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Monday, February 13, 2006

TO FRIENDS, CONCERNING MY PROPOSED WALK  
TO BALTIMORE YEARLY MEETING

Dear Friends,

On the morning of May 13, if all goes well, I will shoulder a backpack and set out afoot from my home at the north edge of Omaha, Nebraska.

I'll hike southward, spending the night at the south edge of the Omaha metropolitan area, and cross the Missouri the next morning. Then I'll turn east, crossing Iowa on US Highway 34.

Two and a half months later – July 31 (if all goes well) – I'll walk into Harrisonburg, Virginia. I'll have gone 1,150 miles.

This will have been a journey for spiritual discernment, under the oversight of my monthly meeting in Omaha. I'll have been traveling in the ministry, carrying a minute signed by the clerk of my meeting. But unlike so many Friends who did this in times past, my obligation will be less to preach than to listen and learn.

In the course of my journey, I'll walk past Friends meetings and churches belonging to Iowa, Western, Indiana and Wilmington Yearly Meetings (FUM), and Illinois, Ohio Valley and Lake Erie Yearly Meetings (FGC). With God's and Friends' assistance, I hope to meet with Friends in these communities, ask questions, listen carefully, and seek with them for God's guidance – hoping to discern how Friends of all persuasions can work together on ecological matters.

The concern here is that at present, Friends of all persuasions are *not* working together in such matters. We have no organization that unites the branches of our Religious Society – FGC, FUM, EFI, Conservative and Holiness – in a common environmental testimony. We have no unity on how to respond to environmental issues.

Indeed, few *individual* yearly meetings in *any* of these branches have any truly comprehensive testimony regarding environmental concerns. And this in a time when major ecological problems

– from accelerating greenhouse warming, to extinctions of species, to the exhaustion of cheap petroleum and other critical resources – are at, or fast approaching, crisis levels.

A large part of the problem is, of course, that the various branches of our Society are divided from each other by other issues: the rôle of Christ and scripture, the matter of religious programming, differing understandings of morality. Because these issues are important, they keep us from seeing and doing our duty in the environmental sphere. And worse: by dividing us, they keep us from listening to one another and benefitting from each other's influence.

Now, our Quaker gospel is a very potent thing. I can think of no other small movement in modern Western history that has had a more successful impact on the world than Friends. By pointing to Christ, the Voice in every conscience, and guiding people to hear what he is saying there – and this has been the heart of our gospel message – our witness has helped catalyze vast social changes with regard to slavery, religious tolerance, treatment of criminals, equality of the sexes, public education, ethical business practices, assistance to the poor, conscientious objection, and much more. This may seem incredible, but it's the historical truth.

So it's not just a shame that we Friends are too distracted and at odds to bring that same message fully to bear on ecological issues. It's a tragedy. That message could make a real difference. Secular society *needs to hear it*, because it is having trouble finding the backbone to address those issues rightly on its own.

– But perhaps the Friends communities I sit with, pray with, and struggle to discern with, can help us find a fresh way forward. I dare to believe that they can.

In the course of my journey, I'll have time to do more than just meet with groups of Friends along the way. There will be long hours of walking in which I can be silent, both to hear God, and also to hear and learn from the creatures around me. There will be chances to interact with the people of the world, who may have much to teach.

Moreover, I may be blessed with walking companions, other Friends, on various parts of my route. I'd welcome such companionship. And if this happens, it could be an opportunity for a more extended group discernment. We might go into considerable depth, regarding Friends and the environment, in prayerful discussions on the road.

Finally, at Harrisonburg, Virginia, when I arrive, Baltimore Yearly Meeting (FGC and FUM) will be just beginning its annual sessions. The Program Committee of Baltimore YM has asked me to address its yearly meeting on Saturday, August 5, the closing night of its sessions, on the subject of living in harmony with the Earth. After eighty prayerful days on the road, and meetings with Friends on the way, I might, perhaps, be prepared to do so.

It feels essential to me to arrive prepared; for there is much at stake. As you may know, Baltimore YM and Friends United Meeting have been laboring together for some years now on one of the more intractable controversies in our Society, the rôle of gays and lesbians in the Church. Inspired by that labor, some of Baltimore YM's members have been visiting other yearly meetings to open up dialogue. This year, the matter of harmony among Friends will be part of Baltimore YM's stated theme, right alongside harmony with the Earth.

To the degree that Baltimore YM can succeed in furthering reconciliation among Friends, it might open doors to coöperation throughout the Quaker world. To the degree that it fails, on the other hand, some doors may slam shut. What hangs in the balance includes a measure of the possibility for a unified (and thus more powerful) Friends environmental testimony. Thus I am one of many Friends the world over who've been holding Baltimore YM in their prayers.

And that, I think, may be part of the reason why I felt a leading last October to undertake this journey of discernment.

Frankly, it isn't a leading I wanted. It will cost me my job. I'll be running risks with dehydration and poor nutrition, farm dogs, predatory humans, suspicious police, rain, cold, hypothermia, blistered feet and the danger of infection. I'm 56, no longer young; these challenges won't be easy. But the Voice in my conscience insists that what happens at Baltimore Yearly Meeting is important – and that I should invest myself fully in this journey of *listening* before I open my mouth to speak there.

One Friend I know has called it a “vision quest”.

To the best of my ability, I've been proceeding according to the gospel order of our Society. I began by laying my sense of leading before my monthly meeting (Omaha Friends Meeting) last October. After five weeks of labor, the meeting endorsed it and is now providing oversight.

From my monthly meeting, the matter proceeds to my yearly meeting, Iowa (Conservative), whose Continuing Committee should consider it in early April. I have also informed Baltimore Yearly Meeting and Quaker Earthcare Witness: the former because it needs to know, and the latter in hope that it may be led to work with me.

Meanwhile, though, this journey must be prepared for. My monthly meeting is doing what it can, but it's a very small meeting and there's only so much it can do.

To make this journey possible, I must raise \$11,000, to cover both the concrete expenses – shelter, meals, etc. – of the trip, and my family's needs while I'm gone. (A tentative budget

appears at the end of this document.) My monthly meeting can receive donations and oversee expenditures, but funds will need to come from a much wider circle.

I also need help setting up meetings with Friends communities along the way – and how I'd welcome walking companions!

If there are ways of turning what I'm doing into a broader dialogue, as by making it a subject of meeting discussions and drawing Friends elsewhere into the work of discernment, I'd be grateful for help making that happen. And if there are ways in which my journey might be turned to the benefit of any larger Friends organization in some way, I'd be delighted.

Of course, Friends, you must start by determining for yourselves whether my leading seems genuine, and whether it is the sort of thing you'd like to support. But if it does and is, can *you* help with the matters I've listed here?

You'll find contact information below, for both me and my monthly meeting. You'll also find copies of my tentative itinerary and budget, and the text of the traveling minute issued to me by my monthly meeting. Feel free to contact me if you have questions – or contact my monthly meeting if you prefer.

In friendship,

Marshall Massey

## CONTACT INFORMATION

Marshall Massey

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OMAHA FRIENDS MEETING

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## TENTATIVE BUDGET

### Lost income:

Wages forfeited, including one week before the journey & three weeks afterward ( $\$420/\text{week after taxes} \times 16.5$ )	\$ 6,930
Minus expenses not incurred:	
– job-related ( $\$40/\text{week} \times 16.5$ )	(660)
– groceries ( $\$45/\text{week} \times 12.5$ )	(560)
– gas ( $\$12/\text{week} \times 12.5$ )	(150)
<b><i>Net income loss:</i></b>	\$ 5,560

### Lodging:

Motels & bed-and-breakfasts ( $\$70/\text{night} \times 37$ )	\$ 2,590
Commercial & public campgrounds ( $\$15/\text{night} \times 9$ )	135
Camping on private land, 33 nights: allowance for owners' fees	300
<b><i>Total lodging</i></b>	\$ 3,025

### Meals:

Restaurant dinners ( $\$13 \text{ ea.} \times 41$ )	\$ 535
Restaurant breakfasts & lunches ( $\$8 \text{ ea.} \times 39$ )	310
Supplies for camp meals, snacks, drinking water	640
<b><i>Total meals:</i></b>	\$ 1,485

### Miscellaneous expenses:

Shipping to and from home:	
5 points en route plus Harrisonburg	\$ 400
Replacement of broken or worn-out clothing & equipment	400
Laundry ( $16 \text{ occasions}$ )	160
Showers when not staying in motels ( $14 \text{ occasions}$ )	140
Printed materials for seekers, churches, and meetings visited	100
<b><i>Total miscellaneous expenses:</i></b>	\$ 1,200

<b>Total anticipated expenses:</b>	<b>\$11,270</b>
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*Lodging and meal expenses can be much reduced if I am able to stay with Friends in the communities I visit. I estimate the maximum savings realizable in this manner as about \$1,200.*

## TRAVELING MINUTE

We commend to your loving care Friend Marshall Massey. He is traveling to Baltimore Yearly Meeting where he has been asked to speak at their annual sessions. Marshall has been a member in good standing of Omaha Friends Meeting since November 2004, coming to us from Colorado.

Marshall has worked through a clearness process with Omaha's Monthly Meeting concerning a calling to walk from Omaha to Baltimore Yearly Meeting. This calling comes out of Marshall's continuing witness to walk gently over the Earth and as a part of his personal spiritual journey. We support Marshall in this calling.

Greetings to Friends and others along Marshall's travels, and to Baltimore Yearly Meeting. We hold Marshall and Friends at Baltimore Yearly Meeting in the Light, as time is spent together at the annual sessions.

Marilyn Mantel-Guss, Clerk,  
On behalf of Omaha Friends Meeting,  
(Iowa Yearly Meeting, Conservative)