



# BeFriending Creation

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**QUAKER EARTHCARE WITNESS**

Affirming our essential unity with nature • Vol.33 Number 3 • JULY-AUG-SEPT 2020

## A Toxic Factory Will Create a Toxic Future

By Bobbi Blok, Barb Adams,  
and Catherine Jozwik

CHILDREN DESERVE clean air, water, soil and a safe healthy area where they can play and grow. But a factory that manufactures wool-like insulation from spun-melted rock in Ranson, Jefferson County, West Virginia, will make that impossible. Rockwool, a Danish company, is constructing a factory that will burn 1.6 million cubic ft. of fracked gas and over 90 tons of coal *a day*, and is permitted to emit 156,000 tons of hazardous pollutants including particulate matter (PM10 and PM2.5, similar to asbestos), volatile organic compounds, methane, sulphur dioxide, and ozone. Rockwool claims to be a “green” company making a “green” product, yet it would be extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible, to build such a factory today in environmentally conscious Denmark.

Although located in the eastern panhandle of West Virginia at the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers, the “Significant Impact Area” expands in a 35-mile radius and encompasses bordering northwest Virginia, western Maryland, and Pennsylvania,



Photo of Bobbi Blok by Samuel Wright

impacting a total of 710,000 people, including parts of Baltimore Yearly Meeting.

We want to share with you the critical health, environmental and justice concerns associated with this industrial nightmare.

**Environmental injustice:** This project will create an environmental sacrifice zone less than 400 yards from North Jefferson Elementary School, a Title 1 school that serves economically underserved families. It is also located within two miles of three other public schools which serve nearly 30 percent of the county’s school children.

**Hazardous air pollution emissions:** Our children’s health will be threatened because of the hazardous air pollution emitted near their schools and neighborhoods. Children and adults already suffering from asthma will have their respiratory challenges exacerbated.

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## BeFriending Creation

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We publish *BeFriending Creation* to promote the work of Quaker Earthcare Witness, stimulate discussion and action, share insights, practical ideas, and news of our actions, and encourage among Friends a sense of community and spiritual connection with all Creation. Opinions expressed are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect those of Quaker Earthcare Witness, or of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). The editor is responsible for unsigned items. Please share our work widely and broadly, always attributing it to Quaker Earthcare Witness.

**Interested in being a member of QEW? Membership** is open to all who demonstrate a commitment to support the work of Quaker Earthcare Witness and who support its work at the Monthly or Yearly Meeting levels, or through other Friends organizations. Quaker Earthcare Witness is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation; contributions are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

### 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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### WANT TO WRITE FOR US?

**September 30, 2020** Deadline for  
articles for Oct-Nov-Dec issue

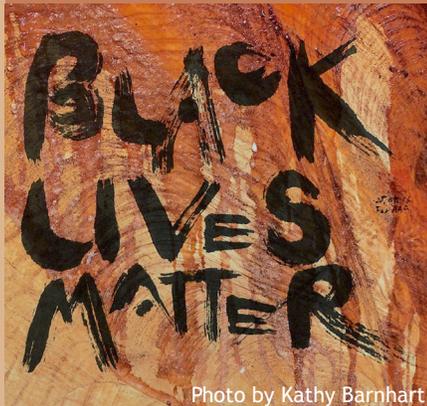


Photo by Kathy Barnhart

## From Our Clerk and General Secretary:

*Following the killing of George Floyd, the arrest of a Minneapolis police officer, and worldwide outrage, Quaker Earthcare Witness General Secretary Shelley Tanenbaum and Clerk Mary Jo Klingel issued the following statement in June:*

We are once again witnessing the ongoing pattern of confrontation and violence that is symptomatic of the institutional violence and racism that communities of color face daily.

Our hearts ache along with the family and friends of George Floyd, Ahmed Arbury, and Breonna Taylor. Tragically, these are just the most recent victims of a pattern of systemic racial profiling, undue use of force, murder at the hands of police, and the ineffectiveness of our society in preventing these outrages.

We focus our work as Quaker Earthcare Witness on advocating for ecological integrity and environmental justice. Our core belief is that we are all connected, seeing that of the Light, God, in all of us and in all of creation. Just as we are all connected, our movement for environmental justice is connected to racial and economic justice. We cannot work for a better future for our planet and all life without addressing the deep, systemic harm caused by colonialism, slavery, and racism. We must root our Quaker values and our love for the Earth in a better understanding of these issues, and follow the lead of those most affected.

COVID-19 has now killed more than 100,000 in the US [165,148 deaths at the time of publication], and a quarter of those deaths are Black Americans due to racism, social inequity, and environmental injustices that have robbed the Black community of health and well-being. The climate crisis impacts vulnerable communities disproportionately because too often polluting and extractive facilities are located in communities of color.

As Friends and leaders of a Quaker organization, we commit to working for justice and to dismantling white supremacy within our communities as we work for justice for all those who share our home, our Earth.

*Mary Jo Klingel*     *Shelley Tanenbaum*

Mary Jo Klingel, Clerk and Shelley Tanenbaum, General Secretary

**Join Quaker Earthcare Witness'  
Virtual Fall Steering Committee  
Meeting: October 8 - 11**  
Visit [www.quakerearthcare.org/upcoming](http://www.quakerearthcare.org/upcoming)  
for more information.

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These air-borne toxins are proven to cause greater health hazards including cardiovascular disease, neurological disorders, prenatal defects and cancer. Emissions travel with wind patterns, but heavier particulates fall in the area surrounding the plant, which is adjacent to a low-income neighborhood.

**Contaminated groundwater:** Over 80 percent of county residents obtain drinking water from wells filtered through fragile karst topography, a network of limestone caves that lie just beneath the surface. The Rockwool factory is being constructed on the highest density of sinkholes—entryways into the underground water system and aquifer—in a sinkhole-prone county. Children’s access to drinkable water will be compromised by leaking gas pipelines, holding ponds, and factory-produced hazardous contaminants that fall from the air to the ground. Such contamination will be nearly impossible to remediate.

**Agricultural Pollution:** Jefferson County is the number one producer of many agricultural commodities in West Virginia including soybeans and corn. Studies have shown that the level of ozone pollution produced by the proposed factory can reduce crop yields by as much as 50 percent.



To fight this threat to our health, pristine air and water, and thousands of existing agricultural and tourism jobs, local citizens have organized. We’ve voted out elected officials responsible for bringing Rockwool, filed several lawsuits covering different aspects of the project, sent a delegation to Denmark to educate and plea for intervention, and obtained over 13,000 signatures opposing the Rockwool factory. In spite of all our efforts, lax regulatory procedures and complicit government agencies are allowing the project to move forward. We need outside intervention and are asking Friends in the wider Quaker world for help.

The cry “I can’t breathe” is echoing throughout our country and the world. It’s also a silent cry from our children and our future children in West Virginia. We pray you hear the children’s cry and take actions to protect them. To take action, please visit [www.quakerearthcare.org/rockwool](http://www.quakerearthcare.org/rockwool).

*Bobbi is a member of Shepherdstown Friends Meeting in Jefferson County, WV and sojourning at Goose Creek Friends Meeting in Loudoun County, VA. Catherine is the co-chair of the Eastern Panhandle Green Coalition and a member of the Jefferson County Vision Board of Directors. Barb is BYM’s Yearly Meeting Representative to QEW and a member of Richmond (VA) Friends.*

## Worship Sharing Queries from Quaker Earthcare Witness

*QEW hosted a series of online worship sharing sessions in partnership with Friends General Conference this spring. The following queries are from one of those sessions. We hope they speak to your condition.*

When George Fox was resolving his personal spiritual seeking that laid the groundwork for the Religious Society of Friends, he is quoted as saying, “This I know experimentally,” meaning this is what he knew from living through his journeys.

“In the wake of George Floyd’s killing, the Movement for Black Lives—already a massive global force—has succeeded in birthing a phenomenon infinitely larger than itself. It can only be called a ‘Great Awakening’ of empathy and solidarity, one without historical precedent...Tens of millions of Americans are out in the streets protesting for a better way forward, confronting inequity, and turning discomfort into action. Because of their efforts, there is a new consensus emerging. The black folks who have led this movement, many of whom are young people, are literally changing the world—right before our eyes.” Van Jones, CNN, June 2020

- What do we now know experimentally? In this time of pandemic and protest, how are we as Friends called to live out our faith?
- What is your role in what Van Jones is calling the “Great Awakening?” Are there spiritual practices that are giving you strength and sustenance?
- What in Friend’s practices is a resource or a challenge for you now?

# The Outgoing Epistle of the 2020 Virtual Friends General Conference Pre-Gathering of Friends of Color and their Families

From the editor: *Quaker Earthcare Witness serves many Friends who are members of Yearly and Monthly Meetings affiliated with Friends General Conference. We want to share this powerful epistle with you.*

“We are a harvest of survivors. But then, that’s what we’ve always been.” —Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower*

To Friends Everywhere:

We begin by remembering our ancestors who were strong enough to make a way for us. Friends of Color and their families met for Pre-Gathering Retreat on 26 Day through 28 Day Sixth Month 2020. This is the eighth year Friends of Color have met for our Pre-Gathering Retreat. First-timers felt welcomed and validated. This year, we met virtually with our largest attendance yet. There were 47 attendees, ranging in age from 11 months through 77 years from Canada, Mexico, Switzerland and the United States of America.

The importance of this Gathering for Friends of Color worshipping in community together cannot be overstated. To our Friends in the wider Quaker world, we the Friends of Color, can’t breathe. During this weekend, we enjoyed the rare opportunity of not being othered In Quaker space. We experienced the joy of being seen as we are and the affirmation of a supportive spirit among ourselves in the “Amen corner”. The term

“Amen corner” comes from the Black church and is a communal space that validates, affirms and uplifts the spirit. In isolation, due to COVID19, we are being kept apart and away from those we love, trust and need. The pre-gathering retreat brought back the source of community and family that has been missing. We were able to exhale, relax, and breathe together. Many of us did not realize how exhausted we were until we were able to relax with one another. The gifts of the spirit were abundant. We shared in worship, gentle yoga and meditation, meaningful discussions, journaling and self-discovery. We also listened and shared in each other’s joys, triumphs, pains and sorrows. We experienced spiritual renewal that was awakened by

**Friends of Color need respite from the insidious lie of white supremacy manifested in daily oppressive traumatic stressors (microaggressions) which have the effect of blaming the oppressed for our own oppression.**

moving through pain to hope for the future for ourselves and our children. Attention and space was given for people to play games, dance, talk, grieve, play music, watch videos, and write.

We have much gratitude to the Program Coordinator for the Ministry on Racism; the pioneer who laid the groundwork to make the Pre-Gathering Retreat available

to us within FGC gathering and who faithfully makes it happen each year. We are grateful for being able to acknowledge all that makes us human, for finding home and connection. Our inner Light is magnified and our capacity to breathe deeply is nurtured when that of God is acknowledged in each of us. It is our hope that other Friends of Color will know that such a space exists and know that they are desired, needed and will be warmly embraced.

The Pre-Gathering Friends of Color Retreat provides a reprieve. Friends of Color need respite from the systemic racism too often found in our American Quaker community that often goes unseen by many white Friends. Friends of Color need respite from the insidious lie of white supremacy manifested in daily oppressive traumatic stressors (microaggressions) which have the effect of blaming the oppressed for our own oppression. Friends of Color need respite and support which our home meetings have not provided. Friends of Color are fatigued from being asked to teach white folks.

We ask all Quakers to heed a Call to Action. Please sit with these queries:

1. What is the Spirit leading me to do about the historic and ongoing racial pandemic across my meeting, my community, my work environment and my country?

*Continued on next page*

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2. How can we honor the memory of people who have lost their lives to the struggle for a better world?
3. How can we construct ways for people to engage and remain engaged beyond good intentions in the struggle for true equality in health, education, wealth and against state sanctioned violence?
4. How can we encourage the support of Friends of Color in Quaker worship and meetings around the world?
5. How can Friends de-center themselves in order to listen to and hear Friends of Color?
6. How can I support respite for Friends of Color?

In this time of COVID19, People of Color discovered that a deadly pandemic is secondary to the long-time pandemic of racism in our lives. People of Color are more likely to die from COVID19 due to the effects of racism and oppression. Think about how this pandemic has turned your world upside down, economically, emotionally, psychologically. Now imagine there is no one working on a vaccine, and that if you get sick or die, no one notices or cares. For People of Color, the human-made pandemic of racism is deadlier than COVID19, and we need you to do work so that we can BREATHE.

In Peace, Love and.... 2020 FGC Virtual Pre-Gathering Retreat for Friends of Color and their Families



## QEW Presents Virtual Workshops for your Community

Quaker Earthcare Witness staff, Steering Committee Members and Friends have created virtual workshops to share with your Friends meeting or church. Please see the list of workshops below and invite us to join you this fall. Email [hayley@quakerearthcare.org](mailto:hayley@quakerearthcare.org) for more info.

**Climate, COVID-19 and an Uprising** Shelley Tanenbaum, General Secretary, QEW

**A Vision from 2050: Looking Back on COVID-19 and Climate Change**

Hayley Hathaway, Communications Coordinator, QEW

**Sounds of Silence**, Brad Stocker, QEW Steering Committee

**Tailored Earthcare Workshops** Beverly G. Ward, QEW Steering committee and SEYM Field Secretary for Earthcare

**Regenerative Agriculture: Sustainable is Not Enough**  
Carol Barta, QEW Steering Committee

**Finding Way Forward: Friends Care for the Earth**  
Mary Jo Klingel, QEW Steering Committee Clerk

**Building the Heart Muscle to Take on Threats to the Earth & Financial or Economic Roots of the Climate Emergency**  
Pamela Haines, Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting

**Quaker Testimonies: From Separation to Reciprocity**  
Mary Ann Percy, QEW Steering Committee



## A Minute of Appreciation for Mary Coelho

On behalf of QEW/FCUN [Formerly Friends Committee on Unity with Nature], we want to express our appreciation for the use of Friend Mary Coelho's design for our logo. This design has served us well, expressing our care for the Earth and all of her inhabitants. We will be moving to a new logo soon, but before doing so we want to acknowledge how grateful we are to have made good use of Mary's creative, thoughtful and descriptive design.

# Weeding out Systemic Oppression in Our Garden

By Katie Breslin

THIS YEAR, I started a garden at a local farm. I didn't know what I was doing when I signed up, just the basic principles like make sure the plants have water and to pull weeds, but that was about it. Thankfully friends and my plot neighbors gave me plants and guidance. In the beginning, I was diligent about pulling the weeds and watering regularly. But then, it started to get hot. I got busy with work. When I visited the plot, I would see all of the weeds that I was ignoring. I kept putting off pulling the weeds. When I looked deep into my tomato plants, I would see more weeds, looking back at me. I started to avoid looking at the roots. It was easy to avoid pulling the weeds because I couldn't even see them. One day I went to the plot and I saw one of my tomato plants died because of my neglect. I knew what I had to do. I pulled up the red basket that was put aside for weeding and started to get to work.

Friends, many of us haven't been pulling the weeds of systemic oppression within the Religious Society of Friends. When the tasks ahead of us have made us uncomfortable, many of us have felt overwhelmed and decided it was too hot to go outside today. Or perhaps we have been pulling a few weeds, but never at the root, because we didn't think we had time or resources to properly pull from the ground. We have been supporting stopgap measures instead of going deep into the tomato plants to see what the root causes of these problems are. Many of us have been ignoring our own history of oppression. The roots are getting deeper and us ignoring the problem isn't going to make it better.

Throughout Quaker history, Friends have looked at the world in front of them and dreamed of a better one. Whether it be the recognition of corrupt clergy or believing in a world free of war, at the core of our theology comes a sense of responsibility to work toward a more just world. Some Friends would say to build the kingdom of God on Earth. If we look throughout our history, we can see moments where Friends actively upheld white supremacy, such as the way many early Meetings denied membership to black Friends. Sometimes it comes in the form of hiding behind overblown involvement in the underground railroad.

Ibram X. Kendi, in his book, *How to be Antiracist*, writes that being antiracist is about challenging the idea of racial hierarchy and instead

**Throughout Quaker history, Friends have looked at the world in front of them and dreamed of a better one.**

working toward racial equity. He calls denial "the heartbeat of racism." Accepting racial hierarchy may not look like denying membership today, but the roots of the policies are still present. Friends have a responsibility to work toward a world free of racism. It will include coming to terms with our history and looking at ways our policies and practices uphold racial hierarchy. This is not a suggestion. Our garden is overflowing with weeds and the temperature is not an excuse.

When I look around the community garden, I see beautiful plots farmed by my neighbors. It reminds me

## Quaker Resources

Visit Friends General Conference's webpage "Becoming an Anti-Racist Faith Community" at <[fgcquaker.org/deepen](http://fgcquaker.org/deepen)>

Subscribe to American Friends' Service Committee's Action Center at <[afsc.org/actioncenter](http://afsc.org/actioncenter)>

Read *Say the Wrong Thing: Stories and Strategies for Racial Justice and Authentic Community* by Amanda Kemp

Read *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship: Quakers, African Americans, and the Myth of Racial Justice* by Donna McDaniel and Vanessa D. Juley

that there are people who have a vision for this world we seek. There are Friends who have been leading antiracist initiatives that we must support and embrace. We are beyond time for problems to be solved by a book club about racism. We must move beyond rhetoric like "but my uncle is a cop." If we are not helping get to the roots of the problem by supporting antiracist policies, we are not working toward a more just world. We are simply ignoring the weeds.

*Katie is a current student at Earlham School of Religion. Before coming to ESR, Katie ran the young adult program at FCNL. She is currently a member of Friends Meeting of Washington and a sojourning member at West Richmond Friends.*

# Connected Crisis: COVID-19 and Climate Change

By Alicia Cannon

WE ARE LIVING IN A TIME of concurrent global crises. There is the COVID-19 pandemic at the forefront of our minds. It is forcing us to stay home, constantly wash our hands, and wonder when this time of uncertainty will end. Despite this immediate threat, there is still the persistently looming climate crisis. While its presence may be less obvious, it continues to affect communities across the world.

These global crises are interconnected in many ways. Moreover, there are lessons to be learned from COVID-19 that can be translated to the climate crisis. First, COVID-19 serves as a reminder that a danger to anyone in the world can be a danger to everyone. When we ignore the severity of global issues because they have not affected the United States yet, they can come to overwhelm the inadequate systems we have in place. The climate crisis is one of those dangers.

For example, the Trump administration made light of the dangers of COVID-19 when it had not yet overtly affected the lives of Americans. President Trump went so far as to call it “a hoax.” Downplaying the pandemic delayed the country’s response, resulting in thousands of deaths, and a society riddled with anxiety and fear.

Climate deniers use the same tactic to undermine the science behind the climate crisis. Climate-exacerbated events can be explained away as one-off occurrences or 1,000-year events. But if we continue to ignore the signs of a worsening climate, these climate impacts will continue to ravage our nation and our world. In both crises, we must “unite behind the science” and treat each issue with the gravity it deserves.

Second, the populations that suffer the most from climate change, are disproportionately affected by COVID-19. We know, for instance, that polluting industries are more likely to operate in areas populated by low-income communities and communities of color. Thus, people of color are disproportionately subjected to air pollution, increasing their risk of cardiovascular and respiratory disease. And we know that underlying conditions like these decrease the body’s ability to fight COVID-19. Yet tragically, vulnerable communities are frequently situated in medically underserved areas. When we lobby for equitable and just climate policies, it trickles down into every aspect of our lives. As Congress



You have to act as if it were possible  
to radically transform the world.  
And you have to do it all the time.

– ANGELA DAVIS

Quaker Earthcare Witness [www.quakerearthcare.org](http://www.quakerearthcare.org) Photo: Kathy Barnhart

engages with the COVID-19 pandemic, we must ensure that these short-term solutions align with our long-term goals of addressing climate change.

Third, we should not place these crises in competition with each other. Global crises transcend partisanship and political opportunity. Congress cannot sacrifice the environment for the sake of productivity, efficiency, or economic gain when crafting stimulus packages. As Congress engages with the COVID-19 pandemic, we must ensure that these short-term solutions align with our long-term goals of addressing climate change.

There is one key lesson to be learned from COVID-19: When Congress views an issue as a genuine threat, it will respond in record time. In March, Congress passed three stimulus bills to help stave off the worst economic consequences of COVID-19. We now know that Congress can advance solutions to a global crisis, but it should not take stay-at-home orders and overwhelmed hospitals to convince Congress to act. We cannot wait for the climate crisis to kill thousands from air pollution or displace millions because of climate-exacerbated events.

We need immediate congressional action in order to avoid the worst consequences of climate change. With four bipartisan bills in Congress, carbon pricing is one of many essential tools Congress can apply as a first step to address climate change and shift toward a clean energy economy. Urge your member of Congress to pass an equitable and just carbon price before we reach catastrophic consequences, not after.

*Alicia is FCNL'S Program Assistant for Sustainable Energy & Environment."*

# Collective Community Resilience: Thinking Through Climate Change and Defunding the Police

By Sara Jolena Wolcott

ONE OF THE MOST important lessons I learned when working in sustainable development overseas is to listen to the people most impacted by the problems to appropriately co-create viable solutions. Sometimes they would prioritize things that seemed strange to me. But over time, I would realize that they usually knew what they were talking about.

Thus, nearly five years ago, when indigenous leaders in the fight against one of the most polluted lakes in America, Lake Onondaga in upstate New York, told me their priority was to rescind the Doctrine of Discovery, I had to re-organize my own mental framework about the relationship between a set of papal bulls in the 1400s and polluted lakes today. I subsequently shifted my analysis. I wrote my Master of Divinity thesis on this topic, created online courses, and have been helping others better see these connections ever since.

Today, in the United States, people of color, especially Black women, are amongst those most impacted by climate change. If they repeatedly say that changing policing in their communities, including defunding the police, is a critical priority, then I need to listen, even if I am not, at first, sure how this connects to climate change vulnerabilities. Defunding the police after all is not, on the surface, about creating a “new green economy.” It did not fit into my mental schema of “climate actions” that I held a few months ago. So what am I, as a white-bodied woman, missing? What if I let go of my framework about the economy and instead centered their concerns? I can ask myself, what shows up? I know this is not a critique of the thousands of men and women in uniform who are honestly seeking to be of service to their own communities. This is what I’ve seen thus far:

1. Climate change is a security challenge: What enables communities to experience security? Access to healthy food and water sovereignty; strong and supportive local relationships; feeling physically safe in their homes and their streets and waterways; knowing their children are being cared for and well-educated; working through conflicts without losing their physical or emotional security; a sense of belonging. Do the police enable these things? Not in their current configuration.

2. In a climate disaster, who is most helpful? Local communities and those locally trained in community disaster support. Not necessarily the police. Indeed, armed security forces often worsen the situation. If a poor community of color is faced with a climate disaster, it is possible police might worsen the situation.

3. Budgets: Until we start seriously taxing the wealthiest 400 people in America, we will continue to have budget limitations. At the local level, more money for “x” means less money for “y.” Community resilience to climate change is only possible if people in the community have what they need to be resilient, including: food security, education, support for those who are mentally ill and in other ways vulnerable, and services to support them in increasing their economic well-being. Given that police do not necessarily make the community more secure, police department budgets could be reduced to direct funds toward social services. I haven’t seen any police abolitionists advocating for simply reducing police budgets without directing the funds toward collective community resilience.

4. New economies: The conditions of police abolition—stronger local communities that know each other, better social services, greater energy in mutual aid—are the conditions for growing stronger local economies. What if we first addressed issues of safety and resiliency? New economies could then be built more easily.

5. History: Climate change, and other types of “ecological pollution” stem from histories of racial and ecological violence. Our “new normal” needs to be one of peace. Too often, police escalate violence. The history of the rise of the police in this country is explicitly violent (carrying on from their military forebears) and is rooted in slavery. Also, the police are called on to protect private property, both upholding existing inequalities and contributing to ecological destruction.

When I imagine a world with fewer police in the midst of climate change, I immediately see the need to prioritize skills in de-escalating conflict, conflict resolution, and preventative measures. These are the kinds of programs that Quakers have long supported. Indeed, defunding the police seems a natural fit for Friends. What would I expect from listening to those most impacted by the challenges? That the solutions they prioritize are not only better for everyone, but that they invite us to listen more attentively to the Light.

*Sara Jolena (M.Div.) is the founder of Sequoia Samanvaya, an international learning community seeking to connect the disconnected in the midst of a climate changed society shaped by colonization. She is a member of Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting.*



Photo by Kathy Barnhart

## I am a tree

By Cai Quirk

I am a tree, rooted in the bedrock of divine love. I am no longer trying to be a stone wall or surround myself with one. Walls are strong but they divide, are inflexible, less connected to the earth and the divine. A tree is rooted, grounded, yet flexible. A tree can bend in the wind or under snow, shifting back and healing any damage once the pressure has passed. A tree cannot live without the ground that roots it in standing tall, cannot live without others around it exchanging gifts. Trees give gifts of fruit, shade, cleansed air, homes for many species, and are given gifts by bees pollinating flowers, animals carrying seeds to new places, sun giving light to turn to food, rain nourishing roots, joyous birds singing in their branches. Trees carry messages to each other on the winds and through the earth. When one doesn't have enough nutrients, others share through underground root systems. They support one another. They can grow and change. They are all unique. They can heal from wounds. They live in balance, yet flowing with the cycles of seasons. Their branches make music in the wind. They do not try to be something they are not. Changes are not immediately seen. They are in cycles of growth as they are meant to be. When a branch breaks or is cut off, more growth springs up in new places. They aren't proving anything to the world, just living into their true selves, rooted and grounded in divine love, water from deep within the divine earth running through all veins, infusing each and every cell.

*Cai (they/them or ey/em) is a lifelong Quaker with passions for Witness, personal discernment, and diverse methods of spiritual deepening. See more at [caiquirk.com](http://caiquirk.com).*

**To make a donation to Quaker Earthcare Witness, visit [quakerearthcare.org/donate](http://quakerearthcare.org/donate) or send a check to Quaker Earthcare Witness, P.O. Box 6787, Albany, CA 94706. Thank you.**

## Plowing the Prairie

By Pamela Haines

Leaning into the plow—  
an enduring symbol of virtuous work  
Pioneers breaking virgin ground,  
bent on mastering the prairie  
whatever the cost.

The harder the work  
the more noble the cause.

And subdue the prairie they did—  
along with all the beings  
that called it home.

The prairie, we are learning,  
was the keeper of our soil.  
Washed to the gulf  
we wish it back.

The dead substrate  
that's left behind  
cannot nourish on its own.  
We pour in more and more,  
for less and less return.

If we could listen  
to the natives of the prairie,  
now gone like the soil,  
what might we learn?

Maybe they would tell us  
that some work  
though it seems so masterful  
is better left undone.

*Pamela is a member of Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting and the author of the book Money and Soul.*



## Pacific Yearly Meeting's Mutual Aid Experiment

By Keith Runyan and Rebekah Percy

WHEN the shelter-in-place order took effect throughout California earlier this year, a small group of Young Adult Friends from Pacific Yearly Meeting organized a mutual aid project with the goals of sharing resources and creating greater equity and self-sustainability within our communities during the global pandemic. Through this project, we wanted to create long-lasting infrastructure that bridges our youth with elders and fosters genuine connections in the community through various service work projects. We have been especially interested in this becoming as intergenerational a project as possible, and truly serving the most vulnerable among us. Our project also currently operates a small grant that gifts emergency funds, in preparation for the inevitable struggles ahead.

At Santa Cruz Friends Meeting, numerous young Friends and fellows affiliated with the mutual aid project have worked with the Building and Grounds Committee to begin revitalizing the community garden. After a year of solarization, the entire property is now weed free. We've built a new set of terraced beds, and are eagerly awaiting fresh heirloom tomatoes, kale, and peppers. Our focus and intentions involve permaculture design and the creation of a peaceful space for children, that lends opportunity for spiritual re-centering.

In the Los Angeles region, we have started working on a communal garden on part of a Friend's property in Arcadia that was graciously offered up to the Quaker community. We are also working to establish a community garden at Pacific Ackworth Friends School, a Quaker preschool in Temple City. Though this second garden is mostly being set up by Quakers, it will additionally involve and eventually be gifted to our other community members of that region, including families of the children who attend the school.

We intend to use these spaces for community gatherings and to offer community-based education in growing one's own food, preserving, and cooking up healthy meals. We continue to harvest a substantial amount of citrus in Los Angeles for donation to our neighborhood homeless services organizations.

When the project organizers stepped back to evaluate our work so far, we realized we had tried to take on too much, and that perhaps the most important work is focusing on creating more sustainable systems that connect people and their varying needs. Moving forward, we intend to act more as a resource for Friends, helping navigate unemployment and crisis management, and develop further ideas for housing our unhoused Friends.

We are happy to report that the mutual aid network has really

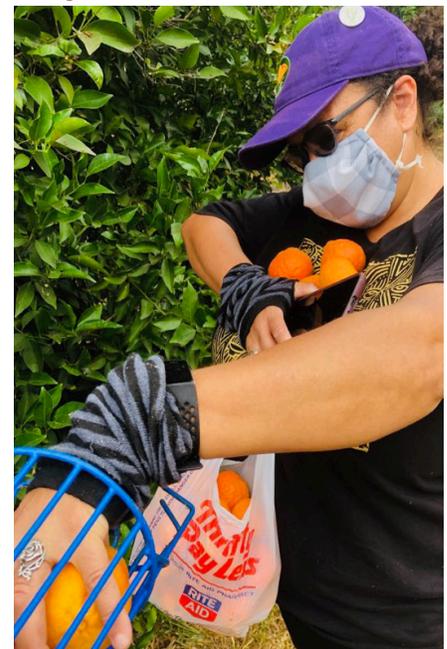
taken root in strengthening more localized support systems. Many of our group's members are involved in arranging systems for individuals to connect on a one-on-one basis in expressing and getting their needs met. A pilot project of this nature is in the works at Orange Grove Meeting.

We hope that such community-based sharing and collaborative systems will continue long after COVID-19 has passed. Many of us feel strongly that our global economic system is fragile, and see this virus as a reminder and a wake up call for us to build and strengthen alternative systems, be they gardens or alternative networks of care, to create some stability in our rapidly changing world.

*Our Steering Committee includes: Keith Runyan, Kiernan Colby, Marc Lichterman, Bertha Peña, Laura Adair, Nate Secrest, Keenan Lorenzato, Kylin Navarro, Camila Gomez, Evan Nelson, Jim Summers and Rebekah Percy.*

*Rebekah is PacYM's Interim Youth Programs Coordinator and Keith is a naturalist and Quaker activist.*

Photo above: Cedar Green at Santa Cruz Meeting. Below: Cecelia Valentine picking oranges in Arcadia.



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involved in as many different parts of the UN as we can, like indigenous peoples rights, the Commission on the Status of Women, the 2015 - 2024 International Decade of People of African Descent and the Water Action Decade, because we can talk about the connections between all these issues both domestically and internationally. We share messages about the impacts of colonization, climate change, and economic structures that are making it so only a few people are benefiting. But we know that those benefits are temporary; we are so quickly exhausting our most basic resources: potable water, clean air, and land.

Beverly connects these messages back to Florida, where she's worked as a researcher for over a decade finding ways to respond to and understand climate change in a state already experiencing its severe effects. "You have to start with the outer layer of the onion: the structural stuff of Florida's history of clearing most of the indigenous people out...to clear lands for agriculture, and then African Americans were brought to work the fields. Now Disney plays the same role: Black and Brown workers have to clean up after tourists. Both industries—agriculture and tourism—represent low-paying jobs. The same people who provided services historically are at the frontlines of the crisis now, too. What you've been calling 'essential', we've been saying 'expendable.' They live in expendable communities—they're being put on the frontlines as Corona-fodder. These communities can't social distance because they are working multiple part-time jobs while living in intergenerational households. Some of these same communities are still in recovery from the mortgage-lending crisis. You can pick any portal to look at these structural layers: housing, food security, or water."

The UN Working Group works to look at these different layers. During the forum in July, Nancy Abwalaba Owano, PhD of Pawn University in Kenya, shared about water and sanitation issues. Forty-one percent of Kenya's population rely on unimproved water sources like ponds, shallow wells, rivers, streams, while 71 percent lack basic sanitation (World Health Organization and UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme). These issues are exacerbated by climate change while lack of basic sanitation increased the possibility of disease, like COVID.

Another guest to the UN Working Group's forum was Elizabeth Wathuti, known as Liz Mazingira, a young

Kenyan woman who founded the Green Generation Initiative which addresses issues like deforestation, pollution and environmental injustices through conservation. Antoinette Jackson, PhD and chair of the Anthropology Department at the University of South Florida, presented on the connections between tourism, colonization and racism.

What to do about these many layers? Beverly shares "One of the things that we are not paying enough attention to is how communities are coming up with their own solutions during these ongoing crises. How can we get involved in how our own communities are coping? Particularly within a lot of the communities of color in Florida, there is a history of mutual aid societies or 'sousous.' People have been left out of the formal economy for so long, they came up with their own solutions, like insurance, trading, and bartering services, and alternative banking structures. These lessons are important now because we can learn how to better respond to emergencies, how to plan for displacement due to climate change, and because these networks make it easier to contact trace for COVID-19."

"These lessons can apply to our meetings too. In Southeastern Yearly Meeting, I am trying to encourage meetings to do this sort of emergency assessment. To ask questions like, 'Who has capacity to shelter people? Who could or should evacuate? Which meetinghouse has solar panels? Who can generate ice for medications when the power goes out?' Those are the kinds of planning things that I am thinking about. And this brings me back to the UN Working Group. We ask, what can we do with this knowledge? Where do we go with this? We don't just meet and talk about the Sustainable Development Goals. We are asking, what should the policies be? What can our communities do? How can we share this knowledge?"

"Let's remember also that this is not the last of the pandemics. We really should be spending this time preparing for the next and learning as many lessons as we have. And making these global connections. Maybe Liz from Kenya has a strategy that we could use in Florida. Maybe I have a strategy they could use in Kenya or throughout the diaspora. The more we are able to engage with each other in understanding how communities are adapting, the more we will all benefit."

And finally, "Find joy and love."

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**Quaker Earthcare Witness**

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## Sharing Love and Knowledge in the Time of COVID-19

Hayley Hathaway Interviews

Beverly G. Ward

“IT’S LIKE PEELING an onion: layer after layer of pandemics and it all makes you cry,” shares Beverly Ward. She’s referencing the built-in injustice of her home state of Florida, where she works as Field Secretary for Earthcare for Southeastern Yearly Meeting (SEYM) and clerk of Quaker Earthcare Witness’ United Nations Working Group. Sea levels are rising and sunny-day flooding is the new normal. It’s hurricane season. Florida’s numbers of COVID-19 cases represent some of the worst in the nation. Beverly shares, “Tourism is a major industry. That industry and its ancillaries, e.g. restaurants, hotels, etc., have been decimated. The maximum weekly unemployment benefit is \$275.00. However, the governor recently described the online unemployment application process as a deterrent to apply for benefits!”

All these factors are parts of a much bigger story, one that Beverly shared with Friends from the US and Kenya and beyond in July as part of a forum hosted by



Elizabeth Wathuti, known as Liz Mazingira, spoke at the QEW UN Working Group’s side event in July. Liz is a climate activist from Kenya, founded the Green Generation Initiative, and is a youth council member of the International Reserva: The Youth Land Trust.

QEW’s United Nations (UN) Working Group and held during the UN’s annual High Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development.

Quaker Earthcare Witness holds four UN agency accreditations with the mission of bringing a spirit-led Quaker voice to UN deliberations on the environment. In the last few years, the UN Working Group has connected with diaspora communities as part of their “Diaspora Where you Are” project and in honor of the International Decade of People of African Descent.

Beverly shares, “As a group, it is important for us to be

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