

Epistle from Australia Yearly Meeting

Westminster School Adelaide January 2-9, 2010

To Friends everywhere

Nina Marni

Australian Friends gathered at Westminster School, Marion, and South Australia for YM 2010. In our opening session we experienced

Kumangka ngadlu kumanendi (together we become one)

a sharing ceremony with the Kurna (pronounced Garna) people. During part of the ceremony branches of eucalyptus leaves were held and passed in silence among all those present. For the Kurna people their natural connection with the land and each other and their innate respect for land and life involves deep trust, deep closeness, deep dependence and oneness with the land and the earth. These traditional connecting ways offer a path for healing between all peoples and the healing of the earth. The ceremony culminated in an exchange of gifts, of dance and music composed specially for the occasion

“ Choosing life, Living differently, We dare to hope”

This year's Summer School theme became a connecting thread for Yearly Meeting, from the cool quiet of early morning meeting for worship, to the larger gathering for Meeting for Worship, often punctuated by the sound of hammering and of ripping roof iron. The business of the Society has been conducted in lively preparatory sessions and formal business meetings. Share and tell opportunities enabled friends to share a diverse range of topics from Earthcare to war tax resisters. Epilogue each evening was interpreted for us by a different regional meeting and one evening concluded with lively folk dancing. Our days have been full with silence and ministry, fun and laughter, enthusiasm and hope.

Young Friends gave a dramatic and unique presentation of the Backhouse Lecture; “Finding Our Voice: Our truth, community and journey as Australian Young Friends”. Speaking from and returning to the silence, YF shared their story. The gathered meeting responded eagerly and at one stage we were invited by our young friends to dance in the aisles! The Elephant in the room or rather the elephant on the stage throughout the performance represented those difficult and often unstated questions that during the evening were dealt with in creative, fun and honest ways.

The State of the Society address was eloquently delivered by Elizabeth Kwan from Darwin and drew our attention to 5 key areas; Caring for the earth; Placing children and JYF at the centre of our Quaker communities; Involving smaller meetings in the wider Quaker community; Acknowledging and resolving conflict within the Quaker community; Developing the Australian Quaker Centre.

Children enriched our gathering with their active and lively presence, joining us in meeting and sharing our responsibilities. In the babies who charmed us with their playful innocence, we could see the responsible and confident young adults of the future.

Our Earthcare Committee continues in their work reflecting the commitment of Australian Friends to take urgent action in our daily lives that will contribute to the saving of our planet.

“We dared to hope”; and now in 2010 there will be an Australian Quaker Centre programme at Silver Wattle.

After a long and sometimes acrimonious journey over 35 years, we agreed to practise full marriage equality regardless of the sexual orientation or gender of the couple. within Meetings around Australia. Friends expressed their hope that the Marriage Act will be amended as soon as possible to allow Quakers to support all couples to full legal recognition.

Key committees that are to be laid down and for the present not to be taken up reflect the ongoing

constraints upon Friends for their time and inevitably there are new concerns that emerge.

Visitors from overseas hailed from the UK., USA, Japan, Philippines, Aotearoa-New Zealand and the American Friends Service Committee in Cambodia. Their presence enriched and informed our deliberations. In particular our friends from the Philippines shared with us the terrible destruction wrought by Typhoon Ondoy and their gratitude for the timely support they received from Friends all around the world co-coordinated by Friends World Committee for Consultation/ Asia West Pacific section.

There were those who found time to take in the surroundings; tall trees and the choir of magpies, cockatoos and galahs; a bench to sit on; time to chat and reconnect; time to take a stroll around the expansive grounds. There were opportunities to join in shared activities such as the singing group and yoga.

In the summer school's meeting for music, in the opening and closing ceremonies, and in the Backhouse Lecture, Friends experienced unique and distinctive creations of music that brought joy and playfulness. Songs composed for and performed at, the closing meeting for worship reflected both our Quaker roots and how our testimonies continue to resonate in the 21st century.

At the close of YM as we leave each other with hope for the challenges of the coming year we are reminded of the words of Isaac Pennington (1667) "Our life is love and peace and tenderness and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another and helping one another up with a tender hand".

Bilyanina yertungga (let there be peace)

Note to the reader:

The greetings at the beginning and the end of this epistle are written in the language of the Kurna, the first people of the Adelaide plains.