

# Quaker Earthcare Witness Second Representative Report to PYM Annual Session 2018 by Catya de Neergaard

## SUMMARY

An overview of the workings of QEW after four years of service in multiple committees of QEW. Why abandoning patriarchal behavior in ourselves and our institutions is vital to restoring equality and justice. Linkages between destruction of the Earth, patriarchy, racism, and all forms of inequality and injustice.

## REPORT

Friends of Pacific Yearly Meeting,

Thank you for the privilege of serving you as one of your Representatives to Quaker Earthcare Witness [QEW] for two two-year terms.

### How QEW Works

QEW is a relatively small Quaker organization, just 30 years old, with a long term involved core of roughly 20 people. QEW's basic mission is to lift up and give Witness, in a spiritual context, Friends' concerns for Earthcare. The size of its 'steering committee' is greatly enlarged by the Yearly Meeting Representatives who usually rotate in every six months to two years. QEW asks that one, preferably two representatives from each yearly meeting come for its twice a year 'steering committee', held mostly in the Eastern USA. QEW has one almost full time and one part time employee.

Although the QEW 'In Practice' states that Quaker process and decision making will be used, the two employees and the presiding clerk make most of the decisions with a small group of oldtimers strongly influencing those decisions behind closed doors. This core of oldtimers have been coming to the steering committee and running QEW for many years. The few requests for decision coming to 'steering committee' meetings, mostly 'rubber stamp' decisions already made. The atmosphere is very warm and friendly. People spend most of the time in sharing stories, worship and intellectual exploration of earthcare ideas. There are often bird walks, excursions, and exciting invited guest speakers on a variety of earthcare related topics. The culture and practice is white and upper 20% economically, mostly liberal unprogrammed, and secular humanist or nature mystics.

I've suggested to QEW that they might want to formalize the reality of their power structure by converted to a governing board format. I've tried to address the downside of the Patriarchal power structure in this organization. I spoke to several key people about their Patriarchal behaviors where women's agency was taken away by men for example, by simply changing the outcome of a committee if they didn't like the decision or, for another example, by taking women's ideas and giving it to men to execute and control. This ministry wasn't well received. Tellingly, at an opening evening sharing circle in the Spring of 2016 with roughly 23 males and 20 females present, the first 18 people who felt comfortable to talk were male.

After my ministry about patriarchal behavior, there was a shift toward more support for women's leadings, presence and voice. However, what didn't shift is the 'old boys' secretive network of decision making and control through gossip/slander. Patriarchy can be and is carried out by female bodies as well as male. I heard from one women that, "Well it didn't happen to me, so therefore there is no sexism."

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Last year in this report, I told you about QEW's Sustainability Faith and Action Working Group in April 2017 coming to unity to affirm acceptance of a diversity of spiritual language, basically to include some Christ centered language in QEW productions. It was an effort to learn to understand and welcome Yearly Meetings from other branches of the Quaker Family Tree. Both the minute and the rewritten minute failed in the larger 'Steering Committee' by being blocked by several core oldtimers who didn't want biblical/ Christocentric language in their QEW and, in my view, a Working Group made up of mostly relative newcomers telling them what to do.

As you can hear from the above, QEW is not affirming diversity or admitted newness in a number of ways - which is a feature of patriarchy. Patriarchy prevents creativity and real growth individually and corporately. The conquest, exploitation and destruction of Nature is another expression of patriarchy. Patriarchy is about power over others, top down decisions, inequality, and dominance. As we heard from Carin Anderson, one of the keynote speakers at Annual Session 2018, we participate in and benefit from a global system of inequality and dominance. Besides addressing this individually with experiments in simpler lives, it needs to be addressed on the institutional and systemic levels, as does racism, also an expression of patriarchy.

## **The Corporate Witness of Yearly Meetings**

One way Yearly Meetings such as PYM could make a difference is to affirm structures of relationship/partnership which is the opposite of Patriarchy. Our Testimonies points to collective decision making structures. PYM could, for example, make a minute affirming acceptance of the spiritually diverse languages of Quakers and other ways we find to welcome diversity of all kinds. In my experience, the minutes and letters of concern of Yearly Meetings make can have a powerful effect.

## **Concrete Next Steps Friends Can Take**

I continued to serve as clerk of QEW's Sustainability Faith and Action Working Group this year. I wrote the draft of The QEW 2018 "**Concrete Next Steps Friends Can Take to Address Climate Disruption**" which was refined and produced by the working group. We will be having an interest group at Annual Session 2018 to explore together the next steps we can take individually and corporately to reverse climate warming. These and other steps incrementally and cumulatively make a difference. A condensed one page summary, the "**List of Concrete Next Steps...**", is available on PYM's Unity with Nature Committee's webpage. Many Green Quakers are encouraging each other to vow to take two new concrete steps (no matter how small) each year to reverse climate destruction and make an earth restored.

## **New Online "Earthcare Action Worship Group"**

An online worship and discussion group is forming for Friends to continue the dialogue and support one another toward action. There will be Zoom meetings and soon a FB group to lift concerns into leadings and into actions. Contact me, [cadeneergaard@gmail.com](mailto:cadeneergaard@gmail.com) if you are interested.

## **The Products of QEW**

The main products of QEW are the many pamphlets, and the 'Becoming Creation' newsletter which are all free. You can download them or have them mailed to you from the QEW website. Plus QEW has a free lively and very informative discussion listserv open to all Friends on all things environmental. QEW

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produces earthcare programming for Yearly Meetings and others, runs a Mini-grant program, and provides support for a few earthcare ministers.

## **Conclusions**

Despite problems with patriarchy and white privilege, QEW is the container for worthwhile things to further Friends' Earthcare testimony and save the Earth from climate destruction.

But to really ground the change, we need to affirm non-Patriarchal structures and relationships. Radical vulnerability means to be able - for those of us who dominant as whites in the upper 20% economically, to admit, just for starters, how we hold onto our power and white privilege and how our identity is wrapped up in the same. We need to do this corporately as well as individually and hopefully with great kindness to ourselves and others.

You might ask what all this has to do with Earthcare Witness. The problems of earthcare, warming, climate devastation, war, and economic, eco, and social injustice are interwoven. Climate devastation is increasing war and injustice. Nature teaches us the interdependence and unity of all life. How we humans treat the Earth and how we treat each other are the same.