

Pacific Yearly Meeting Unity with Nature Committee Report to Annual Session 2021

SUMMARY

Unity with Nature Committee (UwN) is seeking one or two representatives from each Monthly Meeting to act as contacts for our committee. We would ask them to convey messages and requests to their Meetings, as part of a network for sharing resources. As they feel able and are led, or as their Meetings direct, we would also invite them to act as sources of input, ideas, initiative and guidance and as occasional participants in, leaders for, or initiators of, UwN activities. Please contact our UwN Clerk Keith Runyan with suggested names or invite them to contact him directly at krrunyan10@gmail.com.

REPORT

Discerning How Best to Serve Our committee having been in abeyance for several years, with all but one new to it, and feeling the enormity of the climate and related issues we would be grappling with, we all have felt the need to move slowly. We have sought to create a space of safety for deep emotions and spirit led dialogue. Discernment has indeed come slowly, but it is coming, and we feel gratitude for it and blessed to be with each other in this work.

Braiding Sweetgrass We came to unity around the need to take into our work with and for the Meetings in PYM the same spirit of exploring the deeper existential challenges of the climate and related crises and sought for something that would at once invite us to confront these challenges directly, without turning away, but at the same time gently, with even startling clarity at the ways in which the systems we live in and indeed our very culture are part of what has gone wrong, and yet not from a point of self-blame but rather of openings in joy to new openings, new ways of being that are within our reach as human beings, as Americans and especially as Quakers.

As most of us were by then reading Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer, we came to see it as just the bridge into the issues—both clear eyed and full hearted--that we had been seeking. After presenting on it at the Spring Quarterly for Northern California, we began, on Monday, April 5th for what is now a monthly Quaker sharing on the book for both those currently reading it and those who've not yet started it.

We welcome you to attend as you are able and to invite others in your Meetings, networks and local communities to join in these conversations when they wish. See the Pacific Yearly Meeting website for more details.

Supporting Climate Grief and Climate Courage As Pacific Yearly Meeting Friends and their local communities experience various kinds of climate chaos—fires, drought, record-breaking heat and other extreme weather events—we hope to offer strategies for being present with one another in the midst of suffering and grief. The Unity with Nature Committee has also been discerning ways to engage meetings and worship groups in conversations about what some are calling 'climate grief,' or 'eco grief,' and 'climate courage.'

Exploring Solutions and Leadings As we must go as deep as Spirit calls us to do in facing the truths of the climate crisis, and all of the feelings it rightly brings up, we confront our own often crippling sense of despair and powerlessness. Yet this is precisely where God most critically intervenes, calling upon us turn to "that of God within each of us and all whom we encounter." We are not only to receive from Spirit the knowledge of what must be done, but the means to do it.

Our committee is now looking to be of service to in confronting and reversing climate change, handling the risks and disasters stemming from it, facilitating community conversations and actions

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around it, and finding and bringing promising answers to scale. Not only does this allow God to work through us to achieve the deep changes needed, but it is ultimately a key part of healing, yielding over our sense of powerlessness and despair, and putting all we have into serving in whatever way is most needed, as we are called.

Discerning Further Service We do not currently have contacts or committee representatives in each meeting. We see that whatever else we may be led to do it all turns on the practical matter of having such representatives in each Meeting that we can turn to for communication and shared discernment.

As we develop such a list, we can then turn to them and their Meetings to help us see in what ways this committee may be of most help—what are the felt needs and queries, emerging insights and resources to share, and specific ideas for coordinating infrastructures and specific projects or actions. While we have many possibilities surfacing, it is clear to us that our very next step is to create and support a network that optimizes communications and support between Meetings including even where led to do so between their respective local communities. We are also exploring what larger networks we may be led to work with more closely, e.g. Quaker Earthcare Witness and Interfaith Power and Light.

The Unity with Nature Committee consists of:

Michael Dunn (Co-Clerk)

Gayle Matson

Joseph Conroy

Marge Gianelli

Nancy Glock-Grueneich

Keith Runyan (Co-Clerk)

Andrea Beane (former member)