

EPISTLE TO FRIENDS EVERYWHERE

From Australia Yearly Meeting, 5th to 12th days, 1st Month, 2013

Greetings from Australian Friends in Canberra (*meeting place* in the language of the *Ngunnawal* people, traditional custodians of the land). Summer School study themes, climate change, sustainable living, the role of elders, and compassionate communication, provided the ambience of the Meeting – along with 39°C heat and the faint smell of bushfires.

Friends are concerned about the excessive use and depletion of the earth's finite resources, and our need to care for the earth. More than 30 Friends held a peace vigil at the gates of the headquarters of the Australian Defence Force Joint Operational Command near Canberra. In an amiable exchange, they presented to a senior officer a statement calling for a renewed focus on building peace. We recognise our responsibility to offer spiritual as well as practical leadership at local, regional, national and international levels.

For us the relationship between earthcare and peace work is central, as is the extent to which we will continue to fund our Peace and Earthcare Office established in 2012. When we as Friends are most passionate about issues but are vigilant in following proper Quaker process, we move more easily to unity. Division and conflict arise when we neglect deep silence in the Meeting for Worship for Business. A vibrant group of younger Friends took up the challenge of earthcare by imagining, designing and constructing Australian towns for 2050.

A significant shift in thinking led the Meeting to establish a Children's Fund as a resource for developing programs for children and Junior Young Friends (JYFs). The move addresses a long-felt need to nourish our children and bring them more fully into the life of the Meeting, possibly by appointing a paid coordinator. We delight in the fact that children and JYFs make up about 17 percent of this year's gathering. Australians attending the 6th Friends World Conference admired the great diversity among Friends across the world.

Recommendations from a comprehensive review of Quaker Service Australia (QSA), (Australia Yearly Meeting's aid organisation) were largely accepted. They encourage a closer relationship between QSA and Yearly Meeting by more fully involving Regional Meeting appointees. They also suggested ways to enable the organisation to be more effective.

Jocelyn Bell Burnell, British Quaker and professional astronomer, in her Backhouse Lecture, explained how – in billions of years – the physical universe is getting colder, darker, emptier. Three days later, with Friends aged 6 to 17, she explored the Mount Stromlo Observatory, the home of major scientific and astronomical discoveries.

Our challenge now is: how to continue to believe in a loving Spirit, which can guide our actions; that is, how to use intuitive knowledge and experience to balance scientific logic. We need our hearts as well as our heads.