

## **YM24 Friendly School – individual reports**

A Friendly School program was held on Kurna land on Sunday 7 July as part of the Yearly Meeting 2024 gathering in Adelaide. The theme this year was “Quakers in times of conflict and change – 400 years since George Fox’s birth”. Friends offered seven all-day workshops on: creative writing, Indigenous theologies, Quaker funding and applicants, radical hospitality, spirituality and ageing, traditional Aboriginal spiritual practices, and women authors on peace.

The workshops were held from 10 am ACST into the afternoon, some finishing at 5 pm. We estimate that about 110 Friends were involved in Friendly School, with 10 facilitators, 93 participants registering in advance and some joining on the day. One workshop was offered hybrid including 5 online participants.

For this our first experimental hybrid Year Meeting, we sought to cater to online participants by offering a program of shorter 60-90 minute Share & Tells in the afternoon, assuming most Friends would go to their local Meeting for Worship in the morning. We hear these were small, but appreciated by their participants. Reports of these sessions are in the Share & Tell report.

Below are the reports of the seven individual Friendly School workshops.

### **Creative Writing**

David Evans, SANTRM

From the place of silence nine participants introduced themselves briefly and spoke of their interest in writing. Then followed an opportunity for all to speak about their writings, past, present and future. The contributions were interesting, even exciting, and appreciated by all. We ended up knowing a lot about each other.

Attention was drawn to the Creative Writing publication from YM2008 entitled *Turning Points*. That has been accepted by the AYM Publications Committee as an AYM publication. It was suggested we could each write an article about “Becoming a Quaker” and we will proceed with this idea.

### **Indigenous Theologies: reflections from attending the Indigenous Theologies Conference**

Jane Hope, VRM

A group of 12-13 Friends gathered to hear about the Indigenous Theologies Conference I attended on behalf of Friends. I am a 6th generation coloniser-inheritor. I have English heritage and my family arrived in 1841. They lived on Gunditjmara land, I was born on Wurundjeri land, and I now live on the border country of Wurundjeri and Bunurong/ Boonwurrung Country.

After an Acknowledgement of Country read from the book ‘Contemplating Country’ by Trawlolway man Dr Garry Deverel we had a discussion about the many topics spoken at the conference. These included an indigenous theological understanding of Christianity as well as justice issues around land back, treaty, truth telling and truth acceptance.

We then did some deep truth telling around the colonising history of these lands and how we are living in the continuing colonisation as a country, as individuals and as Quakers. While as Quakers we have some positive history with the intentions of Backhouse and Walker we looked at how we tell the story of the first Quaker in these lands, Sydney Parkinson, and how we are not currently acknowledging the Quaker contribution to the awful act of colonising these lands. well.

## **Learning to Adopt some Traditional Aboriginal Spiritual Practices**

Rowe Morrow, NSWRM

On a clear, cold winter's day in South Australia, beside a huge flat sea in Shack 81 about 20 Quakers met to explore the topic. We opened with:

'the whole of life is sacramental ... there are innumerable 'means of grace'  
by which God is revealed and communicated'

We began with an exercise in Earth consciousness, and recorded through our bodies the whole grand and miraculous world outside ourselves. We listened to readings and poetry from eco-spiritual writers including Quaker woman astronomer, Maria Mitchell. We went to the edge where the sky and sea meet perfectly.

We considered what it would mean to have a 'totem, blood line or skin' with an indigenous species and from that never harm it but restore, extend and protect its ecosystem. We listened, saw, felt, tasted absorbed this special place. Friends offered reflections afterwards in a range of media.

This workshop offered depth and practicality. Not just to know about Indigenous spirituality as a curiosity but as a satisfying way to live or find spiritual meaning in life. When Friends develop deep protective relationships to water, air, mountains and all species, then, perhaps, then, one day in the future, we will know ourselves as truly belonging because we know how to live here without doing harm, and we become restorers as well.

## **Radical Hospitality**

Yarrow Goodley, Silver Wattle, and Emily Chapman-Searle, SANTRM

A delightful group of Friends attended the sessions, examining what it might look like for our Meetings to be truly inclusive. How do we sometimes alienate those whose lifeworlds are different from our own? How might we be more open and welcoming?

Taking in ideas of belonging, acceptance, attention, listening, conscious building and rebuilding, care for self/world/others, scene-setting and invisible work, perhaps what we notice is that there are multiple radical hospitalities.

Taking action to make meeting for worship at Yearly Meeting more accessible, we held a meeting for worship for walking one morning, and other mornings created a 'nest' in the centre of the circle with cushions and pen and paper for people to experiment with different ways of reaching spirit.

The challenge we take up is to open ourselves to change, in big and small ways, in our Meetings and ourselves. Will you join us?

## **Reflection on Quaker Funding and Quaker Applicants**

Di Bretherton, Dorothy Scott & Sue Ennis, VRM

Friends gathered to reflect on Quaker funding of Concerns related to our Testimonies. We heard from Quaker fund representatives about each of their funds. We also heard about the experiences from Friends who had received Quaker grants. They expressed their deep gratitude, and their appreciation of the distinctive Quaker funding based on Concerns.

Together we explored the inherent tensions between the need for accountability by fund committees and the needs of those seeking funds to have a simple and timely response based on mutual trust. It would appear that:

1. For some applicants the application processes are sometimes unclear and inaccessible, and the outcomes not timely.
2. Acquittal processes are not consistently followed.
3. The processes of “testing” Friends’ concerns by their supporting Meetings is often superficial and perfunctory.
4. Greater collaboration between Quaker funds to allow joint funding, or to develop a similar standard application form, would be valuable
5. Greater dissemination of grants and project outcomes would be helpful
6. Enhanced capacity to respond to urgent needs would be desirable.

We concluded that many Friends might appreciate assistance in how to donate to Quaker funds. It would also be helpful to Friends to have a form of words to give expression to their wishes in their will, or where there is an existing will, a codicil to that will. To have these easily accessible on the website would be highly desirable. We ask the Finance Committee to advise on these matters.

## **Spirituality and Ageing**

Anne Felton, CRQ

Spirituality and Ageing is a topic relevant to the theme of YM24: Quakers in Times of Conflict and Change. Our older years can demand significant change: physical and emotional. What of the spiritual?

“Spirituality and Ageing” offered a day-long reflective workshop in four sessions. Sixteen people participated, with ages ranging from 67 to 92 (of those who volunteered their ages).

In Session 1, participants introduced themselves, and their hopes for this Friendly School. We considered definitions of ‘spirituality’. In later sessions, we learned how psychologists and spiritual writers describe stages of development throughout life, providing a framework for thinking about our spiritual lives. We next illustrated the story of our past life, followed by picturing our hopes for our remaining lives, then sharing with a neighbour and with the group.

In our last session together, we looked at the Quaker Advices and Queries particularly relevant to Ageing, noting the qualities listed: courage, hope, increasing disability, loneliness, serenity, detachment and wisdom. Finally, some resources and suggestions for our onward journeys were provided.

The workshop brought out the rich wisdom of participants. We learned much from each other as we willingly shared our stories and insights.

## **Women authors on peace and non-violence, transforming conflicts**

Anne Herbert, VRM

Thanks to Margaret Bearlin's encouragement to pay more attention to women's work on and about peacebuilding, a small group gathered to focus on women of various ilk (songwriters and singers, politicians, nuns, activists, authors etc) who inform, inspire, provoke, and comfort us in the face of challenges we encounter practicing our peace testimony.

Each of us brought and shared songs, books, quotes, and memories of conversations. The multilayered connections between our different experiences and reflections on practices to increase peace, justice and security were evident and affirmed. We collaborated to hold the space for the intensity of multiple emotions evoked during sharing in our session.

We affirm the value of ongoing engagement with each other's practices and understandings to maintain our energy and strength in our pursuit of realisation of the peace testimony.

Bibliography of written texts:

Viola Smith 1975 **Women in Australian Parliaments and Local Governments Past and Present** AWLGWA

Jean Zaru 2008 **Occupied by nonviolence** Pendle Hill

Joan Chittester 2011 **Uncommon Gratitude** Liturgical Press

Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone 2012 **Active Hope** Pademelon Press

Judith Butler 2020 **The power of non-violence** Verso Press

Louise Diamond 2000 **The Peace Book** Conari Press

Pam McAllister 1983 **Reweaving the web of life: feminism and nonviolence** New Society Publishers

Patricia Pak Poy RSM 2020 **A path is made by walking**

Sandra Sewell, Anthony Kelly, Leonie Daws (eds) 1988 **Professions in the nuclear age** Boolarong Publications

Songwriters and singers:

**Sweet Honey in the Rock** [sweethoneyintherock.org](http://sweethoneyintherock.org)

**Holly Near** [hollynear.com](http://hollynear.com)