

Quaker Community in Southern Africa – Epistle, 22 April 2019

Greetings to Friends from the Quaker Community in Southern Africa

The gathering was held at eMseni -Place of Grace in Benoni, Ekululeni, Gauteng, South Africa with 80 members and attenders from South Africa, Lesotho, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Britain Yearly Meeting including 8 young friends and 14 children as well as the Carol Bower, Director of the Peace Centre, formerly the Quaker Peace Centre.

The theme was Equality, and this was supported by MMs exploring it in preparation, a special Issue on Equality in SAQN where 10 Southern African Friends shared their thoughts on Equality, the Richard lecture which focused on our Testimonies including equality and the worship sharing groups’.

The Richard Gush lecture was delivered by Helen Vale from Namibia and which took us on a tour of our faith and action in the reminding us of who we really are as a community, and what we have achieved, and the value of our own Faith and Practice Handbook - Living Adventurously.

She quoted from a statement at a Namibian Art Exhibition, HOW INDEPENDENCE CAME TO YOU, that powerfully sets out the different elements that have impacted Namibia since independence in 1990.

“Independence, precious but precarious, buffeted by environmental crisis, economic disaster, poverty, alcoholism, corruption, greed, alcoholism, cynicism, defeatism, violence crime. Bolstered by art, advocacy, youth action, feminism, compassion, concern, critical engagement, justice, reform, analysis, research, activism, information, a free press, independent observers, diligence, efficiency, democracy.” Helen went on to say “I feel certain the list of negative and positive forces could apply equally to all our countries in southern Africa. We hope that we can be part of the ‘ocean of light and love that overcomes the ocean of darkness and death’.

We heard 9 testimonies of past Friends which were very moving and made us realise that we are now responsible for carrying on the faith. We valued an exercise were chose one of our members who had passed on and wrote a short appreciation of them and posted them on a large Q for us remember them by.

Meetings for worship were moving and often interspersed with wonderful singing that enhanced the silence.

On our last meeting for worship we received the news if the terror attack on churches in SriLanka when a Friend read out a message from the Clairmont Mosque in Cape Town, condemning the attack, offering their condolences and calling on all peace-loving people of all faiths to work for peace in the world. We join them in condemning the attacks, offering our condolences and working for peace.

The business ran smoothly with one less session than last year by asking meetings to present their report for tabling, having a poster summarising the report highlights and members of each meeting having a session with the co-clerks and YM elders.

Significant decisions were

- to have a gathering every second year instead of gathering twice every 3 years due to financial constraints.
- and the conclusion of the name change of the Quaker Peace Centre to the Peace Centre and the successful resolution of the outstanding property matters and the developing of a cooperative relationship.

Three significant actions were

- the decision to write a letter to all new members of parliament who will take up their seats after the South African Elections on May 8, with a card containing the same questions we had reflected on in our worship sharing groups for them to reflect on.
- the decision to write a letter to the Independent Media Group outlining our concern about its independence and stating that we would not write to them again or buy their papers until they re-join the press council and comply with their criteria. We would ask other faith communities to do the same.
- and the first meeting Local Organising Committee to start the planning of the FWCC world gathering in July 2023 in Durban, South Africa. This serves to alert Friends to start planning to attend the gathering and visit our countries.

The Worship Sharing groups were well prepared valued and enjoyed by all. All the groups addressed the same questions from our Quaker Testimonies and were an opportunity to get to know new and old friends in a deep and special way.

The gathering included a Summer School, Special Interest Groups, 7 minute talks, separate Young Friends meetings and Children's meetings all held together by wonderful deep meetings for worship in the morning and evenings.

The venue was much appreciated with its Sea of Galilee, Mount of Olives and Empty Tomb at this time of Easter, and the wonderful food and their special care in preparing for vegetarian guests.

The next gathering of the Quaker Community in Southern Africa will be held in early January 2021