

Compiled Epistles from Yearly Meetings and Gatherings

List of epistles compiled:

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Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand
Australia Yearly Meeting
Belgium and Luxemburg Yearly Meeting
Bohol Worship Group (Philippines)
Britain Yearly Meeting
Canadian Yearly Meeting
Central European Gathering
Friends Church in Kenya
France Yearly Meeting
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Intermountian Yearly Meeting
Ireland Yearly Meeting
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Lake Erie Yearly Meeting
Monteverde Friends Meeting (Costa Rica)
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Northern Yearly Meeting
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Epistles can also be found on the FWCC website at https://fwcc.world/resources_cpt/epistles/

Alaska Friends Conference
Epistle from Annual Session
August 3-6, 2023

To Friends Everywhere:

Nestled among the spruce and birch trees, with the sounds of sandhill cranes and great horned owls, we were grateful to be gathering in person again for the first time since 2021.

We welcomed visitors Avis Wanda McClinton, Michelle Bellows, and Ursula Knudsen-Latta, who shared their stories and news of their organizations.

We were graced by two powerful presentations that highlighted ways that we can help heal the scars of racism and White supremacy both in Alaska and in the Lower 48 states.

The first was a presentation from Alaskan Quakers Seeking Right Relations (AQSR) about the many ways that have opened this past year for relationships with Alaska Native peoples following the approval last year of an apology for the damages suffered in Quaker Indigenous boarding schools. First, there was the opportunity to share the apology with a large group of mostly Tlingit people in Douglas, Alaska. Then in July of this year eight Alaskan Quakers traveled to Monmouth, OR with Jim and Susan LaBelle and Jamiann S'eiltin Hasselquist, who presented at a plenary session of Sierra

Cascades Yearly Meeting. The most recent opportunity was for Jan Bronson and Sarah Kehoe to attend the Annual Sessions of Alaska Yearly Meeting in Kotzebue, where they were invited to present the apology. As a way of following through with the intention to work toward truth, healing and transformation, we approved sending funds to assist with the development of a healing center in Kake, Alaska, where there was a Friends mission in the late 19th century.

Another highlight was a presentation by Avis Wanda McClinton about her work with the 339 Manumissions and Beyond Project in Philadelphia. The Project is a search for what happened to the 339 enslaved Africans who were promised freedom by Philadelphia Quaker slaveholders. We were moved by her powerful presentation, the first time to a Yearly Meeting. We hope to find ways to support her work and trust that other Friends will hear this message. One Friend called on Friends to financially support this project through its fund at Friends Fiduciary, and we are grateful to Howard University for hosting this critical work.

We also heard briefly from three members of the local Mat-Su Martin Luther King Jr. Foundation: Aundra Jackson, Daphne Barbosa-Jackson, and Melvin Sage-el, who talked about the importance of both acknowledging the truth of slavery and moving forward together to heal.

The State of the Meeting Reports from each of the Monthly Meetings indicate progress in recovering from the

impact of the COVID epidemic. All seven monthly meetings/worship groups were represented, either in person or on video conference. We welcomed the presence of two children and three dogs.

Epistle of the Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri,
held at Sonninghill Hostel, Hamilton and online 24th – 27th April, 2024

“You have to look for the wonder, it will reveal itself”. Jonathan Tailby (2020)

Kia ora koutou, greetings to Friends everywhere.

Yearly Meeting 2024 opened with worship as we gathered in the sunlight at Sonninghill Hostel joined online by Friends around the motu (country) and the world.

Our formal meeting followed a preparation day on the Theme of “Faith and Play: an experiential tool for spiritual reflection”, which had led us into listening: moving out of the day-to-day bustle of everyday life and focusing on Quaker values, thoughts and history, as we prepared for Yearly Meeting.

We were welcomed to the Waikato, with acknowledgement of tangata whenua (indigenous people, the Tainui iwi) and a whakataukī (Māori proverb) of the Waikato River: “Waikato taniwharau, he piko he taniwha, he piko he taniwha.” (Waikato of a hundred taniwha, on every bend a friendly taniwha.)

We were joined by Margaret Clark from Quakers Australia (online) and in person by Herrad Heselhaus, who represented Japan Yearly Meeting and as our visitor from the Asia West Pacific section of FWCC.

We celebrated with joy the Quaker Faith & Practice Revision Committee’s completion of our new 2024 version “On These Islands: I runga i ngā motu nei”. This was the culmination of two years of gathering new contributions, and discernment by the Committee and by Meetings across Aotearoa. It is an inspirational resource, in the Quaker tradition of ‘continuing revelation’. While the work is done, it is not ‘dusted’ – it is up to us to “spread the dust” and the book around the motu.

The Website Oversight Committee shared their discernment of the options for us around our website and its functions: outreach, inreach and linked administrative document management systems. We are challenged to consider what we need as an organisation, and how we keep our foundations strong – balancing looking after ourselves so we can look after others. In a later session, we came together in open worship in Quaker tradition as we discerned the pathway forward for our electronic infrastructure and with careful discernment we supported the recommendation of the Committee.

Historical changes in our membership numbers and our capacity to maintain our major functions and enterprises remained a continuing theme of this yearly meeting. This reflects our aging population and the gap between numbers of available friends and our current expectations of ourselves in business and outreach.

This is not a new challenge but has become more pressing in recent times. We acknowledge the work of our committees to bridge this gap and look forward to future review of our level of activity. We appear to be at a pivotal point in time where decisions need to be made to ensure ongoing guardianship and sustainability of our major enterprises. We took comfort from the encouragement and support of our Australian Quaker whānau (family) who are in the process of reorganising their structures.

The 2024 Quaker Lecture: “A Queer Gift: Stepping beyond the mindset” – was presented by some of our Rainbow community who shared personal stories of struggles, courage, and joys. Although we may believe we do not suffer from prejudice, we were reminded that residues of prejudice remain within.

Climate justice is an ongoing concern from our Yearly Meetings and 2024 was no exception. In the context of governments and those in power we were encouraged to be strategic, innovative and joyful in an holistic approach to raising issues and advocacy on critical climate change issues.

A legend of the Quechua people from Peru was shared. It is about a hardworking and persistent hummingbird, though small, that continued to try to put out the forest fires, because to do nothing was not the answer.

In Peace and Friendship

Anne & Alistair Hall
Yearly Meeting Co-Clerks



2023 Yearly Meeting Epistle to Friends Everywhere

We send loving greetings to Friends everywhere.

Quakers in Australia gathered from 1-9 July 2023, online and in regional hubs. We met on the unceded country of many nations all around this land now called Australia. We welcomed a number of Friends from across the globe. There was much to choose from in a full and varied program of opportunities to worship, socialise, learn, share, and conduct our business. A program for children and young people provided both online connection and in-person activities in hubs. The Presiding Clerk reminded us to maintain an unhurried pace. Listening was a recurring theme. Speak softly, listen well. Listen to the speaker. Listen to Spirit. Listen to yourself.

The theme for the gathering was "Integrity, Voice and Right Relationship". This is a momentous year when Australians will vote about a change to the constitution to establish an Indigenous Voice to Parliament. We were welcomed by Ken Pengarta Lechleitner, Aboriginal elder from Anmatyerre country and Deb Buckskin from Kurna country, who taught us Ta marra, the gesture of two open hands which offers peace, friendship and unity. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians again made a generous offer, and asked us to work together to build a better nation for us all.

In the State of the Society Address Mark Macleod (Tasmania Regional Meeting) reminded us not to focus on numbers, statistics and percentages, but on the qualities of our community as Quakers. This is the fourth year that Yearly Meeting has been held online. Our regional meetings weathered the pandemic, and learned that online meetings are accessible to remote Friends and people with disability in ways that in-person meetings are not. But children and young people relish in-person contact, and children are often absent from online meetings. A beloved attender, mourned by her Meeting, encouraged Friends to have fun, be kind, and laugh.

American Quaker Jon Watts delivered the Backhouse Lecture, "How my 2009 Viral Video Transformed my Perspective on Quakers, the Internet, and What's Next". He reflected on the example of early Quakers who began the practices of listening deeply and speaking as led by the Spirit. Young Quakers embraced their technology – the printing press – and spread the news about Quakerism through pamphlets. Jon Watts founded the YouTube channel QuakerSpeak, and encouraged us to embrace the technology available to us – the internet – to connect with all those people who are hungry for community, depth, quiet, and deep listening. "Sit with Friends. Listen deeply. Go boldly."

The foundation of our action is individual spiritual growth, nurtured in community. Yearly Meeting provided many opportunities to learn and share in small groups. Friends shared their experiences of active involvement in many and varied concerns, including the promotion of peace-making around the world and in our region, the climate emergency, integrity in public office, and exploring gender identity. In our special meeting for remembrance, we gave thanks for the Grace of God in the lives of our dear Friends who have died. It showed in their kindness and persistent advocacy for many social justice issues.

Elizabeth PO' (Western Australian Regional Meeting) shared "precious gleanings" from twenty-nine epistles from Quakers around the world. Common to many was the sense of urgency that people feel about the climate emergency. Others named the harms caused by Empire, such as racial, economic and social injustice. The urgent need for peace-making was highlighted by the

suffering of people in Ukraine. Further Epistles expressed spiritual hunger for prayer and God's guidance. One Yearly Meeting used pruning of plants as a metaphor for reshaping its practices to enable new growth to emerge.

The foundations of our business practices are still there, but Friends saw the need for some changes in our processes and structure. In our Formal Sessions, we were challenged to discern the right way to interact with overseas Friends, given the impact of travel on the planet and its inhabitants. We heard the challenges of finding names for roles, and we welcomed new and imaginative ways for Friends to serve Quakers Australia.

Some Friends saw the 2023 Salter Lecture given to the Socialist Quakers Society in Britain by Rupert Read. Titled "The horrible, wonderful truth about climate: how facing that truth changes everything." It is about the inevitable polycrisis which will force radical change on us in the cause of love for each other, our communities and world. We acknowledge the faithful Friends who feel compelled to take non-violent action, and we call out harsh government moves to outlaw environmental activism. This Yearly Meeting took place during a week when the highest global temperatures ever were recorded. The Meeting adopted the Action Plan devised by the Climate Emergency and Species Extinction Working Group, which calls on individual Friends and Meetings to make big changes in the way we live.

In response to Friends' concern about preparations for war, the Meeting issued a comprehensive statement opposing Australia's involvement in a new pact with the United Kingdom and the United States (AUKUS).

We were challenged to decolonise our thinking and walk with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in search of equity in our relationships. A public statement from Quakers Australia supported the full implementation of the Statement from the Heart. Dadirri is one Indigenous word for deep listening. Can we do that? We were asked what our response will be, as Quakers, to the result of the referendum. Are we prepared for this?

Yearly Meeting expressed heartfelt appreciation to Jacque Schultze, who served as the Secretary for seven years. Jacque regarded her work as ministry, and Friends acknowledged her kindness and grace amongst many fine qualities. We warmly welcomed the new office staff, Holly Dhynes as Communications and Publicity Manager, and David Tehr as the Coordinator.

We look forward to Yearly Meeting 2024, hosted by South Australia Northern Territory Regional Meeting (SANTRM). It will be in Adelaide, with both in-person and online meetings. For those Friends who make the journey, including children and young people, there will be the joy of meeting again at West Beach.

We share this gift from Justin Simpson (New South Wales Regional Meeting)

*Here we are
Here Now ...
In love and purpose
mystery and wonder
here we are.*

Australia Yearly Meeting 2023

**Epistle from the Belgium and Luxemburg Yearly Meeting 2023 annual gathering
held at Chant d'Oiseau, Brussels, Belgium**

09-11 June 2023

***Searching for unity in turbulent times –
from our testimonies to corporate Faith in Action***

To Friends Everywhere,

We met over the sunny weekend of 9-11 June 2023 at Chant-d'Oiseau in Brussels. Our theme was "Searching for Unity in Turbulent Times - from our Testimonies to Corporate Faith in Action". Thirty Friends were present, three of whom were from The Netherlands and Britain Yearly Meeting, EMES, plus our speaker Sister Marianne Goffoël.

Guest Speaker

We heard an inspiring speech. Sister Marianne Goffoël told us about her life and work as a Dominican nun. Her story took us from her formative years in 1950s Brussels, to Algeria and then Iraq, where she lived for many years and learned that true dialogue begins with sharing lived experience and concerns.

Sister Marianne also shared reflections about the Catholic Church and Islam, and the "occasional tensions between heaven and earth" she witnessed in her life. Believers must be connected to both heaven and earth, she told us. So faith in the hereafter should not lead to indifference or demobilisation in the face of the world's problems, but on the contrary to commitment to the service of human beings, especially the most disadvantaged.

She took the name Marianne Ibrahim to signify that she would follow Abraham in leaving their homeland to follow God's instruction to go among other nations.

For the last 27 years, Sister Marianne has also been much involved in the Centre El Kalima in Brussels, a centre for Christian-Muslim relations.

Conflict

We have once again considered the tensions and conflicts in our meeting. We shifted our agenda to respond to the issues and held a worship sharing session. Both longstanding Friends and newcomers spoke about conflict and community building.

The earlier attempts to find solutions have not borne fruit and have left us with pain and damaged relationships. Perhaps we must accept that being in community always implies a degree of tension and conflict. We have been reminded that it is best not to focus on the problem as we move forward, but rather to aim for the space of opportunity on either side. When skiing in the forest in wintertime, it's better to focus on the spaces between the trees rather than the trees themselves. We have been given another image of what might be our goal: a tree that, as it has grown over the years, has partially enveloped the iron fencing on both its sides so that finally they form one body.

Back to our agenda

We explored our Quaker testimonies or “SPICES” in small groups. We shared our individual experiences with each other and started to seek what might lead us into collective understanding and action.

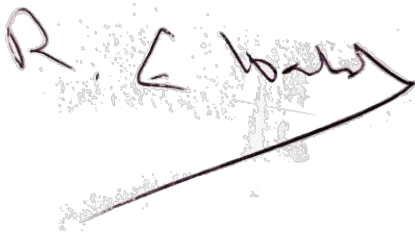
As a whole group, we explored Friends experience of peace work. We heard how Ghent Worship Group discerned their response to the war in Ukraine, which involved the entire meeting in collectively writing an opinion piece about Conscientious Objectors and working with the European Bureau for Conscientious Objectors (EPCO BEOC), to support Conscientious Objectors in Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. We will consider if this concern to support Conscientious Objectors from these countries can be similarly adopted for our whole Yearly Meeting.

In conclusion

Although all of our sessions varied in content and approach, each has served to remind us that very different structures and attitudes can meet and embrace each other and yet retain their individual character, and at the same time respect the different nature of the other.

(We hope that this can finally be the case with our meeting.)

Signed in and on behalf of Belgium and Luxembourg Yearly meeting, 11 June 2023.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Harland', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right and then curves downwards.

Ruth Harland, Clerk

Submitted by epistle drafting committee of Eoin Dubsy, Phil Gaskell, Nick Rendle, Emmanuelle Verhagen

The full text of Sister Marianne Goffoel’s speech can be read here:

[One foot in the Kingdom 2023](#)

[Un pied dans le Royaume.... 2023](#)

[Eén voet in het Koninkrijk 2023](#)

Quakers for One Another

An Epistle for World Quaker Day 2023 by the Bohol Worship Group, Philippines

(Written by: Ludwig Quirog)

There is something about sharing food that brings happiness to people. Whether one is sitting with family for a meal, catching up with friends over coffee and sandwiches, or giving to others food that one has grown and prepared with their own hands, there is always a palpable sense of joy in it. Perhaps this is why in many forms that Christianity is practised throughout the world, the Holy Communion is a physical and literal breaking and partaking of bread. After all, the Bible does indicate that many significant events in the Earthly life of Jesus Christ were centred around the act of sharing food, from the wedding feast at Cana to the multiplication of the loaves to the last supper. And even among Quaker circles everywhere, the ubiquitous post-Meeting gathering over tea and biscuits holds immense value as it facilitates the building and nurturing of relationships among Friends.

Even as we are often compelled these days to use Zoom as an alternative to physical gatherings, many of us may be seen with food and a beverage cup during the chatty bit after the silence has been broken. These tools help remind many of us without Meetinghouses to walk to on First Day mornings that, though miles away from one another, connected only through the world wide web, we are a community of Friends who have just met to Worship. On September 30, our group did just that. Separated by some 7,600 kilometres of sea and land, across five time zones, the miracle of technology allowed us to Worship and chat briefly with Friends from Whanganui Meeting in Aotearoa/New Zealand wherein we had the opportunity to share insights and stories with each other, and explore the concept of *Ubuntu* as it exists in our own local cultures. It was truly a gift to be able to meet with them and, after the call, in our own small physical gathering for the sharing of after-thoughts, in typical Quaker Meeting fashion, we had our own little party of smiles over coffee and cakes.

The following day, on World Quaker Day itself, food was also central to our little Friendly celebration. We paid a visit to a small village that housed families displaced by the construction of our province's new international airport. As all of us in the group have benefitted from this aviation facility, without much awareness we have also in some way contributed to the coercive relocation of these people, so it was high time we gave them good attention and perhaps build a positive relationship with them. For this visit, we met the neighbourhood children – about 60 of them – in their small community centre where one of our attenders, Rechel, a teacher at Golden Link College, a school supported by the Meeting, started things off by creating a space conducive to the building of friendship. To our surprise, she even managed to get these kids to hold a few minutes of silence, much akin to the quiet that is practised in Meetings for Worship, except with children who had never previously heard of Quakers or perhaps even the practice of stillness in prayer. It was a rather brief encounter, not more than a few minutes past an hour, but it was a very meaningful one. All the children snacked well and we are currently in talks with one community leader, Marisa, for another visit so we may give free classes to parents and guardians on cooking delicious and nutritious vegetarian food that even children will gobble up easily, much like the spaghetti, sandwiches and plantain rolls we brought.

The sharing of food is indubitably a language everyone understands and it was serendipitous that World Quaker Day this year also fell on World Vegetarian Day. So, we in the Bohol Worship Group thought, "What better way to celebrate both events, in the spirit of *Ubuntu*, than to pool a little bit of our gifts, whether in the form of financial resources or skills, and share a low-carbon footprint meal made from locally produced plant-based ingredients with others who have less?"