



QUAKER EARTHCARE WITNESS

Quaker Earthcare Witness is a network of North American Friends (Quakers) and other like-minded people who are taking spirit-led action to address the ecological and social crises of the world, emphasizing Quaker process and testimonies.

Jonny Costello

Unintentional Earthcare:

Finding Quaker Activism in the Simple Life

For the past two months, I've been doing outreach for the Quaker Earth Action Map. I've sent many emails, made many phone calls, left many voice-mails, and had the pleasure of speaking with a few Quakers about their meeting's Earthcare work. For this first portion of my outreach, I've focused on meetings in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, emailing and calling 121 meetings and worship groups. As you might expect, emails and phone numbers listed on websites are often inactive, infrequently checked, or belong to whoever the clerk was when the website was last updated.

With such a large sample size, I have been able to reach meetings that are eagerly participating in inspiring Earthcare projects.

In my outreach, I have also encountered some serious Quaker modesty. Of the meetings that I do reach, I often hear something along the lines of, "our meeting doesn't do any Earthcare work" or "we're not doing anything right now." When I hear these things, I get instantly skeptical. Many Quakers are quick to hold themselves to high standards, considering the Earthcare work they do as a baseline, or not doing any Earthcare work at all. It takes creativity to spot all the Earthcare that we do unintentionally.



BEFRIENDING CREATION

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Image Above: State College Monthly Meeting

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From the Editor's Desk

Friends,

As our year closes, QEW finds ourselves in a season of reflection and preparation. We look back with gratitude for the work and witness of meetings across the globe. In this issue alone, we celebrate:

- » The work of an off-grid meeting in rural Pennsylvania.
- » A meeting in Cape Cod addressing environmental justice by growing food in an area vulnerable to rising seas and storm impacts.
- » The community-building around climate-friendly potlucks in Northeast Seattle.

Our bold actions are only as strong as our quiet persistence. The challenge of climate change before us requires our witness to be as broad as it is deep. Through careful discernment, the QEW Steering Committee has made a choice to shift our resources to better meet the urgency of the moment.

BeFriending Creation, our print publication, will now be published twice a year.

This decision is an act of Earthcare for our organization, allowing us to reduce our footprint while improving our ability to amplify your work. We are dedicating staff energy to channels that are more immediate and dynamic: our strengthened online articles and one-pagers, our Quaker Earth Action Map, and social media outreach.

Our goal is to make our collective witness clearer, more nimble, and more effective in promoting action and justice. Thank you, Friends.

Find all of our resources at
QuakerEarthcare.org.

Sweet Miche

Communications and Outreach Coordinator,
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Our Vision & 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.

BeFriending Creation

We publish *BeFriending Creation* to promote the work of Quaker Earthcare Witness, stimulate discussion and action, share insights, practical ideas, news of our actions, and encourage 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. The editor is responsible for unsigned items. Please share our work widely and broadly, always attributing it to Quaker Earthcare Witness.

Quaker Earthcare Witness is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization; contributions are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law. Donate at QuakerEarthcare.org.

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When I reached out to Elklands Friends Meeting, all I had was a phone number, no email. I was delighted to find that the phone number was active when a woman named Dorothy picked up the phone. She informed me that Elklands Friends Meeting is a tiny, rural meeting made up of retired folks who only meet in the summertime when their meetinghouse is warm enough. Naturally, Dorothy let me know that their meeting doesn't have the capacity to do environmental activism or work like they have in the past.

Thankfully, Dorothy didn't hang up the phone then because when I asked her how much water and what sort of energy their meetinghouse uses, she told me it doesn't use any of either. The reason they only meet in the summer is that their only heating is a woodfire stove that they haven't used in years. Talk about energy savings! Here is a group of Quakers practicing their faith in a far more environmentally sustainable way than many of us, and not even they consider themselves to be doing Earthcare as a meeting.

Over the course of my conversation with Dorothy, I also learned that their meeting's parking lot and driveway are unpaved, allowing rainwater to permeate the soil. They have two accounts with Friends Fiduciary—one for the meetinghouse and one for the cemetery—that endeavors to keep money out of the fossil fuel industry, and several of their meeting members have personal gardens and heat pumps installed in their homes.

I don't mean to suggest that every meetinghouse should cut off the water and power. I bring up Elklands Meeting to inspire you to recognize the Earthcare efforts your meeting is already undertaking. Sometimes, it takes a fresh perspective to see the good work we're doing; it reminds us that we are not starting from scratch.

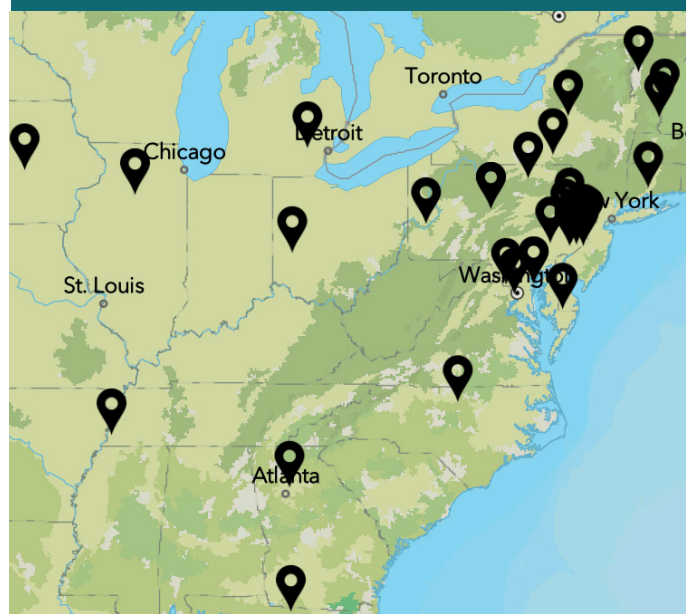
After recognizing the work we already do, it takes creativity to envision our future Earthcare work. That's where the Quaker Earth Action Map—that we hope to publish our new version of by the end of the year—comes in. We are breaking down Quaker modesty around Earthcare to inspire and collaborate with other Quakers on what can be done.

Some meetings have installed solar panels on their meeting houses, or in cases where their meeting house isn't suited for solar, some have financially supported local Friends Schools to install solar panels. Meetings support bikers with bike racks out front. First-day programs that are environmentally focused allow future generations to learn to love the Earth. And I haven't been to a meeting in recent memory that didn't offer a hybrid Zoom option, so not everyone has to drive their cars to the meetinghouse.

I invite all readers to think creatively about what their meeting is doing for Earthcare and contribute to the Global network we are endeavoring to foster through our Map.

**After discussing with your meeting,
please share your collective work
with us at
QuakerEarthcare.org/MapForm**

*And, you would like to share personal stories
of your Earthcare work, fill out the form at the
bottom of the page.*



Stephen C. Gates

Joy at the Intersection of Earthcare, Gospel Ministry, and Community

Several years ago, I started a regenerative vegetable garden in the sunniest place on my property. Little did I know then that the garden, immediately next to the street, would lead to what I now understand to be my calling. The seminal moment came when I was working in that garden, and the father of one of my neighbors walked by. He appeared very interested in my garden, but didn't speak much English, so I motioned him over, pulled a big head of romaine lettuce from my garden, and handed it to him. The surprise on his face was amazing!

The joy – for both of us – of this small gift made me think about ways to share produce with others in my neighborhood. I started by giving food to other passing neighbors. But soon I was talking with them about how they could grow their own vegetables. And several of those conversations led them to start their own gardens.

Based on those roadside experiences, I started a project called **Friendship Gardens of Cape Cod** at my local meeting (West Falmouth Preparative Meeting) to provide vegetables to those in our community who are food-insecure and to help them grow their own. We rejuvenated a fallow garden on the meeting's property and employed regenerative gardening techniques (organic, no-till, cover crops or mulch, and carbon sequestration in the soil) in our 300 sq. ft. of beds to grow a full range of fresh, organic vegetables.

Our volunteers quickly formed a small, tightly knit community, often through shared al fresco meals before gardening sessions. Every week for an entire season, we delivered food to the Falmouth Service Center, our local food pantry, where it was handed out to clients.

At the end of the season, we felt ready to tackle the other part of our original plan: to help clients of the Service Center learn to grow their own vegetables. We made two initial decisions that served our clients well: we chose to interact directly with them, and we decided it needed to be fun.

The Service Center suggested we partner with them on a pilot project at their site. Our focus then turned to raising funds for the proposed pilot, and we applied to both the Susan B. Kirby fund of Sandwich Quarterly Meeting and to QEW for mini-grants. We were ecstatic when we got both grants, and a Friend offered to match them. We developed a plan for using the money: a 9-week test at the Service Center during which we would share food we had grown and simultaneously help clients grow their own vegetables. We planned to give away seeds, plants, soil, pots, pre-built

raised beds, and custom LED étagères. During our preparation, another Quaker meeting, East Sandwich Preparative Meeting, was inspired to start its own Friendship Gardens project, and we helped them establish beds to grow food for the Wampanoag homeless shelter.

In mid-March, we planted our spring crops – primarily lettuce, spinach, kale, collards, and radishes – under row covers to help protect them from any late frosts. In late April, we began harvesting. On Fridays, we stood at an outdoor table, handing out food, growing supplies, and information. And, very importantly, we spent time interacting with each client. At the beginning, we had to approach the clients to tell them what was being offered, but by the end of our pilot, they would show up eagerly asking what we had that week.

We tried to make our offerings appealing – an important way to encourage clients to come to our table was to hand out fresh, regenerative organic vegetables. Almost every week, we had an activity designed to be fun and, when the weather warmed up, to encourage the clients to grow their own food. Offerings included:

- Distribution of free plants, giving away hundreds of seedlings of lettuce, kale, and chard.
- “Tomato Fest,” where we handed out close to 200 tomato plants and offered taste tests of homemade gazpacho.
- Potted plants for those without gardens, including potatoes and cucumbers.



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Overall, our pilot served between 70 and 80 food-insecure individuals. As I reflect on our pilot, I think four things were critical to our success:

1. **Building community:** Our potlucks and conversations in the garden with volunteers, and combining free food, free plants, and positive conversation for clients was the most important outcome of our pilot.
2. **Making it fun:** Next time, we'll do even more fun things like the taste tests we did this year, and hand out recipes for inexpensive, easy-to-prepare food tied to the produce we have that week.
3. **Raised Beds:** The raised beds played a very important role when used in institutional settings (the homeless shelter and the Quaker meeting), and where commitment was high amongst the individuals caring for the beds.
4. **Gardening Basics:** We learned that few of the FSC clients were gardeners, so our major success was in getting them started with gardening.

As I reflect on the pilot, I am struck by how the humble act of giving a head of lettuce to a stranger on the street has, for me, become a calling. It isn't just that I enjoy helping the earth by using regenerative techniques, or that we are called in Mathew 25:31-40 to help feed the hungry, or that we built community. It is the joy that lies at this intersection of Earthcare, Gospel Ministry, and Community that motivates me to go forward. And knowing that the number of people who are food-insecure is likely to increase significantly in the near term, I am motivated to find others who will start Friendship Gardens in their own communities.

Steve Gates is a retired research computer scientist who has also been a college professor of biochemistry and a high school science teacher. He has spent his retirement focused on climate change and, more recently, food insecurity. His project was awarded a QEW mini-grant in 2024. If you'd like to get his guide to starting your own Friendship Garden, contact him at scgates1@sbcglobal.net.

Need Some Funding to Kick Off an Earthcare Vision?

The QEW Mini-Grants program may have you covered. Our Mini-Grants Working Group works to support Friends Earthcare projects. We fund proposals up to \$500.

ANY proposals and visions related to Earthcare are invited, but we especially welcome proposals focusing on one or more of these priority areas:

1. Responding to or preparing to meet the Climate change crisis.
2. Supporting regional and/or global biodiversity.
3. Redressing issues of environmental injustice that impact underserved or disempowered communities (especially communities of color) preferably in North America, but other locations will also be considered.
4. Involving and engaging youth in responding to the above issues and/or transforming the consciousness of the rising generation to act in unity with the Earth as caregivers for our planet.

Find funding criteria and procedures at:
QuakerEarthcare.org/Mini-Grants.



QEW PRESENTS!

Workshops for Friends

Do you want to host a workshop on climate change, environmental justice, Quaker faith-in-action, eco-theology, native plants, permaculture, or another environmental issue? QEW Presents! is a series of workshops designed to help you and your community ground your Earthcare work

Quaker Earthcare Witness staff, Steering Committee Members, and Friends offer online workshops for your Friends meeting, church, or community. From exploring how our testimonies offer a template for ecological integrity to building the heart muscle necessary for climate justice activism, these sessions will help transform anxiety into faithful, nonviolent response.

Invite us to speak with your meeting! Below are a sample of our workshops. For the full list to schedule a workshop, visit QuakerEarthcare.org/Workshops.

Restoring Life & Hope: Renewing Biodiversity, Mind, Body & Spirit

Jim Kessler, QEW Steering Committee

Creating native plant habitat has positively impacted the mental, physical, and spiritual health of Jim's Quaker family—as well as the songbird, pollinator, and wildlife populations at his home. His goal is to motivate others to plant butterfly gardens and larger native plant habitats to confront the extinction crisis. Loss of biodiversity can be reversed by the actions of ordinary people.



Sound Sanctuary Finding Stillness, Hearing Earth

**Sweet Miche, Communications
and Outreach Coordinator**

We often assume silence is the absence of sound. And yet, to listen to silence exposes the essential textures of noise in our lives. Sweet Miche combines guided listening, mindful practice, and creative sound projects to rediscover the quiet spaces within and around us and learn how listening can transform our relationship with our planet.



Building the Heart Muscles to Take on Threats to the Earth



Pamela Haines, Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting

To build our muscles as climate justice activists, we will identify stretches involving listening and connecting, engaging in conflict and repair, listening for and speaking truth, facing grief, and cultivating hope and courage.

Financial & Economic Roots of the Climate Emergency

Pamela Haines

The dynamics and priorities of our economy are a key driver of the climate emergency, and the economy is now driven to a significant extent by the financial sector. You don't have to be an economist to explore these connections and identify key issues and areas of opportunity.

Regenerative Agriculture: Sustainable is Not Enough

**Carol Barta,
QEW Steering
Committee**



Why is "sustainable" not enough in the world of agriculture? What will it take to produce nutrient dense food on healthy soil? Regenerative agriculture is a systems approach to restoring the health of our food system. We'll explore the component parts of regenerative agriculture and discuss why "whole system thinking" is the best way to feed the world.

QEW Fall Gathering:

Finding Common Ground for Unprecedented Action

Friends gathered in October at Powell House and via Zoom for the QEW Fall Gathering. Held under the weight of our planetary crisis, the weekend was anchored by a powerful and essential theme: **Common Ground**. It was a time of deep spiritual grounding and clear discernment, where we explored how to move beyond the limiting “illusion of separation” and into courageous, Spirit-led action for our Mother Earth.

We began by grounding our perspective in the realities of the land and the law. Geoff Garver, of the Quaker Institute for the Future, guided us away from abstract environmentalism toward a concrete vision of “territories of life.” He challenged us to honor the Indigenous peoples—specifically the Seneca Nation in Western New York—who have stewarded these lands for millennia. His message was a call to justice: recognizing our spiritual connection to the land is a non-negotiable prerequisite for restoring the ecological cycles that sustain all life.

Our Saturday session shifted the focus from deep roots to outward action. Eileen Flanagan, author of *Common Ground* and a leader in nonviolent direct action, spoke with clarity about the strategic necessity of unity. She powerfully named the “illusion of separation” as a profound weakness that corporations exploit. We build collective power not by watering down our faith-based values, but by finding shared, tangible interests with diverse communities. She urged us to let communal Quaker practices help us move away from individualism. This was a clear call to dismantle the barriers of racism and colonialism so we can fight effectively alongside our neighbors for a life-giving future.



The gathering culminated in a refusal to separate “spiritual life” from “political reality.” Friends traveled from Powell House to Albany to join the “No Kings” demonstration, standing as a public witness against the authoritarian systems that fuel planetary destruction.

This commitment to direct witness fueled a powerful unity among QEW’s leadership: **We must step into Unprecedented Action for Unprecedented Times.**

The message carried away by all Friends was clear: our path forward requires us to weave together spiritual depth with strategic, nonviolent action. Whether that is planting gardens of sustenance, marching in protest, or engaging in deep listening with our neighbors, the Fall Gathering reminded us that when we stand firmly on the common ground of love and justice, we can rise to meet the extraordinary challenges of our time.



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- » Volunteers set up and take down the tables and chairs, wash the dishes, clean the kitchen, and scoop the leftovers into take-home containers. This, along with the table fellowship, is where community shines.
- » I rarely repeat an entrée or a dessert, so regular eaters have been exposed to many tasty dishes that aren’t part of the standard American diet. I make an exception in December: Seattle Quakers have shown riotous enthusiasm for Impossible meatloaf and mushroom gravy.

I try not to evangelize my religion or my diet, beyond suggesting, “Put this in your mouth. You’ll like it!” Almost four years in, F/friends appear to agree.

Amanda Franklin is a 40-year Quaker, a therapist, and a food enthusiast in Seattle, Washington.

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Amanda Franklin

Plant-Based Propaganda: Building Climate Awareness and Community by the Forkful

In 2019, I had a spiritual crisis stemming from an overpowering visceral realization of climate change. I changed our family's diet, eliminating nearly all animal products (except eggs: thank God for not requiring this baker to go that far.) In summer 2023, a Friend suggested I cook three monthly lunches for our Meeting, inaccurately proposing I call them "Vegan Propaganda" (since renamed to avoid disappointed vegans).

I did, and some 40 months later, I haven't lost momentum. University Friends Meeting hosts a monthly lunch, attended with Quaker riotousness by 25-40 people at a time.

This has been a success for at least these reasons:

- » I'm a maverick Quaker, and I declined a committee — with all its attendant blessings and complications. I handle all the logistics.
- » Eaters are greeted by a donation basket and an instructive sign: "Pay as thee is led. Most people are led to give \$8-12." The Divine generally leads us to the break-even point.

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