

# Discernment Process of the Unity with Nature Committee by Eric Sabelman at the Request of Nominating Committee Revised Report to RepCom 2019

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 effectively sought 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?

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 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

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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.

The religious foundation of UWN in conduct of Committee meetings and selection of programs must be restored. Up to half the meeting time should be spent in silent worship. UWN is not a secular body, and it will not benefit by reproducing the atmosphere of a non-religious environmental organization.

**This report was revised and condensed by Nominating Committee from the original report by Eric Sabelman. June, 2019.**

Resources list, background, design and content of individual interviews, historical context of committee, and some overall and specific recommendations related to committee structure, practices, activities and engagement are archived with the Nominating and the Ministry and Oversight Committees.