

Unity With Nature Committee Report to Pacific Yearly Meeting August 16, 2012

RENIE:

As the climate crisis visibly worsens, we have heard the analogy of our earth's warming to the story of the frog in the pot of slowly warming water, not being aware of it coming to a boil and therefore not having any motivation to jump out to safety. We are the frog, happy in our denial. But I would prefer to offer another metaphor; this one would compare humanity's situation to a slow-motion shark attack. Yes, the shark approaches, we see it coming, 20 years ago. Yes, its teeth are creating a pinching feeling to our leg; we feel it 9 years ago. Ouch, the teeth have hit a nerve! Etc. You get the picture. We will feel this climate crisis; for many the pain has already begun--some of us are for now comfortably cushioned, but in the end it will be very painful for all.

However, as we have become more aware, we have also become more prolific in words analyzing the problem. We have learned that today's slowly unfolding catastrophe is rooted in a long evolving history; as Louis Cox comments, a "kind of general unraveling of happiness, sovereignty, and well-being has been happening everywhere—a *logical result of a system that values profits over people*," continuing, "global predatory economic forces continue to strengthen their grip, chewing up communities, cultures, local economies, and ecosystems." (1) I would add to that the militarization, mis-named the "War on Terror," that necessarily accompanies this industrial empire building and resource grabbing.

Quaker Earthcare Witness has been on the forefront of the earthcare movement, attending the UN climate summit Rio+20, disseminating stories of work plans, ideas and action to its subscribers (which I highly recommend all Meetings to become). To be sure, the growing diversity of discourse is important for each of us to find our own path through this maze. But we must also collaborate as a community for any of these voices to be heard.

MAIA:

At this point we would like to mention the work of PYM's own Unity With Nature Committee. Its members are Susan Swanstrom from Redwood Forest, Nathan Helm-Berger from Grass Valley, Joe Morris from Santa Monica, Oliver Ryder from La Jolla, Muriel Strand from Sacramento, Maia Wolff (*myself*) from Central Coast, co-clerk, and Renie Wong Lindley, co-clerk from Honolulu. We met once for an October planning retreat all together at a lovely and quirky Russian River home offered by our member Susan Swanstrom, where we outlined our goals for the year:

1. We wished to support a greener PYM by offering information about climate change implications to the transportation and food options at the annual session.
2. We wished to continue the mini-grant program, improving our criteria and evaluations, and encouraging local Meetings' involvement in earthcare activities in local communities. Please look at our table of homemade and homegrown "goodies" that our committee is offering as fundraising for the grants,
3. We wished to encourage voices and stories of spiritual experiences in and of nature which speak deeply to Friends and strengthen our will to live in harmony with nature.

4. We wished to deepen the discussion about Friends' apprehension about our country's dependence on nuclear power and other fossil fuels. There is need to continue an exchange of ideas on how to handle temporary bridges of energy use and how to build sustainable futures.

The Unity With Nature Committee came together in monthly tele-conferencing with heartfelt concern for these issues but also, as is so common among Friends, with our own sometimes overwhelming responsibilities. So, even though we achieved some degree of success in moving our goals forward, we remain hungry for time and for enlarging our community to do this necessary work.

1. Member Muriel Strand updated our Unity With Nature list of liaison contacts with monthly meetings, and sent a letter to each contact or clerk expressing interest in developing meeting or online discussions on earthcare topics. We thought to expand the conversation from a concern about nuclear energy to include the question of our ideal and sustainable future. Pursuant to the minute on nuclear power that was offered at last year's annual session, the Grass Valley Friends Meeting had a threshing session on nuclear energy. The participants concluded that the problem is that there is no safe way to dispose of nuclear waste. This was fundamental to their opposition to energy from nuclear reactors. They also agreed that the nuclear power industry must be honest about safety. Other alternative energies should be explored and funded first. Most importantly- everyone, our whole country, needs to take the idea of simplicity to heart.

2. As part of our continuing focus on furthering dialog, we sent members Joe Morris, Maia Wolff and QEW clerk Shelley Tanenbaum to the annual QEW session and offered three interest groups here at the annual session. "Food for Thought, Food for Body, Food for Spirit, Food for Earth" was presented by Maia Wolff on Tuesday, "What is Our Ideal and Sustainable Future" presented by Muriel Strand on Wednesday, and "Unity with Nature and Quaker Mysticism" will be offered by Eric Sabelman tonight.

3. We were able to contribute small amounts of funds to Central Coast, Grass Valley, Redding, and Casa de los Amigos for their earthcare projects. Casa de los Amigos is using the money toward the purchase of a "flash boiler" (a hot water heater that heats on demand) for the women's dormitory. Grass Valley has already produced its graphic educational exhibit, "What will happen in California when Earth's Temperature Rises 2 Degrees Celsius?" which is available for viewing here at PYM. Redding Friends Meeting is using their mini-grant to purchase seeds for planting in their Sequoia School Community Garden Project, with which they have been actively involved for a number of years. Central Coast Friends Meeting is looking forward to working with One Cool Earth, connecting with the Unitarian community, and with Friends and students, in rebuilding a shed and planting at Tenbrook Community Garden.

4. Thank you to Carl Magruder for coordinating the bicycle riders coming to Walker Creek. And we continued our interest in what food is offered to participants here at the PYM annual session. We are fortunate to have choices, and grateful for the good healthy food offered here.

RENIE:

We eat our healthy food in the shadow of worldwide droughts and floods already having a devastating effect on people with limited resources. Now today what many call “food” is a product of a mono-cultural factory, a mega-business that results in two things; de-natured food plus toxic waste. As even these “food” prices soar, unrest is brought on by hardship and competition for livelihoods. We join in the concern for the peoples’ health and troubles. How do we rise to meet this challenge, bearing on us from all sides; a forecast of a fearful future?

Let’s go back to the quote from Louis Cox and the question of how we got from there to here. For at least 1200 years Western civilization has been conditioned to believe that humans are separate and distant from the environment in which they live. We have failed to acknowledge that the environment is our primary source of wealth. In other words, the human economy is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the earth’s economy. But let us take this a step further. Not only does all our wealth come from the earth, but all our health does too. As they say, “You are what you eat.” “You are what you breathe.” Our bodies and our well-being are also a wholly-owned subsidiary of earth’s economy.

We Friends have the resources to be able to make healthy choices. We eat non-GMO organic food when possible, we get to “retire” to spots of wilderness where we can get away from busy lives and quiet the turmoil of our minds. We are able to make a “space within a space”, an oasis for ourselves and our spiritual communities. But what if we were to redefine these little spaces of the natural world that give us so much spiritual sustenance? Rather than “getting away from it all,” or “finding *our* balance” we look to nature to see *her* balancing act, and to see how completely and crucially we are interconnected with that balance. Not just admiring nature, walking, hiking and bicycling everywhere, Unity With Nature needs to be redefined as true inner-connectedness. Nature, our Earth, is as much inside us as our sense of the divine exists within us. We rise and fall on her health, her “balancing act.” Our inner Light relies on the Light of Creation.

There are huge forces relentlessly changing Earth from a fruitful to a barren land. We recognize our part of the problem, and make steps to keep our footprint small. We tackle some issues, such as water scarcity, fracking, toxic waste, etc. But let’s not be too self-congratulatory. By separating our “do-good” communities from others we fall into an “oasis” mentality. Don’t forget, nature needs diversity and inclusiveness. For all our attempts to find the easy way out, our nation is filled with very unhappy people. Just as we find the well-being of our Quaker community to be dependent on diversity and inclusiveness, let’s embrace Earth’s appeal for multiplicity and interdependence. Not just summer skies, but drought and disasters. Not just bounty, but famine. Embrace the whole divinity. Let’s redefine happiness. Not just the absence of difficulties. What if happiness is true Unity With Nature, manifesting her energies in our lives? Finding the meaning of love, gratitude, and spiritual growth in our work for Earth’s well-being?

The Earth needs our voice. Discernment for what is true, what is right, is made at her feet.

(1) Louis Cox, review of The Economics of Happiness, BeFriending Creation, Vol.25, No.1