



## Let It Shine!

# AN EARTHCARE TESTIMONY FOR FRIENDS

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STRAWBERRY CREEK MONTHLY MEETING, BERKELEY, CA

*Is there that of God in everyone and that of God in everything? What are the links between resource scarcity and war? What can be done so that the least powerful are not the most vulnerable to environmental disruption? Are Friends living a testimony on Earthcare?*

Friends are developing a testimony on Earthcare by changing the way we live and the way that we relate to the Divine. Some of these changes are visible: greening our Meeting houses with insulation, energy-efficient lights and appliances; walking, biking, carpooling or using public transit to Meeting events; driving less and using energy-efficient vehicles; vegetarian and locavore potlucks. Ministry during Meeting for Worship, environmentally-themed retreats and adult education sessions suggest that these changes are more than cosmetic or economic. Friends are expressing deeply felt connections to nature. Our love for Earth and the whole commonwealth of life calls us to witness to our concern for an Earth restored. The effects of the current climate crisis and other threats to a healthy environment are now being felt around the world with the poor and powerless suffering most.

The time was right for Strawberry Creek Meeting in Berkeley California to approve a testimony on Earthcare in April this year. This step grew naturally out of increasing interest and action within our Meeting over the past decade. Much of this interest originated in an affinity group within Meeting started in 1998, known as Ecoberries. Its members have provided ideas, energy, and projects to involve Meeting in Earthcare. Their enthusiasm and concern has been contagious.

During 2000, our Meeting participated actively in the revision process for the current edition of Pacific Yearly Meeting's *Faith and Practice*. The result was a formal request from our meeting to the PYM Revision committee to add a section- *Advices and Queries on Harmony with Creation*—in the new edition. We submitted text for this addition and for a new section,

“Toward a Testimony on Harmony with Creation”, much of which was used in the final statements included in the 2001 PYM *Faith and Practice*.

In 2004 SCMM adopted the Dime-A-Gallon Project to encourage members/attenders to be aware of their energy consumption and act to reduce it (see [www.dimeagallon.org](http://www.dimeagallon.org).) Soon after, we charged our Peace and Social Witness committee with overseeing the Dime-A-Gallon project and other Earthcare concerns. In 2006 the committee's name was changed to Peace, Earthcare and Social Witness to reflect the expanded scope of its activities and the interconnection between social justice, peace and environmental concerns.

*“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 addition to the Dime-A-Gallon Project, our Meeting has adopted several Earthcare activities. We are a participating member of California Interfaith Power and Light, a network of religious congregations committed to reducing the energy used in their facilities and encouraging members to take practical steps to reduce their energy consumption in their homes and daily lives. Our meeting's quarterly potlucks are now primarily vegetarian and locavore (made from ingredients grown locally.) Many of our members/attenders walk or ride bicycles to attend Meeting for Worship or drive fuel-efficient automobiles. We facilitate carpooling to meeting events, and attempt to schedule events close to public transit. Individually, members and attenders often minister on Earthcare themes and we know of

lifestyle choices made by most community members that reflect Earthcare values.

In 2005, we approved the following minute, which was forwarded to the PYM discipline committee:

*Pacific Yearly Meeting, in 2001 in its Faith and Practice, presented a statement Toward a Testimony of Harmony with Nature. We believe that PYM should now be called to testify unambiguously on this matter. We therefore urge the Discipline Committee to explore the formulation and approval by Pacific Yearly Meeting of the statement of such a testimony. We further believe that our testimony should clearly express the link between our Spirit-led concern for the natural environment and issues of environmental justice invoked in addressing this concern.*

By 2009, the PESW committee was led to write our own testimony on Earthcare. First, we struggled with what a testimony means to Friends (see inset B). Some people think that the Brinton-inspired use of testimonies in modern Quakerism is misguided and detracts from our individual spiritual connection to spirit. We discussed this concern in our committee. We decided that as long as our Faith and Practice continues to use the concept of written testimonies, we would work to ensure that the way we are currently living and the way we are currently led by spirit is truthfully reflected in those written testimonies.

We also listened to the concern that Earthcare is already reflected in the existing testimonies of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality and unity. Keith Helmuth's article in Friends' Journal entitled "Friends Testimonies and Ecological Understanding" is an eloquent expansion of how the existing testimonies apply to Earthcare. Nevertheless, we felt clear to continue this work. We see the Earthcare testimony as an expansion of the concept that "there is that of God in everyone" to that of "there is that of God in everything." We recognize that this expansion is a major shift in Friends' worldview, hence in need of a specific testimony.

Early in the decision-making process, our Meeting approved the following minute: Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting will begin a process of discernment on developing a Testimony on Harmony with Nature. We held two meeting-wide listening meetings. In addition, our committee meetings where we worked on this statement were open to all to attend, and were well-attended.

At times it felt like light was descending upon us

## WHAT IS A TESTIMONY?

From Pacific Yearly Meeting's *Faith and Practice*, pages 37-38:

*The word "testimonies" refers to this set of deeply felt, historically rooted attitudes and ways of living in the world. Testimonies bear witness to the Truth as Friends in community perceive it: Truth known through relationship with God. Testimonies are expressions of lives turned toward the Light, outward expressions that reflect the inward experience of divine guidance.*

Spiritual evolution of the Religious Society of Friends occurs largely through individual Friends' openness to spiritual insights. Insights widely held by Friends over time, guiding and informing the community, become testimonies.

Our faith requires us to live what we profess to believe. Our testimonies are meant to be descriptions of how we are living, and the way we are living is guided by our spiritual life.

In reviewing the list of testimonies that we have within Pacific Yearly Meeting and amongst other yearly meetings, we find some commonality, but no definitive list. Most yearly meetings currently include written testimonies in their *Faith and Practice*, though there is no standard list to which all yearly meetings subscribe.

Around 1950, Howard Brinton came up with a list of modern testimonies (see p.120 and the discussion that follows in *Friends for 300 Years*.) Brinton noted that most of the old specific testimonies—plain language meaning using "thee" to address singular people; refusing to do "hat honor" by taking off one's hat to social superiors; plain dress meaning traditional Quaker garb; etc.—had fallen into disuse among most 20th century Friends.

Brinton bundled up the old testimonies into four main conceptual groups, and said that Quakers were still honoring the concepts of Equality, Simplicity, Community and Harmony. The testimonies listed in PYM's 2001 *Faith and Practice* followed Brinton, with the addition of Peace and Integrity. So PYM wound up with Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality and Unity (harmony), or SPICE U. The 2001 *Faith and Practice* includes a section titled, "Towards a Testimony on Harmony with Nature," on pages 62-63.

## EARTHCARE TESTIMONY OF STRAWBERRY CREEK FRIENDS' MEETING

*"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.

*Approved April 2010*

as we labored to make this decision. We came together month after month with new vision and fresh understanding of how our lives are intertwined with Earthcare. Silence was a guide, and so was recognizing that each of us had something special to offer in this process. We nurtured each other as we sought to nurture the Earth and promote right-sharing of resources.

Instead of feeling drained, we often left a committee meeting feeling enlarged with a greater understanding for each other and for our place in the natural world.

We asked ourselves many questions as part of the discernment process: Are we transforming our lives to respect the environment? Do we contribute to the right-sharing of resources? Do we feel connected to the commonwealth of life on Earth? Are we open to the light of a world that is not dominated by humankind? We found that we are indeed living Earthcare-conscious lives just as much as we are living up to all the other testimonies in our Faith and Practice. In other words, the testimonies serve as both a description of how we live now and as an inspiration for who we hope to be.

We hope that describing our process of approving an Earthcare testimony might inspire other meetings to do the same. Visalia Monthly Meeting has approved our Earthcare testimony, which can be used as a place to begin a significant discernment around the question, "Do we have a testimony on Earthcare?"

We realize that living a testimony is more important than approving a minute or including it in Faith and Practice, but we feel that Spirit is nudging us in this direction. As Keith Helmuth said recently, "After a couple of decades in which many Friends have worked to build up the ecological fertility of Quaker consciousness and practice, the sprouting and growth of an Earthcare testimony seems to me a natural and helpful outcome."

*The authors are active members of Strawberry Creek Friends Meeting in Berkeley, CA.*

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, 2/14/2010*