by Michael Corbett*

When I was first asked to lead the 3rd Sunday 'spiritual discussion' on the words we frequently use - to hold someone in the light - I thought that this would be just so easy but, on reflection, this is seriously one of the

hardest tasks I have undertaken.

I know what it means. I know how to. I have been doing this for over 60 years, so I don't need an instruction manual - I open my heart and soul, sitting in silent worship, it just happens, no matter where I am. For example, I find it easier to hold someone in the light than when I try to centre down in a MfW.

When I centre down, I sometimes struggle to let go of the world that I live in as too many things keep popping up into my thoughts. But I know that I can hold someone in the light, with all the distractions going at me full bore - I don't need perfect peace and quiet. As Assistant Clerk, for example, I am able to hold the MfWfB, especially the Co-Clerks, in the Light, with all the flow of people, conversations, lawn mowers and aircraft disturbing the 'silence'. But this does not help you. I still need to put it into words.

In Quaker terms I don't know if George Fox was the first to use the term 'Light', but he certainly used it many, many times. He spoke of the 'Divine Light' and 'enlightened by the Divine Light'.



Michael Corbett

In 1664, Margaret Fell said that 'Christ is the Light', asked 'art thou children of the Light' and 'hast thou walked in the Light'.

Thomas Camm in 1652 said 'Christ Jesus is the Light of life'.

Other Quakers have left us phrases from the past 350 plus years like - 'Live in the Light', 'divine Light', 'live up to the light thou hast', 'universal Light as the light of Christ', the Elders of the Balby Meeting in 1656 used the term 'with a measure of Light which is pure and holy may be guided'.

So the word 'Light' is a fundamental of our faith but that still does not explain what I mean when I hold someone in the Light. I have had to rely on others and use their words from two articles that I have read.

The first is from an American, Philip Gully, from his 'Quaker sayings' and I have only used part of his essay. He says:

I am holding you in the Light. We Quakers say that when we intend to pray for someone, when we want for someone, what God wants for them – peace and healing and well-being and soundness of mind and body and spirit. Though we often say it very casually, without much thought, it is more than just words. To hold someone in the Light is not a casual greeting that we toss out without thought. It is a promise to work for the betterment and well-being of another. We shouldn't say it unless we are prepared to do it. If we say to them 'I will hold you in the Light', we need to be prepared to lift them up. That is one aspect, our willingness to work for the betterment and well-being of another, to hold them

in the light when they cannot hold themselves in the light.

Now let us go a little further. We can hold someone in the light, and we can also hold someone to the Light. That is, we can hold someone to the Light when they are tempted to walk in darkness. To hold someone to the light is to hold them up to the Light of God's love, mercy and justice when they are tempted to walk in darkness. It is not to scold or nag or condemn.

It is simply to hold one another accountable to the higher Light and Life to which all humans are called. We hold others in the Light. We lift them up in the Light of God's Love and Goodness when they are unable to lift themselves. And we hold ourselves and others to the Light.

We keep before them, and ourselves, a vision of the Grace and Forgiveness to which we all are called. We say 'Remember who we are. We are merciful, not vengeful. We are charitable, not intolerant. We are generous, not miserly. Even when others have forgotten what they are to be, let us not forget who we are to be.'

We live in the Light. We live and hold others in the Light. We hold ourselves and others to the Light.

If I hold myself to the light, I am using self-criticism - did I speak harshly to someone today, did I treat others with respect, did I 'listen and follow the prompting of the Light'? As it is says in the Advices and Queries 19 'Think it possible that you may be mistaken'.

Our Friends in the Ann Arbor Meeting, Michigan, issue regular readings for reflection from their Committee on Ministry and Counsel. I have used part of the August 2003 issue to help me with 'what does it mean'.

When I'm asked to hold someone in the Light, my immediate

response is to picture them surrounded by a kind of halo of light as I pray for their well-being. I hope, then, that I will continue to think of them during the coming week and month, again praying that they will be well/healed or whatever is needed. I interpret 'holding' to mean 'carrying,' so my intention is to carry concern and love for them over a period of time ...

I like to think of 'holding in the Light' as 'holding in Love'. The Light to me represents God's love and some of its qualities, and so when I think of holding someone in the Light, I picture them surrounded by a visual, bright Light, but also surrounded by something warm and a soft texture...

If illness, or some other bad turn in my life, struck me next week, I would like Friends to hold 'me' in the Light, and not just my bad fortune. It is easy for the concern to focus on the illness, forgetting that there is a person there who has, or has had, a whole life that needs holding in the light as well.

Hold the person up to the light so that we may see illuminated all there is to the person. The thought above came to me recently when a Friend told me of seeing a person in need and not realising for the longest time that there was more to helping this person than tending to the need.

Friends, I want to leave you with some thought provoking points. What canst thou say?

- What does holding someone in the Light mean to you?
- Have you ever felt held in the light?
- Do you hold yourself to the light?

AF



# Know thy Friend

## *Nelson File*

PETER JONES | TASMANIA REGIONAL MEETING

Nelson File is best known as the current Principal of the Friends' School in Hobart, but what is little known to Australian Friends is his long history of Quaker ancestry since the four Walton brothers left Bibury in the Cotswolds to move to West Jersey in the American colonies in 1674. This farming family, like many other Quakers, moved across the Atlantic to escape the persecution being waged against them during the Restoration period (1660–85). They settled as farmers and the family remained so in Philadelphia until forced to sell their land during the Great Depression in the 1930s.

Nelson's Quaker antecedents are on his mother's side as his father was 'a lapsed Episcopalian' or what we would call an Anglican. The family has been in continuous membership at Byberry Meeting (the spelling got changed in the US) for more than three centuries on land allocated by William Penn in 1694.

One of Nelson's jobs when he was young, was to look after the cemetery where so many of his ancestors were buried. He recalls the section where many of the Lenape Native Americans were buried after the devastating smallpox epidemic of 1707, when other



Nelson File in Nepal, 1985

white settlers denied them burial rites in their 'Christian' cemeteries, but the Quakers accepted them.

While his father moved through various jobs,

his Quaker mother eventually returned to paid work through employment in Philadelphia at the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

Nelson himself started Year Seven at Abington Friends' School (another change in spelling from Abingdon in England) and then went on to college at Johns Hopkins near Baltimore. He told the story of how the founder was once a Quaker but got disowned because his business involved shipping alcohol so instead he left his fortune to found the university bearing his name. Nelson said that this period was an important one in his life because, although brought up in a Quaker family, he now felt the need to become 'convinced' and taking up a comparative religion course at Johns Hopkins helped him realise that Quakerism was indeed his spiritual home.

His knowledge of the history of Quakers and his own family still leaves him puzzling how a religious society that had initially predominantly appealed to yeoman farmers in England (the 1652 country) and in the American Colonies (Penn's Holy Experiment) then over three centuries became what is perceived today as much more of an urban middle class movement with a strong intellectual bent.

Nelson studied political science and history before moving on to try his hand at teaching at the Friends' Central School in Philadelphia. After teaching for two years at Friends' Central, Nelson felt the call to undertake service and volunteered for the US Peace Corps. He was posted to a remote village in Nepal to assist with a UNICEF project to install a gravity flow community

drinking water system where he spent two years and met his wife, Lisa, who was serving as a volunteer at a nearby village.

Returning to Philadelphia, he continued his teaching career there until opting for more work overseas. However their time in Kinshasa (the capital of what was then Zaire but is now the Democratic Republic of Congo) was a brief stay as the political chaos at the time (1991) led to their hasty evacuation and they transferred to the American Embassy School in New Delhi for the next eleven years, where they started their family of three children.

While there was a small Friends' Meeting in New Delhi, there were no Quakers at Nelson's next post at the American International School in Muscat, the capital of Oman. Having developed his own understanding of other faiths by learning about Hinduism in India and Buddhism in Nepal, he now learned about the moderate form of Islam practiced in Oman, a small state at the entrance to the Persian Gulf but one with a long and fascinating history.

Here in 2012, he noticed the ad for a Principal at the Friends' School in Hobart so after nine years in Oman, he made another big switch in his career as an educational administrator, this time to Tasmania.

Recently Nelson announced his retirement from the post of Principal at the end of 2023, proposing this time to move back to the United States, not to Philadelphia but to their new home in Hawai'i.

AF

# Where was God?

KAYE WRIGHT | VICTORIA REGIONAL MEETING



**WARNING: THIS ARTICLE CONTAINS DETAILS OF ABUSE THAT MAY DISTURB SOME READERS.**

Julie and I have a friend named Judy (not her real name) who was raped by her older brother nearly every night from the age of about six. Two years later, another, slightly younger brother joined in. She hated this but accepted it as normal. She knew nothing else.

Judy was brought up in the Catholic faith tradition and every Sunday the whole family went to church. Judy also attended church independently most mornings of the week. She cried each time... waiting to be asked what was wrong... No one asked.

Men who are bullies sense when women have been spiritually and psychologically injured (also in other ways) and home in on them. Judy married Ron when she was seventeen years old.

The cycle of abuse continued. Think of the worse abuse that can conceivably happen to a woman. What happened to Judy was far worse than that. We listened in horror as Judy related her life story.

Judy had two children, both boys. Judy always said that she cared for her children but did not love them. For Judy, love was a dirty word... I remember Judy saying that when the boys were babies, she used to set up their basins with their milk bottles positioned in a particular way, so that the boys could get milk but she wouldn't have to hold them. And so, the abuse became generational.

I am not a mother but this made me profoundly sad. I couldn't express this. I just blinked away my tears...

When Judy was in her late fifties, something shifted within her. She

slowly became stronger. She insisted on spending every Wednesday afternoon by herself (not looking after her husband, who was sick by then).

Judy explored her local township. She walked the streets. She never talked to anyone but just walked and looked at the houses.

Then one day she saw a particular house. There was nothing special or conspicuous about it but there was something powerful drawing Judy to it.

After going past this house many times, she decided to walk up the path and knock on the door. She didn't know why she did this. A woman answered the door and asked Judy what she wanted. The woman was not particularly welcoming. Judy couldn't talk. Perhaps a softening happened inside the woman because she invited Judy in for a cup of tea. Judy sat down at the kitchen table and burst into tears. And for the first time in fifty-eight years she shared her story.

The house Judy had just walked into was a Women's Refuge.

This was the moment Judy's life changed. Judy received support and counselling, and in a year or two she left her husband (who had threatened to kill her). Now the flood gates were opened, Judy shared her story with anyone who cared to listen, including radio programs. Judy also told her story to the Royal Commission into Domestic Violence in Australia.

When Judy was sharing her story with us in my lounge room, I listened carefully and respectfully and asked one question: 'Do you think that Spirit led you to that house?'. 'No!!' Judy was

adamant that Spirit was not involved. To her, God did not exist because of the profound suffering she had experienced. I knew enough not the question this. It was Judy's story, not mine. But still I wondered...

For me, there is no other explanation that I can think of. Judy had reached the age and maturity when she was ready to reach out for the beginning of her healing journey which would last the rest of her life. Whether it was God within or God without or both, something (good) and powerful enabled and prompted Judy to take that first step.

I guess it doesn't matter what led Judy to walk up that path. It matters that she did.

After many years of speaking out about domestic violence, Judy's health failed and she entered an aged care facility at the age of eighty. Judy has dementia now.

And yet she survived! She left her husband. She became a spokesperson for herself and all women who are abused.

If only, some seventy odd years ago, someone in that church had asked Judy why she was crying...

**If anything is this article has disturbed you, please ring Lifeline (13 11 14) or 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732)**

AF



# Some fruits of spiritual preparation

TIM GEE | FRIENDS WORLD COMMITTEE FOR CONSULTATION

When the Friends World Committee for Consultation announced that for their next General Secretary they would like me, my first response was joy – how else could I describe the prospect of working for the global community that enables people to know God’s love through the Quaker experience?

After that came a deep gratitude, joined by recognition of the responsibility I’d been entrusted with. I knew that to be ready I would need to prepare spiritually. The goal felt clear – to know an inner expansiveness which could hold the whole global community of Friends within it. I’ve found different methods of spiritual practice valuable: especially journaling, religious reading, focussed prayer and more open ended contemplation, in addition to Meeting for Worship.

By necessity I’ve come to understand lamentation as a form of spiritual practice too, in the light of the interlocking crises facing the world. Part of the lamentation is personal. Many of the extremes the world is seeing now, are more or less what many of us have been trying for years to avert. Why, when there have been ample well researched, costed, implementable proposals put forward to address global heating, inequality and violence have these proposals largely been rejected or ignored?

I’ve long believed that we need more than good ideas communicated

well to politicians. Part of the solution comes with public pressure, but we also need something far more profound: a collective, inward change of heart. This is something that can be understood and acted on by a faith community like ours, in a way that secular groups typically can’t.

There is a history that could be told of the crises of the present day which traces how each of these grows from countless moments when people could have chosen to love God and love their neighbour, but instead chose to love money and their own selfish interests. I’m not exaggerating when I say I believe that converting the world to Jesus’s central message, shared by many of the world’s religions – love your neighbour as yourself – will be necessary to liberating humanity from the mess we are in.

A passage by Winifred Lamb in Ireland Yearly Meeting’s *Life and Practice* asks, ‘How can we, such a small and insignificant group of people as the Society of Friends help to stem the tide of evil and hate and greed and fear which is so widespread?’. Her answer is – and I agree – to get the right balance in our life between inward and outward, being and doing, faith and practice.

In *This We Can Say*, Adam Curle recognises that the individual change each of us makes in this shift will likely be as hard to assess as that of a single strand in a rope. Nevertheless, if we act in faith doing the right thing for the

right reason then we will be part of the great movement which will address the world’s great problems.

In my preparations I’ve found very apt the words US Quaker scholar C Wess Daniels, who writes of the central goal for those called to serve Quaker community as being to hold a liberatory space, which allows Christ to lead, who will lead communities to work for justice, by resisting those forms of empire which manifest today. I believe that part of holding this space, will involve cultivating love, joy, community and friendship, against the corruptions of the world.

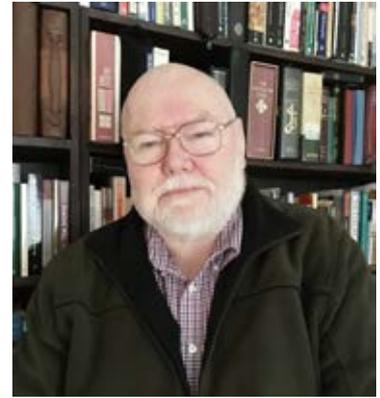
This is, as yet, a set of reflections rather than a plan. One of my colleagues compares working for Friends to being like a taxi driver, who makes sure the vehicle is safe and roadworthy, makes sure to understand and clarify where the passengers want to go, then works out the best route to get there.

It’s an engaging metaphor which as I’ve talked it through with others has grown. How do we make clear that everyone is welcome in the cab, and that if they speak up they will be listened to? What is the role for the taxi driver with suggestions, who as part of the group will also end up where they go? And if different people want to go different places, does the driver facilitate them until they agree, or just drop them off at each of their destinations?

These are questions I carry with me as I start, joined to a confidence that

# A brief meditation on alienation of the soul

PETER H BENNETT | VICTORIA REGIONAL MEETING



## *In Augustine's Confessions he writes at the end of Book II*

'And I became unto myself a wasteland.'

This heart-breaking sentence comes after a long reflection by Augustine on his selfish and thoughtless way of being. It is true sinfulness. It is the way of being which alienates one from God. It is the alienation of the prodigal son, it is the alienation that brings with it the Great Yearning, the Great Desire.

Without this Yearning there would be no sense of alienation. It is the alienation of the wasteland; the soul of wo/man can come to be a wasteland, and like the wasteland of the physical world, it is the result of

misuse, of imprudence, of unrestrained desire, of poisoning the land. It is the result of the absence of love. It is produced by a forgotten stewardship, the forgotten stewardship of Adam and Eve.

And the Yearning is for what?

It is to touch God. The woman presses herself in through the massive and surging crowd – if only I can touch the hem of His garment, I will be healed, I will be whole. This is the Great Yearning, this is the Great Struggle, to press in through the madding crowd, to struggle against all that keeps us from God. Somehow we know we will be whole, if only we can touch God.

And when we touch God, where there was once a wasteland, a garden flourishes. An Eden-of-the-Soul.

### SOME FRUITS OF SPIRITUAL PREPARATION – CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

an answer exists. I have felt this all the more joining online programmed, unprogrammed and semi-programmed Quaker worship in different places, delighting in the diversity of worship styles, whilst also being struck by the unity of the different gatherings, especially the extent to which ecology is an enduring theme of ministry.

In this spirit the next World Plenary in 2024 will explore *Living the Spirit of Ubuntu: Responding with hope to God's call to cherish creation – and one another.*

I'm encouraged by the way early plans for an inclusive 'hybrid' online/in person event are shaping up to reflect that theme. These conversations, joined to ideas about celebrating George Fox's 400th birthday together as part of the event, provide a welcome opportunity to envision life beyond the hardships of the hard years we've had, and to work to make that better future a reality.

Tim Gee is the General Secretary of Friends World Committee for

Consultation. His fourth book '*Open for Liberation: an activist reads the Bible*' will be published in June.

Tim joins FWCC from Amnesty International in the UK. Before Amnesty, Gee worked for Britain Yearly Meeting, Christian Aid, and Friends of the Earth. He is a member of Peckham and Plumstead Common Meeting in South East London, where he serves in an eldership role.

AF



# Know thy Friend

*Anne-Maree Johnston*

ANNE-MAREE JOHNSTON | NEW SOUTH WALES REGIONAL MEETING

Six years ago Elaine Polglase of Wahroonga Meeting gave me a small booklet ‘Yarns and Threads – a gathering of stories of a lifetime.’

Her way of writing struck a chord with me, not a historical rendition of her life but rather snippets and vignettes, fragments of times and experiences that were meaningful to her.

What follows are some of those moments in my life:

I grew up in a farming community inland from Byron Bay surrounded by relatives. Family was, and still is, very important; second cousins, third cousins, anyone remotely connected to us was embraced into the fold. Scottish, Irish, German and Scandinavian genes were all pooled together but the prime influence was Celtic. Entertainment consisted of dances and musical evenings in the local School of Arts and the beauty of Scottish and Irish folk songs resonate with me still. I hear this music, the cells in my body vibrate, and I am home.

While we were mainly of Anglo-European ancestry, there was also a large Sikh community in the area. One of those was Ram Singh, an elderly man dressed in traditional clothes and a turban. We were told as children he was the King of the Indians and was to be treated with the utmost respect. He sometimes hitched a ride into town and was the only hitchhiker my family and

relations ever picked up. We regularly attended the local Methodist church and one eventful Sunday a visiting lay preacher asked us to pray for these doomed, wayward local Indian souls. I was very indignant and perplexed. ‘But what of Ram Singh? Heaven’s doors would definitely be open to him’. My parents agreed. On that day I felt the idea of that of God in everyone was firmly planted within me.

Mine was a ‘free range’ childhood; hours were spent in the bush and roaming the countryside. My father divided the garden into small plots and every year I grew pansies in my little patch alongside the garage. He had a natural affinity for gardening ‘look at these flowers and they will tell you what they need’ he advised. Sadly my garden is still rather shambolic, and I often remain deaf to the entreaties of my plants.

It was a safe environment for a child. The community cared and supported each other, loved music, encouraged a love of nature and underpinning all was a deep Christian faith that nurtured and sustained us in times of joy and of trouble.

The war in Vietnam raged when I was 19 and a chance encounter with a stranger at a party planted another seed which started to flourish. I was intrigued to hear him talk of the injustices of this war. He quietly

explained his point of view and I went home feeling something inside me had shifted. I often think back to this night when discussing politics. How, rather than haranguing and arguing, gentle listening and respectfully teasing out of issues can be a much more effective way of changing hearts and minds.

The following year I was studying teaching in Armidale and attended the Methodist (now Uniting) Church. Described by a politician as a ‘hot bed of radicalism’, it was here that I began supporting the anti-war movement.

Having completed my studies and teaching in Sydney a small newspaper advertisement caught my eye, an invitation to the Quaker Meeting House, Devonshire Street, Surry Hills to hear a speaker named Donald Groom. The year was 1970 and Donald had been appointed as the first full time Secretary of the Society of Friends. He had journeyed with Gandhi in the struggle for Indian independence and worked with Vinoba Bhave. Bhave conducted the Land Gift Movement and persuaded Indian landowners to hand over five million acres of land to landless villagers. I listened as Donald spoke of peace and ‘letting your life speak’ and started to immerse myself in Quakerism.

Years later I dabbled in Buddhism for a short while. It was a Buddhist Monk who encouraged me to remain

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within Quakerism and to re-examine the spirituality and mysticism within my own culture.

Yearning to explore the world, in 1973 I travelled overland from Darwin to Turkey with Joanna Pearsall and Neil Barltrop. In what was then Portuguese Timor (now Timor-Leste) we meet young Timorese freedom fighters who spoke passionately about their desire for independence. I felt a great deal of compassion and sadness both for them and for the young Portuguese soldiers we encountered. Homesick and lonely they had been sent from Portugal to complete two years of National Service in a country far from home. Everywhere the insanity of colonialism was evident.

We travelled on and 10 months later arrived in warm hearted, snowy Istanbul. Spontaneously and in search of the sun, I flew to Israel, for a six-month stint on a kibbutz. Fortuitously I landed at kibbutz Shefayim and Amos Gvintz, a kibbutnik, became a friend. He was deeply involved in the Israeli Peace Movement and a passionate advocate for justice for the Palestinians. I learnt much from him and remain filled with admiration for those who choose to stay rather than leave their homeland. They remain committed to spending their lives, often misunderstood by many around them, working for change.

As summer drew to a close I flew on to London. Amos suggested I attend a

film directed by a Jewish friend of his. The National Front was at the height of its activity in 1974, a right wing and virulently antisemitic organisation. They chose that night to attack the theatre. How terrifying it was to see young men kicking and punching, in steel capped boots, with fanaticism in their eyes. How relieved I was to escape unscathed and make my way home. To this day neither the 'far' right or the 'far' left has any appeal. I have seen the pain it can cause.

After many adventures and travels I returned to Sydney to study nursing and to complete an Archaeology degree. Working in research and education in a Haematology Department I resumed my travels, collecting bone marrow from donors around the world.

When I started travelling years ago I was ignorant of the ways of the world. I look back with gratitude at the kindness of strangers who reached out and cared for us along the way. Travelling for work I was overcome with a different type of gratitude. Deeply grateful for those thousands of people who reach out to strangers and donate their bone marrow. They give to those they will never meet the only chance they have to be healed and to have a fulfilling future. I still feel humbled by this experience.

My involvement in Quakers has been diverse; I have received much more than I have given and learnt much

along the way. I have learnt the value of silence, and of listening to that still small voice within. I have served on a number of committees over the years. Perhaps because of my love of the bush it seemed a natural progression to become involved with Werona in Kangaroo Valley. I am thrilled that this year most of the property has been handed over into the care of the Biodiversity Conservation Trust to be kept in perpetuity for the protection of native plants and animals.

As we travelled in the 1970s we had very few books. We did however have a copy of some of the words of The Incredible String Band. Words I will always treasure.

*May the long time sun  
shine upon you,  
All love surround you,  
And the pure light within you  
Guide you all the way home*

AF



# The Jan de Voogd Peace Fund



**J**an de Voogd, a Quaker Peace activist, died in 2021 leaving his estate to be spent on projects which foster peace and social justice. The bequest is administered by the NSW Regional Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

We are inviting funding applications for projects which reflect the Quaker testimonies of Simplicity, Peace,

Integrity, Community, Equality and Sustainability.

Projects could include work in reconciliation, disarmament, non-violent conflict resolution, improving race relations, or assisting refugees and asylum seekers.

Projects may be aimed at making communities more self-sustaining, more equal, and healthier. Education in these fields, and bursaries for such studies are also eligible.

In his will and in previous communications with his executors, Jan stressed that his estate must be used for the benefit of communities, and not be spent on infrastructure such as buildings or vehicles.

Funds may be used to cover administrative expenses, equipment,

travel (including carbon offsets), publication costs and costs of monitoring.

The money is to be distributed within 5 years of Jan's death.

Applicants need to be a not-for-profit, incorporated organisation or be an individual who conducts the project under the auspice of such an organisation. The organisation needs to have a base in Australia. We will consider projects costing up to \$200,000.

For more information, please refer to the 'How to Apply' attachment. If you have questions about the fund or hope to apply for support please contact the Jan De Voogd Peace Fund Committee on [devoogdpeace@gmail.com](mailto:devoogdpeace@gmail.com)

# How to apply

Please submit a document or documents with the following information where relevant: (If you have difficulty completing this application, please contact us at [devoogdpeace@gmail.com](mailto:devoogdpeace@gmail.com).)

1. Project title and brief description (no more than 50 words)
2. Total amount requested
3. Project start and end date
4. Information about the project in detail. Please include:
  - The reasons for undertaking the project
  - Who will it benefit and how will it be of benefit?
  - Who is involved and why?
5. A realistic and accurate project budget. Include timeline and income from other sources if applicable.
6. How you will know if the project has been successful?  
Please include details of:
  - Key dates and milestones
  - How the project will be monitored
  - How you will keep the Jan de Voogd committee informed of the project outcomes
7. How you have considered reducing the environmental impact of implementing the project?

## Supporting documentation

Please attach files that support your application. These could include:

- A letter or letters, from people or communities that your project will participate in or collaborate with, confirming their agreement for the project to proceed
- Examples of previous projects
- Budget explanation including financial quotes where appropriate
- Short videos
- Links to Websites

## What happens after you apply?

The Jan de Voogd Peace Fund Committee will consider your application based on

- How well your project fits within the principles/ requirements of the fund
- The range of applications received

Recommendations for funding will then be made to NSW Regional Meeting (Quakers), where applications will be discerned in the manner of Friends.

Final recommendations for funding will be made to the Jan de Voogd Trustees/Executors before transfer of money is made.

Please note that at any stage of this process, you may be asked to provide clarification or more information on your project.

**Closing dates for 2022 applications are 31st March, 30th June, 30th September and 30th November.**

Please submit your application, preferably by email, to [devoogdpeace@gmail.com](mailto:devoogdpeace@gmail.com)

Or by post to Jan de Voogd Peace Fund committee 119 Devonshire St. Surry Hills NSW 2010

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# QSA Notes

Preserving traditional handicrafts, providing skills, work and incomes to poor women in rural Cambodia

FLEUR BAYLEY | QSA PROJECT MANAGER



Producers at the Centre's production facility in Pursat (one of whom lives with a disability) hand-weave a grass mat using traditional designs, colours and materials. They produce one metre of mat per day SOURCE: QSA

(Inset) Grass harvested sustainably in local communities in storage ready for use in grass mat weaving SOURCE: QSA

I have recently been inspecting our projects in Cambodia, including the Bunrany Hun Sen Development Centre. Since its establishment in 2004, Bunrany Hun Sen Development Center has provided skills training, employment and a source of income to hundreds of people (primarily women) in and around the regional city of Pursat in northeast Cambodia. It focuses on increasing women's skills and empowering them to establish businesses and earn income to supplement rural-based activities, particularly for those women with little or no land.

This organisation is unique. As well as helping the community, it is also keeping alive traditional handicrafts skills and techniques.

## History of the Centre and QSA's involvement

The Centre was established in 2004 when Prime Minister Mr Hun Sen

funded the construction of a vocational training centre in Pursat. QSA supported the Centre's vocational training activities, but falling student numbers due to competition from nearby factories prompted a restructure in 2016. The Centre then focussed on commercial activities, including production and sale of handicrafts, while continuing handicraft skills training at the production facility and in surrounding rural areas.

### What makes this Centre unique?

- It's one of the last organisations in Cambodia teaching traditional handicraft techniques
- Traditional designs and colours from the Pursat area are incorporated into modern and traditional products
- Women from poor rural families are empowered to develop skills, obtain work or establish their own businesses

- Raw materials including bamboo, grass and rattan cane are harvested sustainably in local communities, and natural plant dyes are used to colour

### Overview of operations

During the current project year, the Centre provides permanent employment for 17 skilled handicraft producers working in sewing, fabric weaving, cane and grass mat weaving, food processing and computing, with a further four working from home. This year, 91 students will receive vocational training, 43 at the Center and 48 farmers in rural areas.

Each year, a new village is identified with commune and village leaders, where people are offered training in basket weaving and palm sugar production. The villages selected for these courses all have raw materials available close by that can be sustainably harvested. Trainees also receive small



The only weaving machine of this type in Cambodia having been modified to suit this purpose at the Center SOURCE: QSA



Some of the clothing made from handwoven fabric on display at the Centre in Pursat



A hand weaving machine used to weave kroma SOURCE: QSA



A village-based palm sugar operation that sells to the Centre SOURCE: QSA

business training to set up a small business in their village or home and sell their output to the Centre, earning a regular income to help support their families.

A retail facility at the Centre and a small roadside shop nearby sell a wide range of handicrafts. In addition, customers can order online and also visit the Centre to view the handicraft production.

**The impact of COVID**

COVID-19 seriously impacted the Centre’s operations. With international borders shut and restrictions on domestic travel, gatherings and events, orders for

the Center’s handicrafts were drastically reduced. This forced a slight reduction in employment, but most staff were retained. However, the amount of produce sourced from rural producers for sale at the Centre was cut almost completely for several months, and vocational training was halted.

**What does the future hold?**

Sales have picked up in the past few months, and the future looks more promising.

The technical expertise required for production and handicraft skills training is well developed. However,

the Centre has limited capabilities in product design, marketing and sales. There is a recognised need to focus on online marketing, develop new products and designs, and adopt new working methods, including increasing salaries to retain skilled workers. QSA is now working with the Center, in conjunction with a local university, to prepare a new business and marketing strategy to help secure its future.

This project is supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP)

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.

Find us on Facebook for more photos and stories: [facebook.com/quakerserviceaustralia](https://facebook.com/quakerserviceaustralia).

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# Christmas, Quakers, and Incarnation

HELEN GOULD | NEW SOUTH WALES REGIONAL MEETING

Early Friends did not believe in times and seasons, because every time was sacred. However, they were passionate about Incarnation – the divine spirit becoming human, in us: ‘the body is the temple’. ‘The incarnation’ is the phrase mainstream Christians use for God becoming human in Jesus, at his birth.

For Quakers our beliefs arise from experience: specifically, the Pentecostal experience of the incarnation of the divine in one-self. We may particularly experience this – which Early Friends called the ‘power of the Lord’ – during worship, and when we are following divine guidance despite inner or outer opposition. At a trial of early Friends a judge called them ‘Quakers’ because they visibly shook, and the name stuck. The ‘power’ can be felt as an energy moving within us, or as ‘the light that enlightens everyone’ (John 1:9). We all have a ‘measure’ of the light, and as we live up to the light that we have, that measure grows. Jesus grew into the fullness of his measure, and that possibility is also open to us.

The Buddhists and the Yogis teach students how to meditate so as to experience that divine energy. We can learn how to centre down, down from the busy mind into the breath in the belly, and we can learn how to pay attention there, so that we may experience ‘the power’ or ‘the light’ or ‘the anointing’ which teaches us (1 John 2:27). This experience is, of course, not of our own doing: it is a divine gift, a grace; and it is different for each person because our ‘conditions’ vary. Hence George Fox challenged his hearers, saying ‘Christ

saith this, and the apostles say this; but what canst thou say? Art thou a child of Light, and hast walked in the Light, and what thou speakest is it inwardly from God?’

To Jesus’ followers he was the Messiah or Christ, both of which mean someone anointed by God for a special purpose. Unlike the many other Messiahs around his time, he rejected the view that the Jews would be freed from Roman domination through violence. Jesus was the son of God – and so were Adam (in Luke’s genealogy of Jesus) and the Davidic kings (Psalm 2), and those who, like God, do good to people regardless of whether they do wrong or not (Matthew 5:43ff). The Lord’s prayer begins ‘Our Father’.

The Christmas stories were not part of the earliest Christianity. They post-date the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE. The stories arose in specific communities where very few people could read, let alone write. They are like parables. The stories survived because they were full of meaning for their communities, and memorable. Matthew and Luke’s birth stories are quite different and occasionally incompatible. I focus on Matthew here. The gist of his birth story is that Jesus is the Messiah in David’s line (so Matthew’s hearers would expect Jesus to be born in Bethlehem and so he is, in a house where his parents are living). Jesus is also the new and greater Moses. So just as Moses ‘wrote’ 5 books, the Torah, there are 5 dreams, 5 prophecies, and the first of Jesus’ 5 great discourses takes place ‘on the Mount’. Like the old Pharaoh, the new Pharaoh, Herod,

orders the slaughter of babies in his attempt to destroy the holy child. This is parable, not history, and no less meaningful for that.

Does the meaning for their then, also hold meaning for our now? Yes. The core message of the gospels of Matthew and Luke is: don’t put your trust (faith) in the kings and kingdoms of ‘this world’, put your trust in the Kingdom of God, the Way which Jesus taught. The governments of this world practice peace-making through violence – the Roman armies ‘make a desert and they call it peace’, whereas the rule of God is about making peace through doing justice and loving-kindness.

After the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 CE, the centre of Christianity gradually moved from Jerusalem to Rome, from Jewish Christians to Gentile Christians. With this shift, Greco-Roman ideas about ‘sons of God’ replaced the Jewish ones, and when the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the state religion in 313, the hitherto acceptable diversity of belief in Christian communities was crushed.

And Christianity survives. As Eckhart said 600 years ago, ‘What good is it to me if Mary gave birth to the son of God 1400 years ago and I do not also give birth to the son of God in my time and in my culture?’

**Postscript:** Many of us also recognize that the divine incarnates in living beings apart from just humans! In all of Life, in fact – and from an Indigenous perspective, the land, the rivers, all of what-is, is alive.

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# 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.**

## Climate and Peace Forum

This website (climateandpeace.com.au), an initiative of the Rotary Club of Sydney Cove, features talks by experts about the Climate Emergency. The Rotary Club is not normally regarded as an extremist or radical organisation, and so this could be a good site to suggest to global warming sceptics.

The most recent webinar, given on 15 February, was on 'Climate Risks – making choices: Impending Tipping Points'. It featured Professor Will Steffen of ANU pointing out some of the recent effects of global warming, such as the Black Summer bushfires that affected 21 per cent of eastern forests, and temperatures close to 50 degrees in Canada last year.

He then spoke of potential tipping points at which global heating would become unstoppable, including melting icecaps and permafrost, and drought in the Amazon caused by deforestation and shifting rain patterns.

The second speaker was Admiral (retired) Chris Barrie, also from ANU, who spoke of the security threats arising from global warming. He claimed that by 2050 population could increase by 25 per cent and food production decrease by 50 per cent, unless substantial action is taken immediately. He pointed out that a sea level rise of 1.5 metres would flood large areas of Bangladesh, leaving 70 million people hungry and homeless.

The third speaker was Zara Bending from the Centre for Environmental Law at Macquarie University who

spoke of mass extinctions caused by climate change. She pointed out that as animals become rarer they become more expensive and are subject to black market trading, further decreasing the number of animals in the wild.

All agreed that we needed to reduce our carbon emissions by 75 per cent by the end of the decade.

Videos of the previous webinars are on the site, and include a range of speakers and topics including: 'Driving to the Future' with Alexandra Kelly of the Australian Electric Vehicle Council (16 November 2021); 'Climate Reparations' with Professor Maxine Burkett Senior Advisor with the Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate (16 February 2021); and 'Security Risks in the Climate Crisis' with Professor Lachlan Blackhall of ANU and Cheryl Durrant Fellow of Institute for Integrated Economic Research Australia who led the climate risk scenario development for the Australian Interdepartmental Secretaries' Group on Climate Risk (10 August) 2021).

## Quakers Climate Action at IPCC Negotiations

Quakers have made a number of interventions calling for urgent, fair and transformative climate action to transform root causes driving climate change at the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) negotiations.

Friends World Committee for

Consultation (FWCC), represented by the Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva (QUNO) is the only accredited faith-based observer organisation actively engaged in the negotiations to agree the IPCC's summary report.

Lindsey Fielder Cook, Representative for the Human Impacts of Climate Change at QUNO Geneva commented:

'Quakers press for sufficient research on, and attention to, urgent, fair and transformative climate action to address root causes driving climate change. These root causes are often very lucrative activities and include the extraction and burning of fossil fuels, industrial and meat-based agriculture, deforestation, and unsustainable economic growth and consumption levels driven by unsustainable and unjust economic systems... We prioritise climate justice findings, and aim to protect the inclusion of language on human rights, Indigenous Peoples rights, equity, justice, ecosystem restoration and rights-based approaches to climate action.'

Full details of the FWCC comments can be found at:

<https://fwcc.world/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/IPCC-55th-Session-Impacts-Adaptation-and-Vulnerability-FWCC-interventions.pdf>

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# The Australian Friend

*The Australian Friend* is published online at [AustralianFriend.org](http://AustralianFriend.org) four times a year, in March, June, September and December.

## Contributions

Contributions (articles, poems and other items) are welcome as an email attachment to [CAustFriend@Quakersaustralia.info](mailto:CAustFriend@Quakersaustralia.info). Please ensure that images are sent as separate attachments, and not embedded in word files. We prefer images in jpg format, and a resolution of at least 300 dpi.

## Contribution deadlines

Contributions should arrive no later than one month before the publication date:

- 1 February for the March edition
- 1 May for the June edition
- 1 August for the September edition
- 1 November for the December edition.

## Subscriptions

*The Australian Friend* is available free of charge online at [AustralianFriend.org](http://AustralianFriend.org). *The Australian Friend* is also available by post at no charge to members of Australian Yearly Meeting.

Libraries, other organisations and individuals not associated with Quakers can subscribe to receive *The Australian Friend* by post by contacting: [CAustFriend@Quakersaustralia.info](mailto:CAustFriend@Quakersaustralia.info). The cost is \$40.00 per year for addresses in Australia and \$50 per year for addresses overseas.

**Coordinating editor:** David Swain

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## Production

**Mailing list** [CAustFriend@Quakersaustralia.info](mailto:CAustFriend@Quakersaustralia.info)

**Layout** Sheelagh Wegman, Hobart TAS

**Printing and distribution** National Mailing and Marketing, Canberra

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