



BeFriending Creation

Newsletter of Quaker Earthcare Witness
Affirming our essential unity with nature

Volume 30, Number 4 • July–August 2017

Money & Soul: Bringing Our Faith Values to the Economy

By Pamela Haines

TO THEOLOGIAN WALTER WINK, Spirit is at the core of every institution. These institutions, or Powers, are created with the sole purpose of serving the general welfare of people, and when they cease to do so, their spirituality becomes diseased. The task of the church is to identify these Powers, discern whether they contribute to the common good and, if not, redeem them and call them back to their original ‘divine vocation.’ To call our economy back to its divine vocation of organizing society to provide for livelihood and welfare, while protecting the earth on which it depends, we have to ask big faith-based questions.

What is true wealth? Is it money, infrastructure, natural resources, our fund of common knowledge, our human capacity, our spiritual depth? How can that which we value be increased?

What needs to be equal? Probably not everything—but some things.

What does democracy have to do with economics? Who should decide, and where should control be located? There is probably no simple answer for all situations, but it is a question that cries out to be asked.

How is well-being tracked? What should be measured?

An opportunity to ask these big questions came up at Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in the summer of 2014. We had gone through some very lean and painful years following the great 2008 recession, laying off over a third of our paid staff and slashing program expenses to the bone. After several more years of tight fiscal controls, forced savings, and austerity spending, finally, at annual sessions that summer, we heard the good news:

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Photographer and Friend Peter West Nutting presented at Quaker Earthcare Witness’ Earthcare Center at the Friends General Conference Gathering this June. He reflects: “Next to the very busy (even in summer) ice arena on the Niagara University campus was a seemingly abandoned area with a rusty truck trailer among the chicory, an ‘alien’ wildflower found on roadsides and in ‘waste places.’ The essence of photography for me is discovering beauty even where it is least expected.”

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VISION AND WITNESS

WE ARE CALLED to live in right relationship with all Creation, recognizing that the entire world is interconnected and is a manifestation of God. WE WORK to integrate into the beliefs and practices of the Religious Society of Friends the Truth that God's Creation is to be respected, protected, and held in reverence in its own right, and the Truth that human aspirations for peace and justice depend upon restoring the earth's ecological integrity.

WE PROMOTE these truths by being patterns and examples, by communicating our message, and by providing spiritual and material support to those engaged in the compelling task of transforming our relationship to the earth.

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Earthcare Calendar

October 10, 2017. Deadline for article submissions for November-December 2017 *BeFriending Creation*

Letters to Share

Send your letters to QEW Publications Coordinator Hayley at hayley@quakerearthcare.org, and share your thoughts and leadings with Friends and interested throughout North America. ✍

Hi dear QEW friends,

I am spending almost all my time outside work on climate because I am so scared of the implications for our precious planet—as our home. (I know the planet will continue—but we may not, in anything like our current social organization).

This question of whether to frighten people with stark scenarios, that are realistic given the trends, is up for discussion right now so I'd like to see what others think. I think people will not thank us when things start falling apart, very soon now, for not having woken them from their slumber. So let's waken others, and put them to work, WITH us, that's our hope: an ACTIVE hope so referred to by Joanna Macy. We may need to experience some intense emotions to get there.

As far as solutions, I do believe carbon pricing is part of the answer as I do think we must change our economy to stimulate behaviour change; however, we also need an awakened public consciousness, while there is still a tiny bit of time to avert the worst.

Best,

Lyn Adamson, Toronto Meeting

QEW at 30 – Way Forward

This year marks QEW's 30th anniversary. Our October 19-22 Steering Committee meeting will focus on where Spirit is leading us. We will also be celebrating our history of inspiring Friends to act on our spiritual connection with the natural world, with thanks to the many Friends who have been part of the journey. We will seek way forward to build a sustainable and life-enhancing future in these challenging times.

Whether you are hearing about QEW for the first time or you have been with us from the beginning epiphany at the 1987 FGC Gathering when Marshall Massey spoke about Earthcare, all are welcome. We are meeting at Pendle Hill in the Philadelphia area. There will be multiple ways to connect with old and new Friends, participate in worship and worship-sharing, hear about current projects, plan programs for the future and celebrate. Register and see the draft agenda on our website. Contact our General Secretary with questions: shelley@quakerearthcare.org. Funding is available for young Friends, Steering Committee members, and those in need.

We will also be celebrating this anniversary with our November-December issue of *BeFriending Creation*. Write to hayley@quakerearthcare.org by October 10th with your stories about how QEW's work has impacted your life, or how your work with QEW has impacted your community.

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Spending is stable; resources are up; income is showing a tendency to rise. If the stock market just continues to grow, we can anticipate more reassuring financial statements for years to come.

“If the stock market just continues to grow...” That phrase rang in the ears of several of us who were active in our yearly meeting’s Friends Economic Integrity Project. What a paradox! Our yearly meeting depends on growth in the stock market. Yet that growth is a driver of economic inequality and environmental destruction.

A handful of us gathered at the end of Sessions to scratch our heads together. With our endowments so deeply dependent on these investments, and many of us counting as never before on investment for our retirement security, how could we challenge this system with integrity and effectiveness? None of us were trained economists, but we all saw our economic system at the root of many of the problems we are facing, from inequality to climate change. To help puzzle out these issues, several of us took on a writing project that would lead to the book *Toward a Right Relationship with Finance: Interest, Debt, Growth and Security*, published by the Quaker Institute for the Future.

In the process, I got a much better picture of the radical shift in our economy in the late 1970s, from the strong New Deal and post World War II emphasis on serving the common good to one promoting private gain. Tax rates on the rich plummeted from 91 percent in the 1950s to 28 percent with Reaganomics. Regulations on business, banking, and finance were loosened. The private sector’s influence grew. The system we now find ourselves in—sometimes known as “neoliberal” economics—hearkens back to the *laissez-faire* era of the Robber Barons.

I learned how our retirement system changed over that period of time. After WWII, retirement security based on the shared systems of job pensions and Social Security was the norm (at least for white men). Since then, it has shifted steadily toward individual retirement accounts—with individual security increasingly dependent on interest from investments.

The connection between interest and debt on the one hand, and growth and inequality on the other, is compelling:

1. Virtually all money is created when banks make interest-bearing loans.

2. Taking on loans means taking on debt.
3. So more money needs to be made in order to pay off the interest on that debt.
4. Thus the requirement for economic growth is baked into the system.
5. When there were great untapped resources—minerals, forests, topsoil—and easy access to stored sunlight from the past in fossil fuels, such an expansive system could work.
6. But it has no future on a spaceship, as Quaker economist Kenneth Boulding so eloquently pointed out.
7. Since producing more is linked to using more resources, Earth’s ecological systems are increasingly strained.
8. And inequality steadily grows as interest payments make lenders richer and debtors poorer.



Pamela Haines at QEW’s Earthcare Center sharing her new book, *Toward a Right Relationship with Finance: Interest, Debt, Growth and Security*.

It’s a land mine of ethical issues.

First, there is the question about rights. Do we have a right to interest income that we haven’t earned through our own effort? Beneath that question lies a bigger one: Does having anything mean we have a right to it?

Second, there are questions about fairness. Sometimes a loan can be fair for both sides. But should it be easier for people with some assets to get more than for people with no assets to get some? Should people who have not yet begun their work life be in debt? When does debt become indebtedness?

Then there are questions about relationships and connection. What if my gain in economic security involves someone else’s loss? What does inequality—or even a focus on individual security—do to our sense of

connection?

And then, of course, there is the big question of what really brings security. Can it come from laying away treasures on Earth?

Building on our confidence that we have a right to speak up about issues of war and peace, the world needs us to step boldly into the arena of economics and apply our faith values to these big hard questions. In the next issue, I will use a framework of the Quaker testimonies to reflect on how to put these faith values into action. ☞

Pamela Haines is a member of Friends Economic Integrity Project and the Eco-Justice Collaborative of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. This article is based on a plenary talk given at Intermountain Yearly Meeting annual gathering in June.

Who to Be While You Are Waiting for Your Earthcare Leading

By Mary Jo Klingel

RECENTLY I WROTE A LITTLE ARTICLE with the title "What To Do While You are Waiting for Your Earthcare Leading". Thanks to all of you who read it. However, I realized that I missed a big part of the story.

Of course I did. As a part of this culture, I was taught that we accomplish by doing. It is so deeply ingrained that it is almost self-evident, or so we think. We tend to miss what we accomplish by laying down all the tasks, and the pressure to do, and do and do, and spend time just being as well.

One could say I just wasted an hour and a half. I sat on my porch and watched and listened as a magnificent storm came through. The noise and tumult has passed, and there is only the soft drip of the rain from the leaves of the trees. The birds know the storm has passed. I can hear them begin to sing again. In my doing "nothing," I became clear that there is another piece to figuring out "what to do".

So I ask that you also take on the intention to be a presence for the Earth in your meeting. If the people working in the kitchen are composting, thank them. If

there is a conversation about what we might want to try as a meeting, voice your thoughts. If you know that there will be some discernment in Meeting for Worship for Business about an earthcare concern, try to be there. If you cannot be there, write a letter to the clerk and ask her to read it in the discernment. Send a copy to the Clerk of Peace and Social Concerns. Claim your voice.

Know who the others are in the meeting who share your concern. Tell them you would like to see the meeting sit in worship, being together with our concern for our Earth, and growing as a community.

Let it be known that you have this concern for the Earth. Listen, and know that just by being who you are, you will receive the gifts that nature is here to give us. Your family and your community will feel who you are, and feel the Light you bring to this work with your unique presence. ∞

Mary Jo Klingel has been a member of Fort Lauderdale Friends Meeting and a representative to QEW from Southeastern Yearly Meeting. She has recently relocated to Charlotte, North Carolina and attends Charlotte Friends Meeting.

YES, I'd like to show my support for QEW!

Name _____ Email _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

I want to contribute \$25____; \$50____; \$100____; \$250____; Other _____

____My check/cheque is enclosed. Payable to Quaker Earthcare Witness, P.O. Box 6787, Albany, CA, 94706

____I'd prefer to pay by my credit card: MC____; Visa ____; Amount _____

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Food Sovereignty for Marginalized Populations in the African Diaspora

By Beverly G. Ward and Pamela Boyce Simms

QEW HAS BEEN a non-governmental organization of the United Nations (UN) since 1999, holding four UN agency accreditations with the mission of bringing a spirit-led Quaker voice to UN deliberations on the environment. The QEW United Nations Working Group initiated an African Diaspora Earthcare Coalition in 2016. This July, the Coalition came together at the International Social Justice Commission United Nations Office in New York City to discuss food sovereignty for marginalized populations in the African Diaspora under the aegis of the UN International Decade for People of African Descent (IDPAD), 2015–2024. The event took place in conjunction with the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) July 10–19, 2017.

The event began with Coalition members getting better acquainted over a shared meal on the evening of July 11. Pamela Boyce Simms (Quaker Earthcare Witness), Sara Green (Black Land Liberation Initiative, Unitarian Universalists Association UN Office), Jennie L. Stephens (Center for Heirs Property Preservation), Beverly Ward (Field Secretary for Earthcare, Southeastern Yearly Meeting), Veronica Womack (Black Belt Justice Center), Beverly Wright (Historically Black Colleges and University Environmental Justice Consortium) and Joseph Akeyo (Support Aid Ministry, Movofa Sustainability) reviewed the flow of the following day's side event over dinner.

The event officially began with an African Diaspora food tasting. The tasting menu included:

- Chef Grace Odogbili (NY) providing Kachumbari, an East African onion and tomato salad, especially enjoyed in Kenya and Tanzania. It is spicy, simple, and flavorful. Kachumbari is the Swahili name for fresh tomato and onion;

- Chef Carla Green, Green Community Garden (Newark, NJ), offered "Callaloo" a Jamaican Traditional Caribbean dish;
- Chef Tarsha Gary shared a U.S. Southern gourmet dish, "Watermelon Salad" prepared by Sara Green; and
- Chef Kwame Williams (NJ) served "Ackee and Saltfish in Cassava Cup" a Jamaican national dish and a lemon-ginger beverage.

Pamela Boyce Simms, convener of the Coalition, opened the side event session with an overview of the IDPAD and the Coalition's work. The overarching goal of the African Diaspora Earthcare Coalition is to create "a robust, evolved, post-carbon remnant," a globally interconnected, local, environmentally resilient community within the Diaspora.



Members of the QEW African Diaspora Earthcare Coalition from left to right: Joseph Akeyo, Support Aid Ministry and Movofa Sustainability; Jennie Stephens, Center for Heirs Property Preservation; Barb Adams and Beverly Ward of QEW.

The way forward involves the relocation of sovereign food production in the African Diaspora incorporating:

- Innovative, culturally relevant economic models without strings;
- 21st Century evolutionary culture-building, egalitarian governance; and,
- Intentional healing within a vast network of Diaspora nodes where people of African descent are building environmental resilience.

This first year, the Coalition prioritized the retention of agricultural land which underlies food sovereignty.

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The need to feed the UN-estimated 200 million people who identify themselves as being of African descent living in the Americas and many millions more living in other parts of the world outside of the African continent is imperative given drought, famine, wars, and other anthropogenic and climatic events.

The priorities include producing healthy, toxin-free food locally; employing holistic agricultural practices which enrich the soil and the Earth; preserving local biodiversity; determining agricultural land availability; working through land retention challenges; and, innovating strategies, models, and work-arounds to meet the needs.

Pamela's overview included a review of African-American U.S. land dispossession. Between 1865 and 1910, Blacks in southern states acquired over 15 million acres of farmland and controlled 218,000 farms. However, over a half a million African-American farms were lost between 1950 and 1975. Currently, Black farmers own less than 3 million acres of farmland and account for less than one percent of all U.S. farmers.

Three panelists presented on the "State of potential agricultural land in the African Diaspora." Each provided examples of the linkages between the loss of Black land ownership, the economic potential of the land, the historical trauma, and the narrow framing of the question of food insecurity among people of African descent.

Dr. Jennie Stephens, Executive Director Center for Heirs' Property Preservation, outlined some of the property challenges faced by African-American heirs. Partition sales, forced property sales, property tax sales, and financing, to list a few, are among the factors that contribute to the continuing loss of land ownership among African-Americans. Veronica Womack of the Black Belt Justice Center noted that African-Americans were over-represented among the approximately 10 million people who lost their homes through foreclosure and bank eviction from 2007 to 2013. Little has been done to address the pervasive structural problems, including food insecurity, resulting from the economic marginalization of urban communities of color by capital accumulation.

Joseph Akeyo presented Nancy Abwalaba's Kenyan land ownership case example. Dr. Abwalaba traces the root of ethnic conflict among some coastal Kenyan communities and those who live "upcountry" to colonial and post-independence policies and practices that left persons without titled deeds landless. Since 1960, some families have claimed that they were evicted from their land to make way for tribal partisan government projects that have not begun to date. This has been exacerbated by private developers grabbing beach property and denying public access to natural resources and recreational areas.

The participants separated into four groups to respond to the query, "From your vantage point or that of your organization, what are some innovative, non-justice related next steps to ensure people of African Descent in the Diaspora produce food as climate change accelerates?" Participants were instructed to think

about and discuss what role as individuals they or their organizations might play.

This breakout session was followed by a panel discussion with Chefs Carla Green and Kwame Williams who provided information on healthy foodways and practices. The participants then continued to address the query in their groups while being visited by Resource Persons Sara Green, Joseph Akeyo, Beverly Ward, Veronica Womack, and Beverly Wright.

The final portion of the side event included reports from the breakout groups. Highlights from the suggested strategies, models, and innovations included agro-forestry; organic farming driven by people of African descent; heirs property retention, land rights awareness campaigns and deepened Diaspora organizing; and returning generation farming linked through historically Black Colleges and Universities.

The African Diaspora Earthcare Coalition has begun preparing for 2018. While next year's work will focus on sea level rise, water access and quality issues, Coalition members will continue to organize around the spectrum of land and food sovereignty issues. ∞

Beverly G. Ward, of Tampa Meeting, is Southeastern Yearly Meeting's Field Secretary for Earthcare. Pamela Boyce Simms convenes the Mid-Atlantic Transition Hub and works with international Quaker, Buddhist, and African Diaspora Earthcare networks.



Kwame Williams served his "modern and healthful take on Jamaican cuisine" at the event and presented on healthy foodways. Kwame is Chef and Partner of Vital Dining based in Montclair, NJ, along with his two sisters.

Organizing for Community and Climate

By Jaime DeMarco

I RECENTLY HELPED CO-FOUND the Maryland Clean Energy Jobs Initiative, a new non-profit working to pass legislation in Maryland that will do three things. It will expand renewable electricity in Maryland to 50% by 2030, invest in renewable energy companies owned by women and people of color, and fund clean energy job training programs.

As important as having a clear goal, we have a clear plan. We will follow a step-by-step campaign model that has proven itself in previous campaigns by going head to head and winning against the National Rifle Association, Walmart, big tobacco, big alcohol, and most recently big pharma. The model involves first spending a year building grassroots support throughout the state, and then leveraging that political will during an election cycle to force candidates to take a stand.

We have a clear vision of what we are doing and how we will do it, but my journey to this point has been long, circuitous, and above all guided by the Quaker values I was raised with.

I grew up surrounded by the unconditional love and support of Baltimore Yearly Meeting's Quaker youth programs. There I learned not to act in ways that hurt my community, but then one day it hit me like a punch in the gut that my daily actions were hurting my global



community and climate. In the wake of this realization and inspired by the integrity testimony, I made a bold decision. I stopped riding in cars.

For more than two full years I did not ride in cars, and nothing anyone said or did could convince me to break my commitment. Then I began volunteering for the Beyond Coal Campaign. That campaign has secured the retirement of over 200 coal plants in just 5 years, nearly one coal plant a week! I asked myself, "If everyone who has worked on that campaign had just ridden their bikes instead of organizing, how many more coal plants would be operational today?" In that moment, the community testimony spoke to me. I had to wonder whether abstaining from cars was a real attempt to be part of the solution our global community needs to reach, or just an attempt to absolve myself from being part of the problem.

I ended up getting back in the car and working on policy solutions to the climate crisis. I am still following that path today, but I remain open to continuing revelation as I live out my worship in action. Really, that is the only advice that I have, to take action while retaining a worshipful openness to the voice of God. We need not wait until we have it all figured out or until we have the perfect solution. We would end up waiting our whole lives! Do whatever it is you can in this moment. It may not be the right path, but so long as you keep walking forward, your way will open to the right path for you. ☞

Jamie is a climate activist in Maryland who has worked on a variety of campaigns to expand renewable energy.



Rooted in Reverence: Reflections on the Climate Pilgrimage

By Honor Woodrow

I AM WRITING TO SHARE a reflection on my experience of the recent Climate Pilgrimage, where Friends from New England and fellow travelers spent six days walking the 60 miles from the Schiller Station (which burns both coal and wood) in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to the Merrimack Station (known to locals as the “Bow Plant”) in Bow, New Hampshire. The Bow Plant is the last operational coal plant in New England without a shutdown date, and was the site chosen by a group of New England Friends (called the Prophetic Climate Action Working Group) for a worship service and a civil disobedience action later in the day.

I chose to join the pilgrimage because it was clear to me that it was not a “protest” but rather an opportunity to gather in the manner of Friends with a common concern and listen for how the Spirit might be leading us into transformation both as individuals and as a group. There is so much I can say about this journey, but what is sticking with me the most is my experience in worship on the final morning of our time together, and the implications that that experience has



From the Climate Pilgrimage's Twitter account: “Over 50 NE #Quakers & fellow travelers gathered in worship & prayer to rejoice in life of the spirit bubbling among us #rootedinreverence.”

for how I might orient my life.

On Saturday evening, there were several Friends who heard a clear calling to sleep on the tracks in the encampment that they had built earlier in the day. Several others (myself included) who had not found their way clear to risk arrest at that time (for a variety of reasons) went to the service and shared meal at the nearby Episcopal Church. After the worship service at St. Paul's concluded, I felt like what I needed was to sleep in my own bed, and I was eager to take a shower (after accumulating six days worth of sweat, bug spray, sunscreen and pond water, I felt long overdue). So I made my way home where I showered and slept (which was glorious).

When I woke up the next morning having heard that the police were not planning to show up I decided to return to the tracks for a final time of worship before helping to dismantle the encampment.

There were about ten of us there that morning (the others had gone to worship at Concord meeting for their regularly scheduled worship service). It was sunny and hot and we were sitting on wooden boards covered by sleeping pads crowded into a small space under the scaffolding. We read the parable of the sower, prayed for our own willingness to do what is needed to



The group set up a 24-hour blockade on the railroad tracks that bring coal to the power plant in Bow. Thirteen members spent the night on the tracks.

“We walk acknowledging that we do not yet possess the inner resources to live our lives fully into the reality that our understanding of the climate crisis calls us to. We walk creating a community of holy obedience, understanding that we need each other in these challenging times.”



become the most fertile soil we can be, and reflected on how easy it can be to cast ourselves as the sower in the story, spreading the seeds of truth and judging the “fertility” of others. It was a sweet, tender and intimate worship, and I felt a sense of belonging, love, and for a few moments like all was as it should be—even as so much in our society and our world seems to be falling apart.

During this worship, it came to me that while it is nice to sleep in a comfortable bed, to have a clean body, and to be in my own space, the rest and comfort I am yearning for is actually found in worship with those who share a common expectation that the Holy Spirit might just show up among us at any moment, with all that we need.

I am bringing this awareness with me out of that time, and thinking about what it means for how I choose to orient my life and the decisions that I make about how to spend my time. Should I prioritize what feels most within my comfort zone, or risk being uncomfortable knowing that there is a possibility that I might find greater peace, connection, and rightness there? I feel the resonance of the words George Fox wrote to his parents in 1652: “To that of God in you... I speak, to beseech you... to return within, and wait to hear the voice of the Lord there; and waiting there, and keeping close to the Lord, a discerning will grow... Oh! be faithful! Look not back, nor be too forward, further than ye have attained; for ye have no time, but this present time: therefore prize your time for your souls’ sake.” ☞

Honor Woodrow is a member of Framingham Friends Meeting. This letter was originally shared with New England Yearly Meeting Friends and was reprinted with permission.

A Message from the New England Yearly Meeting Prophetic Climate Action Working Group

FRIENDS, WE ARE CALLED BY GOD IN THESE TIMES OF IMPENDING CLIMATE CATAclysm to make a witness to the divine power to renew all things...

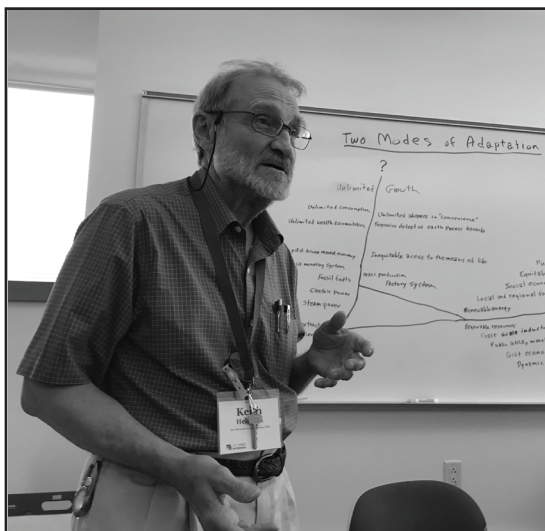
Beginning Sunday, July 9, 2017 we will walk, pray, share fellowship, sing and worship through southern New Hampshire, exploring how we may be called in these times to follow the prophetic examples of our forebears: to act in the truth in witness to the power of God breaking us out of our ordinary lives to be instruments of justice and peace. The 6-day walk will be Quaker-led and open to all.

We confess that the reality of climate change is overwhelming and we do not know exactly how to respond to the devastating truth that the world as we know it is ending. Yet, we also know that a stable climate requires an immediate phase-out of fossil fuel use. Given this reality, we must immediately shut down all coal-fired power plants and rapidly shift away from our region’s dependence on natural gas and toward renewable energy....

We walk praying for clarity, determination and boldness to take the necessary next steps. We walk acknowledging that we do not yet possess the inner resources to live our lives fully into the reality that our understanding of the climate crisis calls us to. We walk creating a community of holy obedience, understanding that we need each other in these challenging times. We walk bringing public focus to the immorality of perpetuating the status quo, and to a genuine hope for a different future.

We walk to build together a beloved community, to see what faith in action looks like. Our hearts are on fire with divine love even though our hands are slow to repent and our feet are slow to change. This is a time for renewal and transformation....

In Abiding Love,
NEYM Prophetic Climate Action Working Group



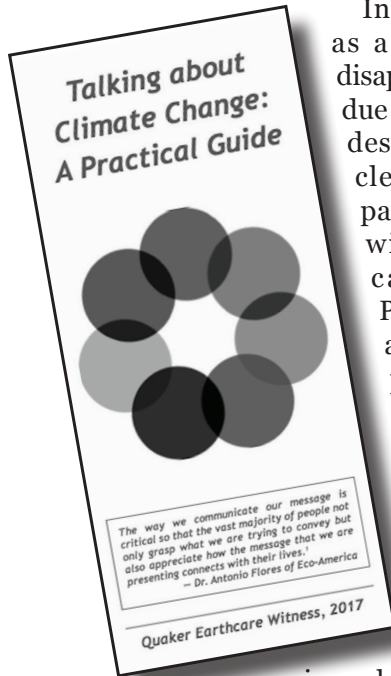
Each year, Quaker Earthcare Witness hosts and organizes a dedicated space for environmental concerns at Friends General Conference's annual gathering. The Gathering's theme was "Ripples Start Where Spirit Moves," and we felt that spirit in our Earthcare Center. Each day featured three presentations by QEW network members and friends that shared with us fascinating perspectives and wisdom on a range of subjects. Highlights included:

Barbara Adams, filmmaker and QEW board member, sharing her documentary "Troubled Water: Voices from Bath" about the devastating impacts of the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline, which would carry fracked natural gas through the remote mountainous community of Bath County, Virginia. Theologian and Friend Sara Walcott led us on a journey through history to help inform the themes of domination and separation in the modern age. Keith Helmuth helped us "track down ecological guidance," and his vision for moving toward an alternative story that changes our understanding of "progress." We hope this rich canvas of faith in action inspired all of the visitors.

Highlights from the Earthcare Center at Friends General Conference Annual Gathering July 2017 Niagara University, Niagara, New York

Top left: Keith Helmuth shares wisdom of his new book "Tracking Down Ecological Guidance: Presence, Beauty, Survival." Below: Geoff Garver presents to a full house, "Making Way for a Mutually Enhancing Human-Earth Relationship in the Anthropocene." Right: Pamela Boyce Simms shares her presentation "Self as Earth: Live Like Trees."

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Instead, focus on past glories as a positive standard that is disappearing in the present, mostly due to climate change. One could describe the abundant forests, clean lakes and rivers of the past. The obvious comparison with the present makes the case for climate change. Presenting climate change as a dire prediction of the future proved much less effective with conservatives. For example, saying that there was less traffic in the past was more effective than predicting more traffic in the future.

GreenFaith's Climate Outreach Program has "over ten years of experience helping [their] partners to talk and think about climate change." They have developed guidelines for talking with people from five major faiths and describe five narratives that work across faiths:

1. Earth is a precious gift with which we have been entrusted. Climate change is harming Earth. We need to return to our appropriate relationship with Earth.
2. Climate change is a moral challenge, harming the poor and vulnerable, including all creatures of Earth. We have a moral obligation to practice non-violence and do no harm to others.
3. Climate change is disrupting the natural balance. Tipping the natural order off balance leads to instability and chaos.
4. We live our faith through our actions. We ought to live more simply so as not to negatively impact the climate.
5. I take a personal pledge to share, lead, and teach because I have a responsibility for the harm I may have caused. I will right this wrong and help to inspire others.

Climate change denial may arise, not from ignorance or self-interest, but from the sense that nothing we do, as seemingly insignificant individuals, can make a real difference. This form of denial arises from feeling overwhelmed by the immensity of the problems. This existential quandary is not intellectual, not from a lack of information, but rather comes from data overload. The help needed here is not a list of things to do, not more ideas, not more information, but human compassion, understanding and connection.

The simplest and most profound gift in this situation is the gift of attention. Those in the mental health professions and other related fields have substantiated the benefits of active, careful, authentic listening. As Friends we are well acquainted with honest caring queries. We are comfortable with silence and attention to spirit. We can employ these spiritual skills here.

When silent spiritual space is offered to stressed individuals, often they will open their hearts and share what troubles them. After people feel certain they are not being judged, or forced to feel more guilty than they already do, they have the opportunity to explore the fears that are immobilizing them. Released of their inhibitors to action, people can more easily take their own small steps towards action. Simple actions may be self-assuring, especially as people find themselves on the same path to well-being as are others who are also struggling with needed changes. Always, it is not the action but the compassion that is our intention.

In QEW, we seek ways to unite in environmental action even as our views differ. We focus on listening with an open heart, and then responding as led in our own terms to the heart of the message, trusting that the others will do the same. If environmental groups are diverse and inclusive, the environmental movement can speak for the world in which we all live and may serve as an example of cooperation. ☞

This text is excerpted from a new QEW pamphlet and is complemented by a companion pamphlet, "Climate Change: A Call for Dialog." Look for excerpts in a future issue. Download and share both at <quakerearthcare.org/pamphlets>.



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Are you one of those fortunate people who is both over 70 and has a need to donate part of your IRA each year? If so, we would be happy to be the recipient of your 'required minimum distribution.' We will put your donation to good use!

Thanks to a recent donation from longtime-QEW supporters, we are now set up to receive stocks, also known in financial terms as a 'Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD).' Contact our General Secretary to arrange for a transfer at shelley@quakerearthcare.org or leave a message at 510- 542-9606. Our policy is to sell the stock as soon as feasible so that we can use the proceeds to immediately fund our work.

Quaker Earthcare Witness

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Talking About Climate Change: A Practical Guide

The way we communicate our message is critical so that the vast majority of people not only grasp what we are trying to convey but also appreciate how the message that we are presenting connects with their lives.

— Dr. Antonio Flores of Eco-America

In December of 2015, all but two countries on Earth (194 countries) signed the Paris Climate Agreement to hold the temperature increase to well below 2°C, to adapt in a manner that does not threaten food production, and to make finance availability consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development. By October 4, 2016, enough countries had ratified the agreement to bring it into force. Recently, President Trump announced he would withdraw the United States from the Paris accords but many states have continued to make good on the U.S.' promise.

Prior to 2010, Republican politicians acknowledged the threat of climate change, including George W. Bush, who openly explained his administration's approach to addressing climate change. But since the Citizens United decision the large amounts of "dark" money injected into political campaigns have led some public officials to deny the current and future effects of climate change. Gallup polls indicate that in 2017 only 45 percent of Americans are worried about climate change.



Photo: Kathy Barnhart

This is a practical guide, not so much to persuade as to help us find effective ways to talk about climate change, increase public awareness, and counter the political pressure of that "dark money."

Some studies of various approaches to talking about climate change offer general advice:

- Avoid alarmist language and dire future predictions.
- Approach climate change as an economic or public health issue rather than an environmental disaster.
- Depict climate change as a collective rather than an individual problem.
- When discussing with conservatives, avoid talking about the potential future effects of climate change.

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