

SUMMARY:

Discernment of the roots of dysfunction in the PYM Unity with Nature Committee and how to repair it has begun with listening to current and recent Committee members' thoughts in one-on-one interviews and correspondence. While some are new to the Committee and perplexed by its problems, others have long experience with Earthcare among Friends. It is apparent that all are committed to a Committee that addresses climate change and its consequences; some consider this to be their life work. What may appear to the rest of PYM as irrational behavior may in large part be caused by the stress of taking on an impossible task with inadequate support. Dedication notwithstanding, they have not made good use of Friends' procedures for resolving conflict, nor asked for help from the Yearly Meeting. The immediate difficulties might be resolved in a few years by (1) providing the Committee with an experienced clerk, (2) expanding the Committee's membership to include Friends having a variety of views on the meaning of "Unity with Nature", (3) studying the Committee's history to gain a sense of belonging to a larger body than the few members today, (4) conducting the Committee's business in a worshipful manner, following Friends' practices.

Discernment can continue only upon engagement by PYM as a whole. In the beginning, UwN was charged with specific tasks by the Yearly Meeting. The description of UwN and its role in the Yearly Meeting has devolved over time, so that UwN lacks guidance and relies excessively on the personal preferences of Committee members. Given that humankind demonstrably does not live in "Unity with Nature", what does the Yearly Meeting want its UwN Committee to do about it?

1. Introduction

At Pacific Yearly Meeting in July, 2018, Nominating Committee initiated a review of the Unity with Nature Committee, which reportedly had been dysfunctional for some time. I was asked to study the make-up of the UwN Committee and its processes, beginning with listening to current and immediate past Committee members through in-person and telephone interviews and email correspondence (August through October) (see Appendix A). A set of queries was given to each interviewee to focus the conversation (Appendix B). Notes taken during interviews are considered confidential; they can be made available by permission of the interviewee if needed in the future.

I was also provided with documents to review: written responses to the queries, Committee reports to PYM and notes from UwN retreats and teleconferences. A preliminary report with three recommendations (included in 5, below) was given to Nominating Committee in November because the UwN matter was on this Committee's next meeting agenda. The time since then has been spent in synthesizing from these materials an overall sense of how the Unity with Nature Committee came to be in its present situation and what to recommend to restore the UwN Committee's mission. While this report has itself been reviewed by two Friends familiar with the UwN Committee, it should not be construed as a product of worshipful discernment according to Friends' practice; in particular, most of the recommendations reflect my experience as a past UwN Committee clerk and my own perception of what a Unity with Nature Committee could and should be doing. Despite the imperative voice (reflecting my own sense of urgency about the state of the world), I offer suggestions that I hope will stimulate

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thought and action drawn from the collective sense of guidance by the Spirit that is fundamental to Friends' practice.

Eric E. Sabelman
February, 2018

2. Individual interviews

A short listening session was held with one UwN committee member (Patricia Constantino) while 2018 PYM was still underway. Four listening sessions of about one hour were held in the East Bay with 3 current UwN members and one past member (Lora Powell, Shelley Tanenbaum, Sharon Shen and Catya de Neergaard, respectively). Telephone interviews were conducted with one current (Andrea Beane) and one former UwN member (Rick Herbert). (Appendix B). In-person and telephone interviews were cordial, and interviewees all expressed hope that UwN's difficulties could be resolved so the Committee can resume its important work. Interviewees were generally frank about their own traits that contribute to the problem (as well as similar traits in others).

- Catya de Neergaard (on UwN 2013-2018) was very helpful in forwarding written materials and suggesting who I should interview. Catya has had a strong interest in "Earthcare" for a long time, and has an anchor committee in her meeting (Berkeley) to support her work. She was UwN clerk or co-clerk from 2014 to 2017, during which term the "carbon tax" donation option on PYM registration and a proposed traveling ministry program were initiated. She expressed frustration with the current clerk's performance, and would prefer a "convenor" model instead of a clerk in order to spread the responsibility for setting agendas and issuing reports. Among her concerns are transparency and fairness within UwN, QEW and PYM.
- Lora Powell began attending Berkeley Meeting and PYM in 2017, having no prior experience with Friends or grounding in the mission of UwN. After interpersonal conflict arose in the 2017 UwN retreat, she asked her Meeting's clerk for guidance. She remains impressed with both Catya's and Sharon's knowledge of climate change issues. Lora feels her contribution to UwN's work might be to encourage youth to bring their ideas and projects.
- Shelly Tanenbaum has long been involved in Quaker Earthcare programs. She and I both served on the *EarthLight Magazine* board in 2002-2003, during the transition to independence from PYM UwN. She is currently General Secretary of Quaker Earthcare Witness (which affects the attention she is able to give to PYM UwN). She is distressed by UwN's dysfunction, given the Committee's history of "walking the talk" (if not leadership in environmental activism). Shelley responded to the pre-interview queries by comparing QEW and UwN; for example, QEW has ties to interfaith groups and funds youth internships, which UwN does not.
- Sharon Shen (on UwN 2016-2019 becoming clerk in 2018) became a Friend in Texas 12 years ago, where she had no experience clerking committees; she moved to Berkeley about 4 years ago. Sharon discovered her calling to engage in Earthcare at the FWCC gathering in Peru 2 years ago; she sees that Quakers "clearly have a moral obligation" to take up climate change as a concern and is "baffled" that other Friends do not share her passion. She admits being "not very charitable to UwN" because of the distraction of Quaker process from the "overwhelming" issue of climate

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change. If UwN had a “dynamic clerk”, Sharon would feel free to travel to educate Monthly Meetings and lobby for governmental action.

- Paty Constantino of Mexico City was on UwN from 2013-2016 and again 2017-2020. According to Catya, she “stepped down from UwN in July [2018]”; Paty herself did not mention resigning from UwN. Paty sent written responses to pre-interview queries. She has been involved in environmental work in Nayarit State of Mexico and at Friends House (which has received UwN “MiniGrants” for energy and water projects). Paty’s participation in UwN has been limited to PYM sessions, email and teleconferences; she is satisfied with UwN’s efforts to include her, but seems regretful that she could not do more. She views the Committee as “an important part of PYM.”
- Andrea Beane moved to California in 2017 from Texas, where she had been South Central Yearly Meeting representative to QEW. She joined PYM UwN in order to continue attending QEW meetings, but found UwN to be “contentious” to an extreme unprecedented in her 25 years as a Friend. Andrea has participated in UwN interest groups, written reports on QEW and offered to review MiniGrant proposals. Andrea states that she did not agree with the UwN request to PYM Finance to increase travel funding. She hopes that UwN can serve PYM by “being a connector” to share what people are doing in the whole spectrum of Earthcare activities.
- Rick Herbert (on UwN 2014-2017) expressed “sadness and frustration” about UwN’s current discord. Rick’s experience includes being QEW representative to FCNL and 3 times PYM representative to QEW; he also has done non-Quaker environment work, such as lobbying for SB100 and attending Governor Brown’s Global Climate Summit, and feels this approach has more impact than UwN.

3. Conclusions from interviews

The dysfunction of UwN Committee in the last year or two seems to arise from two Committee members perception of a leadership vacuum, and their very different approaches to filling that role. Neither of these two have much patience with impediments to addressing the great challenge of ameliorating the effects of climate change. Neither of the two are adept at clerking in the manner of Friends; the current clerk expresses an explicit lack of faith that the time consumed in following Friends’ procedures is worthwhile, given the urgency of the problem.

Other members of the Committee seem to be taking a “wait, and the problem will be solved” attitude. Some have distanced themselves from arguments by resigning, allowing their terms to lapse, or taking on small tasks in the absence of a sense of unity of purpose. Widening ripples of awareness of UwN’s troubles within PYM have made recruitment of Committee members and monthly meeting liaisons even harder than before.

Distrust of Quaker process seems to have spread from a few to many in the UwN membership. Evidence of this is seen in the fact that no-one asked PYM M&O for help in resolving the Committee’s difficulties, and in a common feeling that PYM does not care if the UwN Committee exists or not. The Committee would benefit by hearing examples of Quaker process actually working – and learning that achieving unity in collective decision-making is more powerful than acceding to one person’s insistent viewpoint.

4. Overall assessment in historical context

The UwN Committee membership seems focused on the present and future, and in interviews demonstrated little knowledge of past actions of UwN since its founding in 1985. There was some awareness of a connection between UwN and *EarthLight Magazine*, mostly because of *EarthLight's* operation of the bookstore at PYM. The responsibility for this level of ignorance of UwN history is shared between current and recent members who made no effort to discover what has been done before, and past clerks of the Committee who did not pass down UwN records to recent clerks. (This criticism is not exclusive to UwN; rather, disregard for the past seems endemic in Quaker committees.)

The first major project undertaken by UwN was publication of Marshall Massey's *The Defense of the Peaceable Kingdom*. Rather than publish book-length documents, UwN then began publishing *EarthLight Magazine*, which complemented Quaker Earthcare Witness' *BeFriending Creation*; the former had an ecumenical readership, while the latter is aimed at Quakers. Since *EarthLight Magazine* was spun off in 2003, UwN has had no consistent task of similar or larger scale. What could UwN do now that would draw the same level of interest in Friends and like-minded people?

Knowledge of the past is valuable in teaching what has already been tried, and whether it either succeeded but lapsed or failed outright. An example is the recruitment of liaisons to UwN from Monthly Meetings within PYM. While UwN was managing *EarthLight Magazine* this did not seem of high priority, but it became more important after *EarthLight* became a self-managing non-profit corporation. It did not prove possible to achieve 100% representation of UwN in Meetings at that time, and the Committee's effort to increase the number of liaisons yielded little results. On up to the present, UwN has continued to devote a significant fraction of its time to liaison recruitment, without examining the causes of recruitment failure or discussing whether to abandon the fruitless effort.

5. Recommendations for PYM Nominating Committee

The following preliminary suggestions were given to PYM Nominating Committee in November, 2018, for consideration at its upcoming committee meeting.

The primary recommendation is a responsibility that falls on PYM Nominating Committee to find a clerk who is not necessarily an environmental prophet (I was going to say "activist" but that term is too mild) but is experienced and expert at clerking. None of the current UwN members can do it well, and they are willing to step aside from the role if a new clerk is forthcoming.

The second issue that Nominating should address is to broaden the pool of potential UwN nominees. It seems that most or all the current and recent past members were self-nominated. And many have come from the East Bay/Berkeley area, where Friends have developed over time a particular outlook on the climate crisis and what to do about it. There are other viewpoints (particularly those of young people) which should be expressed - a synthesis of ideas would be better than a continued struggle to get all Friends to adopt a single "right" way to fix the world.

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A third recommendation may be summarized as: do not state or even imply that the UwN Committee could be laid down. The investment of current and past UwN members is so intense that the mere thought of having to stop what they see as the central focus of their lives puts them into a kind of panic state. Rather, what PYM needs is to re-dedicate the UwN Committee to serve the whole Yearly Meeting, and the whole YM needs to invite and welcome this service (much as happened when Marshall Massey gave the keynote that started the UwN movement within PYM).

A fourth recommendation depends on PYM's expectations of the UwN Committee, which should evolve out of a Yearly Meeting-wide discernment process (as in 7, below). The present job description has been pruned of goals and tasks that the UwN Committee no longer undertakes, to the point that the description provides little guidance to current and future Committee members (Appendix D). When PYM is clear what it wants UwN to do, then the description should be revised to reflect that new mandate. Leaving the UwN Committee "to develop its charge as way opens" risks becoming the vehicle for a forceful individual's personal leading, instead of pursuing a mission mandated by PYM.

6. Overall recommendations for PYM Unity with Nature Committee

- Decide on the scale of the Committee's near-future activities. Should UwN act just within PYM (e.g.: sponsoring interest groups at annual sessions and communicating with liaisons in monthly meetings)? Should UwN expand out of PYM, developing relationships with non-Quaker religious organizations having similar aims? Should UwN's goals include making an impact on global climate issues (perhaps by bearing on-site witness to environmental disasters)?
- Instead of putting energy into recruiting liaisons in monthly meetings, invite Friends (and others) who already carry a concern for right relationship with the environment to correspond with UwN and with each other. If new ideas spring up in this correspondence, consider adapting them for UwN programs. If UwN generates programs than fill monthly meetings' needs, then liaisons will come forward of their own accord.
- Abandon any policy to frighten or guilt Quakers into changing their personal lifestyles. If every Quaker alive were to have zero carbon emissions, it would make not the slightest dent in Earth's CO₂ balance. Find better ways to inspire personal change.
- Although it has some benefit in bringing UwN to the attention of monthly meetings, consider ending duplication of a QEW-like small grants program restricted to monthly meetings. Instead, create criteria for grants specific to environmental problems of the PYM region and/or promote local collaborative environmental action.
- Study what UwN has done in the past. Consult with Friends who were part of the original Unity with Nature movement (especially before our elders die and their wisdom is lost). What programs could be revived because there is current need and expertise?
- If environmental disaster is a proper focus for UwN work, explore the value of witness: be witnesses to the consequences of human mismanagement of the natural world, and invite those who suffer the consequences to witness to Friends at gatherings of all sizes.

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- Be better informed of the activities of UwN-equivalents in other faith traditions, possibly through membership and participation in interfaith organizations. In this way, Quakers can join with like-minded folk and not feel isolated and ineffective.
- Stop assuming people are ignorant of the causes and effects of climate change, which has led to a lecturing style in UwN interest groups at PYM. Instead, engage in listening to participants in these groups and review their input when deciding on UwN programs during the rest of the year.
- Listen especially to young people. Don't expect them to come to your interest group, but go to them. While past reports mention such outreach as a one-time effort, build continuing youth-oriented programs for a variety of ages.
- If a traveling ministry program is to attract followers, it must offer real ministry – defined as conveying a message derived from spiritual inspiration, rather than intellectual discourse. Lacking experience in traveling Quaker ministry, study the history of this practice among Friends (including pastoral Friends) – both to learn how to do it and to understand what it can and cannot accomplish. Recognize and provide for the minister's need for eldership. Form a subcommittee for reviewing applications for the ministry, from which applicants are recused.
- Allow yourselves to consider a wide range of programmatic functions and experiment with doing as many as you can. If such programs provide something Friends find missing elsewhere, then attendance and support of UwN programs will rise. (Recognizing that proposing multiple simultaneous programs contradicts advice to focus on a large attention-getting endeavor – we don't know which is best without trying both.)
- Restore the religious foundation of UwN in conduct of Committee meetings and selection of programs. Spend half the time in silent worship. Re-read *The Defense of the Peaceable Kingdom*. UwN is not a secular body, and it will not benefit by reproducing the atmosphere of a non-religious environmental organization.

7. Overall recommendations for PYM regarding the Unity with Nature Committee

PYM (and any Yearly Meeting of Friends) must address a great variety of concerns, some essential to its continued existence and some generated by Friends' connection to the wider world. The Unity with Nature movement exemplifies the latter, and so seems optional compared to operation of the YM. When the movement began, it excited the YM gathering and spread to a significant proportion of Friends in PYM and beyond. But now ...?

At present, UwN seems to be an intense concern of a very small number of Friends. It behooves PYM to consider whether this is the way it should be, or should we raise the priority of UwN and expand the number of Friends involved in UwN issues?

Ideally, PYM will dedicate a major amount of time in upcoming plenary sessions to re-examination of the role of the UwN Committee, and – perhaps – revive the enthusiasm of the birth of the UwN movement.

Engagement by the whole PYM community may be needed to redefine the UwN Committee's job description. A conscious decision is overdue about the relative proportion of the work of the Committee

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in service to the YM compared to individual efforts to mitigate global climate change. Exactly what service does PYM ask of its UwN Committee now and in the future?

If there is any question that a UwN Committee is needed by PYM, consider the recent increase in environmental catastrophes within the geographic region covered by PYM. If nothing else, UwN's mission could be to physically, psychologically and spiritually help Friends (and others) whose lives are disrupted by fire and flood. Personally, I hope that UwN will be given a broader mandate: to examine what it means to live rightly on this Earth.

It remains the responsibility of the UwN Committee and its supporters to convince PYM Friends that their work is Spirit-led and as essential to Friends' lives as any other testimony. The UwN Committee should not expect reiteration of facts about climate deterioration or arguments to increase travel funding to create such conviction. Deeper thought and prayer by UwN advocates could be the beginning of a new vision for a uniquely Quaker presence in a world facing extreme environmental distress.

APPENDIX A: Invitation to interview and qualifications of interviewer

TO: [interviewee]

The discernment process I propose consists of careful listening to each member of the committee through meeting with you individually. First, I will listen to whatever you wish to say about your experience as a member of the UwN Committee. Second, I will pose some queries for you to respond to, of the form "What is your vision of the role of UwN in the Yearly Meeting?" I will summarize your responses in a report to Nominating and Ministry & Oversight...

Nominating asked me to undertake this discernment process because I am a past UwN clerk (2001-2003), having been a committee member off and on since PYM-UwN was founded in 1987. I left the committee to join the board of *EarthLight Magazine* when it was spun off from PYM-UwN as a separate non-profit corporation. I remain on the *EarthLight* board in its present incarnation as a bookseller rather than magazine publisher.

-Eric Sabelman

APPENDIX B: PYM Unity with Nature Committee – Queries for participants in UwN Committee work

- Say whatever is on your mind about the Committee and its work.
- What is your personal history of working with or on the Committee?
- What is your personal view of the Committee's mission?
- What environmental organizations do you belong to, outside the Quaker sphere? What is your level of participation? How are these organizations different from Quakers?
- Young people tend to be very aware of our climate crisis. What are we doing that is missing the mark with the few young Friends that we have?
- Why do you think most Quakers are uninvolved in Earthcare issues?
- What do you think the respective roles of Quaker Earthcare Witness and the PYM UwN Committee should be?
- How do you think non-UwN Committee members (former members, others carrying the concern) should be involved in the Committee's work?
- What is your vision for the PYM UwN Committee in the future?

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APPENDIX C: Interviewees and documents

	Name	Meeting	Notes
Current UwN Committee	Andrea Beane	Santa Monica	telephone
	Lora Powell	Berkeley	in-person
	Shelley Tanenbaum	Strawberry Creek	in-person
	Sharon Shen	Berkeley	in-person
Past UwN member	Patricia Constantino	Mexico City	Met briefly; received email response to queries; per Catya, stepped down July 2018
	Catya de Neergaard	Berkeley	in-person
	Rick Herbert	Strawberry Creek	telephone
	Tom Farley	Palo Alto	met briefly; had no comment
Not interviewed	Klara East	Visalia	Left message; per Catya, stepped down May 2018
	Meagan Fischer	Chico	contacted but could not schedule interview
Not contacted UwN member 2016-17	Andi Macleod	La Jolla	Never participated?
	Alice Rosenthal	Berkeley	No information about participation

DOCUMENTS

<https://www.amazon.com/Defense-Peaceable-Kingdom-Social-Order/dp/0934449023>

The Defense of the Peaceable Kingdom by Marshall Massey (Social Order Series 2) Paperback – 1985

Doing and Being in Unity with Nature (2010), by Eric Sabelman unpublished PDF
 Quaker witness and UwN , by Leonard Joy email attachment; on Catya’s anchor committee
 Unity-with-Nature-Proposed-Charter-and-Goals-2014-10-25 PDF report by UwN to PYM
 Unity with Nature description original (1) DOCX file; reduced UwN committee charter, Feb, 2019
 Unity-with-Nature-Proposed-Member-Job-Description-2017-06-v3 PDF report by UwN to PYM
 Earthcare Liaison for PYM announcement at PYM session, by Andrea
 UwN 2017-2018 notes, and proposed agendas emails forwarded by Catya
 UwN reports to PYM 2001 to 2018; documents from PYM website
 Quaker-Earthcare-Witness-Rep-Report-to-Annual-Session-2018 PDF report by UwN to PYM; by Andrea

APPENDIX D1: Prior UwN Committee Description

Note: this proposed Charter from PYM was revised by Unity with Nature Committee on 10/25/2014. It was based on the 2005 UwN Charter from PYM.

Unity with Nature Committee's Charter from Pacific Yearly Meeting

This committee acts on behalf of Yearly Meeting on spiritual concerns related to the environment. It strives to keep alive in the consciences of Friends the spirituality of and the kinship with all creation. It has the function to educate, inform, inspire, and give Witness about earth care and the environment.

The Committee may have several subcommittees such as: (1) Sustainability, (2) Service projects and internships, (3) Nature experiences and outings, (4) Education and interest groups.

The committee has nine members, serving three-year overlapping terms, with three members appointed annually. Two Pacific Yearly Meeting [PYM] representatives to the national Quaker Earthcare Witness [QEW] (formerly named 'Friends Committee on Unity with Nature') are members ex-officio, if not already members of PYM's Unity with Nature Committee.

Tasks

- Appoints PYM's representatives to QEW
- Supports publications such as Earthlight Magazine and QEW newsletter.
- Encourages and supports QEW and other Friends' environmental initiatives such as Friends Committee on National Legislation [FCNL], Friends Committee on Legislation in California [FCL-CA], and Quaker Institute for the Future [QIF].
- Nominates candidates for Earthlight's Board of Directors
- Provides means for communications among PYM Friends concerned about the environment and with Friends similarly concerned nationally and internationally
- Proposes and conducts interest groups and nature-oriented worship at Quarterly and Yearly Meeting sessions.
- Encourages change toward sustainable lifestyles by Meetings and their members and attenders.
- Raises funds to further its work.

Goals and Projects may include:

- Sponsoring an internship program for Young Friends
- Responding to queries such as recommendations for books and other educational materials related to care of the earth
- Proactive educational programs such as the mini-grant program
- Proactive educational and fundraising programs such as the dime a gallon carbon credit program
- Seasoning concerns arising out of Witness, we nurture the process of taking those concerns towards a minute at annual session.

APPENDIX D2: Current UwN Committee Description

JOB DESCRIPTION

Established in 1985 in response to yearly meeting members' concerns for the environment and dangers to it, this committee is empowered to act on behalf of the yearly meeting on spiritual concerns as related to the environment and to develop its charge as way opens.

Nine members, appointed for three-year overlapping terms, serve on the committee.

TASKS

Facilitates communication among monthly meetings and with the Yearly Meeting, which may include electronic communication, conferences, and publications.

May sponsor plenary sessions or interest groups at the Annual Session of PYM

The committee encourages the leadings of individuals within the Yearly Meeting with earthcare concerns. It may solicit and raise funds to further its work.

EXPECTATIONS AND TIME INVOLVED

Generally holds one one-day retreat per year.

All other work is done by conference call and e-mail.