2015 Summer Research Seminar

The 2015 Summer Research Seminar was held August 3 – 7, 2015, at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. More than twenty people gathered to discuss projects and develop insights for future work, following a process of discernment grounded in Quaker Meeting for Worship. Mornings were reserved for presentations and afternoons for study and reflection by individuals and small groups.
We shared dinners in a local home and enjoyed conversation and fellowship.

Participants brought a variety of concerns to the seminar, which throughout the week cohered into a sense of shared responsibility to actively engage those concerns through our individual efforts and by supporting each other in our ongoing work.
Topics

1. **Food Systems** – Dick Strong, Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting, Berkeley, CA. World food supply and distribution is an emerging crisis. The three world food systems are the industrial and traditional, which are producers, and the food aid system, which is a distributor. There is enough food if the economy and politics would allow its’ distribution. As some countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, and others such as Haiti, slip below carrying capacity, they become dependent on aid. These, as well as one in six people all over the world, will increasingly need food assistance due to population, global warming, land grabs, and conflict. The solution is to integrate the best practices of the industrial and the traditional food systems. Most food is produced by small-scale farmers, who use a quarter of the resources required by the industrial model. Industrial agriculture is often too expensive for many; small-scale farming needs its own technology to improve productivity.

2. **Climate and Culture** – Sara Wolcott, Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting, Berkeley, CA. Art and music evoke deep responses in people, and cultural differences lead to different types of responses to various forms of art and music. Such responses provide insight into the different responses of individuals and cultures to environmental crises.

3. **My Story, Our Story** – Leonard Joy, Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting, Berkeley, CA. What is the most significant thing I, and Quakers, might do to secure a fulfilling future for humanity and Earth? We are in a period of major societal transition, precipitated especially by global climate change. This is not a task of getting back to business as usual. Actions are needed to reduce, and ultimately reverse, climate change. Actions are also needed to mitigate the consequences of climate change, including: (1) sustaining food supply, (2) ensuring access to food, (3) responding to groups vulnerable to climate change, (4) developing capacity for prepared response to trauma, (5) responding to migrations and their impact on communities, (6) responding to the threat and reality of societal unrest, and (7) responding to the threat of authoritarian response and the dystopian future that this forbodes.

4. **Climate Change and Urgency** – Bob Langfelder, Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting, Berkeley, CA. How urgent is “urgent”? An 85-year time frame helps frame actions effectively and makes sense of the apparently paradoxical demand to address climate change both immediately and over the long term. Business as usual, with 90 million tons of carbon emissions entering the atmosphere every 24 hours, cannot continue. Endless urgent requests (send $5.00 now!) clog our email inboxes – we need to ask which are really urgent. In 2015, we can support the pope’s message, send letters to Congress, and prepare for the talks in Paris. In 2016 and after, we can focus on elections. Over the next decade, we can track California and US emission goals and see that they are achieved. Between 2030 and 2050, the effects of climate change will become even more pronounced and there will be a need to implement adaptations and ask if they are working. New challenges will arise in the latter half of the century and beyond 2100 – we will need to carry on, struggle, and hope.
5. **Toward a Life-Centered Economy** – John Lodenkamper, Judith Streit, Paul Alexander, Mountain View Friends Meeting, Denver, CO. A Life-Centered Economy values our individual lives – our time on Earth between birth and death – and our relationship to the communities in which we live. It values our connections with family, friends and coworkers, and also the wider community of our networks with houses of worship, civic organizations and special interest groups, including the growing virtual community via social media. It also values the plant and animal life that we share on planet Earth, and upon which all human life depends. Our current global system is a Money-Centered Economy and it is both unsustainable for the planet earth and exploitive of the vast majority of the humans it should be meant to serve. The metrics that govern it, such as GDP, take no account of the natural capital that it transforms into an excessive accumulation of “stuff” nor of the planet-killing pollution that results. In the course of spreading this Money-Centered Economy globally, we have seen strongly increasing inequality of both income and wealth to the extreme of the top 1% projected to have more than 50% of global wealth by 2016. How do we shift from the Money-Centered Economy, which seems so pervasive and powerful, to a Life-Centered Economy?

6. **Bringing Quaker Process to Strengthen Horizontal Democracy** – Catya de Neergard, Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting, Berkeley, CA. In the long tradition of "How Quakers Invented America" (David Yount, 2007), strengthening people's ability and confidence to discuss and converge ideas face to face empowers them and offsets the erosion of democracy. We can still contribute. Quaker process could help communities grow beyond decades-long poor government, entrenched politicians, and dysfunctional governmental structure. How can Quaker process be useful to Americans struggling with disempowerment, discouragement, and economic marginalization? How can we introduce Quaker process to small groups of interested citizens to build unity of what to do and how to do it together?

7. **Neuroscience and Socio-economic Structures** – Dale Bordelon, Dallas Friends Meeting, Dallas, TX. What are the consequences of differences in early brain development due to genetics, environment, and varying combinations of the two? Just as we do not all see or hear in exactly the same way, we do not all feel, perceive, and think alike. How has specific neurological activity as a biological function played a critical role in the development and structure of not only our economics, but all of our social, political, religious and educational institutions? These institutions directly impact personal and intimate relationships. Which types of people are leaders in our institutions and systems of governance, and when do they make decisions that others might not make because we think and feel differently? What happens when leadership is not in the best interests of the larger society? Better understanding of the biological origins of neurological developmental differences could lead to better understanding of social problems that have plagued humanity for millennia.
8. **Sustainable Investment** – Muriel Strand, Sacramento Monthly Meeting, Sacramento, CA. An antidote to the 'Tragedy of the Commons' exists. Common-pool resources are by nature held in common due to being practically non-excludable, as with fish in the ocean, while their fruits are excludable in that only one person can eat a particular fish. Eight criteria are typically found in cases of sustainable management of common-pool resources, as elucidated by political economist Elinor Ostrom and her colleagues: (1) clear and accepted boundaries of the group of users and of the common resource, (2) rules governing use of the common resource match local conditions & needs for labor/money inputs, (3) most of those affected by the rules can participate in modifying the rules, (4) those who monitor the health and harvest of the resource are accountable to the users or are the users, (5) rule violations receive graduated sanctions that depend on seriousness and context, (6) local, low-cost and prompt means are available for dispute resolution, (7) users have long-term tenure rights, and distant centralized authorities respect the rule-making rights of the group of users, and (8) for CPRs that are part of larger systems: harvest, use, monitoring, enforcement, conflict resolution and governance are organized in multiple layers of nested institutions. How can we understand and apply these criteria to Quaker concerns about sustainability and earthcare?

9. **Ecological Economics** – Larry Jordan, West Falmouth Monthly Meeting, West Falmouth MA. Ecological economics reflects a concern for how to re-synchronize individual and collective human behavior with the natural rhythm of Earth’s entire life community, while retuning our utilitarian values to avoid irreversible losses of the Earth’s resources as much as possible. The community of terrestrial Life is presently comprised of an uncountable number of species (including homo sapiens) involved in playing a giant game (“Ecological Economics”) in which each species seeks to enhance the relevance of its own presence. The arena for the game is Earth’s biosphere. The materials available are just what is already here, and the energy available to drive all Life processes is just what can be extracted from solar radiation plus recapture of energy previously sequestered in fossil fuels plus some geothermal and natural radioactivity. These energy flows define an ecological economy, of which the human money economy is a subset. Ecological economics seeks to take into account services provided by Nature that are usually ignored in the human monetary economy, with the motivation of pricing the true costs of economic outputs and constructing a framework in which to work toward sustainable development. One suggestion for accomplishing this (Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen) is to search for models of economic activity in which energy is the measure of currency. To what extent can a comprehensive pricing scheme be aligned with total material and energy costs?