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Together in the Light: An ethnographic
exploration of the Palmerston North
Quakers' sense of community and shared
understandings

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts in Social Anthropology at Massey
University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

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Abstract

The Religious Society of Friends is a Christian denomination whose emergence can be traced back to the teachings of George Fox in the 1640s in England. Since that time the denomination has splintered, from which four branches of Quakerism have emerged. One of these branches is liberal Quakerism, which is the only type of Quakerism found in New Zealand. Liberal Quakers do not have any centralised doctrine or authority figures, and they take the view that practice is more important than one's belief.

This research focuses on the Palmerston North Quakers and specifically answers two sets of questions. The first is whether they have a sense of community, and if so, what gives them that sense of community. The second set of questions centres on what the Quakers shared understanding are in the context of their community boundaries, and what enables these understandings.

As well as drawing on analysis from interviews with my research participants, this research also draws extensively on participant observation from Palmerston North and also from other groups in the North Island of New Zealand. All of which enables an understanding of the lived experience of being a Palmerston North Quaker.

Underpinning my research is a bricolage of theoretical work. These include community theory from John Bruhn, David Minar and Scott Greer, Patricia Felkins, Susan Love Brown as well as Victor and Edith Turner's concept of *communitas*, Randall Collin's interaction ritual theory and James Fernandez's work on consensus.

The most significant theme to emerge from analysis was the importance of the Quaker's silent meeting for worship. Whilst it may seem like an uneventful period of time to outsiders, its central importance to the community cannot be emphasised enough.

Keywords: Anthropology; Communitas; Community; Consensus;

Ethnography; Interaction ritual; Quakers; Religion; Religious Society of

Friends; Ritual; Solidarity.

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