

Talk to open History Exhibition on 350 Years of Quakerism  
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- I would like to thank all of those who developed this excellent exhibition in Western Australia and a special thanks to Kay Throssall and Susan Addison who worked so hard to present it here in Brisbane. This exhibition is a powerful witness to all those Friends who have courageously testified to their deepest beliefs over the years both in Australia and in other parts of the world. The pioneers of peace and justice presented here voiced their concerns and behaved peaceably often in the face of quite overwhelming opposition. They did not give up, however and the world is a much more decent place because of their vocational commitments to peace, simplicity, truth and compassion.
- The world is confronted by much evil and bleakness at the present time. With the appalling revelations from Abu Ghraib the West – as exemplified by the United States, the United Kingdom and regrettably Australia-- has lost claim to any sense of moral superiority or manifest destiny. Violence and brutality diminish all of us not only those who choose violence to advance their own interests. This exhibition is a salutary reminder that there are plenty of non-violent more peaceful alternatives. The many examples presented here are also an exhortation to think more creatively about ways in which we might solve some of the big problems confronting the world.
- Quakers do not have dogmatic or doctrinal beliefs. Rather we endeavour to let our lives speak for us. Of course we fall and fail but we continue with the struggle of living in ways that are consistent with our faith or what Friends call testimonies. These are our faltering attempts to put faith into practice -- many of which are reflected on the walls of this exhibition.
- Quakers' understanding of faith is that true human fulfillment comes from the deliberate effort to live life in a spirit of love, truth and peace, answering "that of God in everyone". It is this belief that has given rise to a profound sense of equality, justice, compassion and a deep desire to see the sacred in all life. It is this basic commitment that has fuelled Quaker passion for justice in the areas of race, gender, and class over the years as well.
- This quest for true human fulfillment has motivated Quaker witness/(belief and action) for peace and justice for the past 350 years. It was this belief that moved me into peace and conflict

studies. It was this belief that gave rise to the first School of Peace Studies in the UK at Bradford University—an initiative pioneered by Quakers- and it was this belief that moved people like John Woolman to oppose the slave trade in the 18<sup>th</sup> century [before it was fashionable to do so]. It inspired Elizabeth Fry and others to promote prison reform in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and endless Quakers throughout the centuries to conscientiously object to war, to struggle for justice and in everything to respond to every human being with the deepest empathy and compassion.

- It was this belief that inspired James Backhouse to identify with the colonized Aborigines in Australia when his peers were still sustaining the illusion that Australia was terra nullius. The moving spirit generates impulses that take Friends out of their comfort zones in order to identify with those who are marginalized, excluded, humiliated, oppressed and downtrodden. What Friends and others discover in this process is that in the engagement with those who have no power, no status, no influence there is an encounter with the incarnate spirit that lies at the heart of all existence.
- Over 350 years –as you can see from the concerns reflected in the posters some Quaker testimonies have changed. We used to have testimonies about tithes, temperance, slavery, and forms of address.... Some of these have now been superseded and are considered quaint. Calling another person Thee and Thou is a useful reminder, however, of how to treat each person as though they were holy places deserving of the deepest religious respect.
- Modern Quakers while not forgetting these deep and concerned roots have new testimonies on integrity in business; respect and care for the earth and environment, equality and opposition to torture and capital punishment; not to mention a radical adherence to simplicity, non-violence and non military solutions to political problems. As this exhibition highlights, however, Friends have had a particular passion for Peace.
- The Peace testimony derives from our insistence that love lies at the heart of all existence. As Friends said in 1660 in a declaration to King Charles the II “We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fighting with outward weapons for any end or under any pretence whatsoever”.... Because of this Quakers through the ages have struggled with what it means to “live in the life and power which takes away the occasion of all wars”. Or as Margaret Fell another Quaker from this time (1614-1702) put it. “We are a people that follow after those things which make for peace, love

and unity, it is our desire that other's feet may walk in the same and do deny and bear our testimony against all strife and wars"

- This is a particularly gloomy moment in world affairs. The war in Iraq is a powerful and negative example of what happens when the powerful use force, and violence to achieve their political ends.
- The political justifications for this most recent war are without foundation. The original justification for the war of abolishing weapons of mass destruction has proven to be absolutely false. The moral justification in terms of ending tyranny and creating conditions conducive to democracy has been lost also as United States jailers have employed the same brutal tactics as Hussein within exactly the same prisons. Violence has generated more violence. As Gandhi said "I object to violence... because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary- the evil it does is permanent." The world is yearning for some simple alternative. Friends in Australia and all around the world have to figure out some way of responding to these evils in ways that will do permanent and lasting good.
- This is not an easy question. How can we conduct political and social affairs in ways which do not result in enmity, hostility, violence and war? We have to begin initially with a radical re-orientation of our personal lives – so that we understand intuitively the ways in which we are connected one to the other. We have to live simply so that we do not succumb to feelings of greed, envy and hostility at the wealth and power of others.
- But we also need to manifest these beliefs in political witness as well. Quakers have opposed all weapons of war and especially weapons of mass destruction for hundreds of years. We are absolutely opposed to all producers, providers and owners of such weapons without exception. They have no place in civilized relationship between peoples. This means we remain as committed to the disarmament of all states and peoples –not just those weapons of our enemies.
- Quakers have also been at the forefront of individual conscientious objection to war and –along with the Mennonites, Church of the Brethren and the other historic peace churches-- have maintained a vocational objection to war—creating a tension between those who are willing to compromise on the appropriateness or justice of war.
- Quakers have also been at the centre of emergency relief to all sides in war and have worked to ban child soldiers and focused on

what it means to forgive , reconcile and realize true human community.

- Quakers have worked with regional, and global institutions at the EU and at the United Nations to ensure that these institutions too adhere to the highest principles and higher levels of moral consistency between means and ends.
- In this age of terror. The Quaker message shines forth as a clear alternative to the oxymoronic war that is being waged against it. We will not defeat terror with terror, torture with torture, capital punishment with capital punishment. The world demands more creative solutions than this.... We need to harness the best intellects, the most creative imaginations, and the best listening ears so that we understand the needs of others better than our own. So that we sow hope instead of fear, so that we replace falsehood and political deceit with truth, so that we respond to hatred with compassion, so that we can do justice, show mercy and begin to embody and demonstrate that inexhaustible power of love.
- For 350 years Friends/Quakers have been testifying to these alternatives. They have certainly sought to do no harm and they have in fact done much good—especially when others have been wedded to violence. Quakers helped feed hungry Germans at the end of the First World War when the victors were talking of revenge. They worked to establish basic sanitation systems in Tsarist Russia, delivered medical supplies to all sides in China during the Second World War and in Vietnam during that Vietnam war . In countless other places this small band of people has exerted influence far out of proportion to its numbers. Friends have remained committed to those “small transforming circles” where goodness supplants hatred and evil. In all of this work over the past 350 years Quakers have sought to replace revenge with something much more transformative.
- This is one of those hinge moments in history when the world will either see the power of love and non-violence or it will lapse even further into barbarism. I am optimistic because I believe that human beings everywhere when treated with radical love, respect and affirmation respond in similar fashion.
- It gives me great pleasure, therefore, to formally declare this history exhibition open.