

**ANNUAL REPORT
PYM UNITY WITH NATURE COMMITTEE
REPCOM, MARCH 2011**

This past 12 months, the UWN (Unity with Nature) Committee has continued to be very active. At the 2010 summer gathering, our committee added Nathan Helm-Burger, a young man very committed to environmental justice, as a new member. The other members continued the same, or had their periods of service renewed. We held 5 committee meeting, including one daylong retreat and 4 conference calls.

PYM 2010 was a special time of joy for us because we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the founding of the UWN Committee in 1985. An address by Marshall Massey then about the urgency and spiritual necessity of caring for the Earth galvanized attenders, and a committee was formed at the gathering. This was an historic moment for Earthcare among Quakers in the U.S., for this PYM committee was the very first of its kind at any yearly meeting. Two years later, with significant help and inspiration from PYM Quakers, a national organization was founded, the Friends Committee on Unity with Nature (later changing its name to Quaker Earthcare Witness). QEW continues as a significant source of ideas for environmental action to Quakers in North America and around the world.

During its 25 years, the UWN Committee has accomplished a wide variety of things. An early, important function was supporting Earthlight magazine, an independent and creative Friends periodical on environmental topics, with its own staff and budget. UWN has held conferences on Earthcare and acted importantly as a source of connection between monthly meetings about their own activities in caring for the Earth. As well, it has been very active on the yearly-meeting level, regularly offering 2 interest groups at the summer gathering and, more recently, an Earthcare Film Night. In 2006-7, it encouraged monthly meetings to consider approving a minute on responding to climate change. By summer of 2007, an impressive 16 monthly meetings had done so, and the yearly meeting followed with its own minute, "Responding to the Global Climate Crisis."

In 2008, it encouraged monthly meetings to consider the timeliness of an Earthcare testimony, and this was done by numerous meetings, the results of which were reported at the 2009 PYM gathering. It is abundantly clear---Earthcare continues to be a vital and active concern among Quakers in PYM!

In the past year, three major issues have occupied most of our time and efforts: offering mini-grants to monthly meetings for Earthcare projects, developing a proposal for PYM about a Sustainability Advisor, and continued consideration of a possible Earthcare Testimony. The rest of this report will describe each in more detail.

Earthcare Mini-Grants

For three years, Quaker Earthcare Witness has offered mini-grants (currently with a maximum amount of \$500) to monthly meetings who submit suitable proposals. This program has met with wide success, making it possible for meetings, often ones with limited resources, to purchase energy-efficient appliances, do local environmental restoration projects, obtain materials for adult and children's education, and other projects.

Drawing on this success, the UWN Committee launched a similar effort in January 2011. It informed the monthly meetings in PYM that funds (with a maximum of \$300) would be available for environmental projects of a similar nature. Applications, due no later than May 1st, require an itemized budget and description of the expected benefits. Our expenditures will be drawn from a savings account, independent of PYM funds, set up at the founding of the UWN, which can accept donations from well-wishers. Initial response has been favorable.

PYM Sustainability Advisor

Rationale: The concept of a Sustainability Advisor arose in discussions by our committee for several reasons. First, there has been growing concern by monthly meetings that the yearly meeting take more concrete action in diminishing its own "environmental footprint" and setting a more active example for monthly meetings (many of which have made many efforts for years).

Indeed this was part of the charge stated in the PYM minute on climate change in 2007.

Secondly, though individuals and indeed our committee could and has given input to PYM on how to encourage sustainability, it has become increasingly clear that a single person regularly identified with that role is essential to give more focus and establish PYM as having commitment. Many hundreds of faith groups and colleges, and thousands of corporations have been including sustainability as a standard part of their operations for years.

The Proposal: A PYM Sustainability Coordinator would:

- 1) Furnish pertinent information and suggestions to RepCom and the organizers of it and the summer gathering about matters of Earthcare and their implementation.
- 2) Input would include such areas as transportation to and from gatherings, menu choices that emphasize local and/or sustainable sources, food containers, plates, and eating utensils that minimize waste and are recyclable or re-usable.
- 3) Such an advisor would be a member of the Unity with Nature Committee and/or appointed by it, in the same fashion and term of service as the PYM Rep to Quaker Earthcare Witness.
- 4) Recommendations of the Sustainability Advisor are subject to discussion by the RepCom in terms of practicality and other issues it considers relevant.

The UWN Committee has sent this proposal to monthly meetings for review and comment and received much positive support. Indeed a number of meetings, such as Santa Monica Monthly, have minuted their approval of the concept and ask for a response from RepCom on this issue.

Earthcare Testimony

Evidence continues to accumulate about the increased readiness of Quakers in PYM to consider the adoption of an Earthcare testimony. In June and July 2010, the UWN Committee conducted an anonymous survey of members and attenders of Central Coast, Santa Monica, Santa Monica, and Strawberry Creek Meetings, asking them two questions. Total number of respondents was 90.

1. In your personal spiritual beliefs, do the Quaker terms "The Inner Light" and "That of God" refer to (check one): human beings, humans and other animals, or to life in general? Results:

To human beings 11% (10 people)
To humans and other animals 8% (7)
To life in general 72% (65)
Other 9% (8)

2. In the past 12 months, would you say you've had some significant involvement in environmental activities, in a group or individually? Results: Yes 78% (70) No 22% (20)

These results are striking. The overwhelming majority of respondents extended the notion of "That of God" beyond the traditional restriction to only humanity to not only other animals, but life in general. As importantly, this belief harmonized with their actions---78% indicating they had been significantly involved in environmental activities during the past year.

Last April, Strawberry Creek Meeting approved an "Earthcare testimony" for its members, a statement that was also approved by Visalia Meeting, and also La Jolla Meeting has discussed and approved its own version. At the request of Strawberry Creek, this minute has been circulated among all monthly meetings. Its text follows.

Earthcare Testimony (Strawberry Creek Meeting, April 2010)

"It would go a long way to caution and direct people in their use of the world, that they were better studied and knowing in the Creation of it. For how could (they) find the confidence to abuse it, while they should see the great Creator stare them in the face, in all and every part of it." William Penn, 1693

"In the distress of the earth we can hear the calling of God to care, just as in the past we have heard God in the sufferings of the poor. . . the commonwealth of people and the commonwealth of the earth have become inseparably interrelated and interdependent. Our thinking about God and the world, and the way we live in relation to them, must now give recognition to that fact." Rex Ambler, 1990

We seek to live our lives in reverence for all life on Earth, encompassing right-sharing of the world's resources amongst all people and all species. Friends are called to enter into right relationship with Earth and the community of life it supports.

Friends see that of God within all life. We celebrate the mystery and wonder of our world and the gifts of nature that sustain and support us. At the same time, we see that human actions are undermining and destroying Earth's capacity to continue to bring forth these gifts. We hold these gifts in deep reverence, respect, and gratitude.

Friends recognize that those who suffer most from the destruction of Earth's gifts are the poor and the powerless. The wealthy, industrialized nations bear the greatest responsibility for this condition. We strive to find solutions to environmental damage that include peace and social justice for those people most affected by unequal sharing of the world's resources.

Much like a household that overspends its budget, humans are rapidly depleting Earth's resources with excessive, unwise consumption and a growing population. We are called to modify our daily, personal choices and to work at the local, national, and global levels to ensure the resilience of Earth. We feel a sense of urgency to bring our lives into right relationship with the community of life on Earth. We are called to be faithful to continuing revelation in these matters, to be transformed in our habits as our hearts and minds are opened.

"Even the exhausted blade of grass that breaks through the concrete listens to the wind's song and knows that it would be foolish to do otherwise." Spoken ministry, Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting, February 14, 2010.

Is it time then to bring an Earthcare testimony up for consideration in Pacific Yearly Meeting? We ask that the Discipline Committee consider these inputs and requests in discerning what the next steps might be.

**Joe Morris, Clerk
PYM Unity with Nature Committee**