

How do we live our faith in care of the Earth?

(A replacement for existing Part 1, Section B, 21)

The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age.

--- John Woolman (1772)

George Fox was a shepherd when he first heard God speak to him. He and subsequent generations of Friends depended on the land for sustenance and survival. Early writings show that Friends treasured the beauty of our world, encouraged members to know its wonder, and urged caution in our use of its gifts. In recent times, stewardship has evolved to include care of our precious Earth as well as care of our possessions.

We have fallen short in this task. We have extracted and exploited Earth's wealth. We have created disposal systems that disrupt, destroy, and pollute the land, water, and air for us and all our relatives with whom we share the Earth. These changes in climate, population growth, and consumption beyond our needs reveal that the well-being of our Earth has been compromised by human activity. We watched with sadness, but we did not protect her. What then, is the right relationship with the physical and spiritual place in which we live - our Earth that sustains the essence of our lives?

Right relationship connects the fullness of the Earth and the beauty of nature with all who benefit from her bounty. When we acknowledge with gratitude the sacredness of creation, the beauty around us, and the importance of protecting and caring for Mother Earth, we are in right relationship. This care needs to be done both individually and corporately on local, national, and international levels. The Earth graciously and freely provides for us. In return, there is an urgent need for us to repair, protect, and care for her.

As we work to maintain right relations we can reduce, reuse, and recycle, as many of us already do. We can plant native flowers and trees to encourage wildlife to flourish. We can also consider how to decrease our carbon footprint by living more gently on the Earth and being mindful of how we contribute to climate change. In addition, we can encourage our local businesses and governments to cooperate on bigger projects. Solar panels, rooftop gardens, public transportation, rain-permeable sidewalks, and bike paths are all important. Safe homes for everyone, regardless of income, are also important; nobody should be poisoned by pollutants or other toxic waste, which are most often found in the poorest neighborhoods.

We live in a rapidly changing world, and we must be creative and forward thinking in our actions. As this is written, in the 2020's, we are learning how to positively change our approaches from young climate activists. They are convinced that there is no hope of preserving our Earth without major changes on both national and international levels, and they are pushing hard for this to happen. Governments, corporations, humanitarian organizations,

and faith communities must work together. This cooperative work is essential if we wish to end the violence of war and corporate overreach that strip our earth and all who live on it of dignity and basic necessities. Without adequate food, water, and safety, which is already limited for those who are marginalized, life cannot continue. It is essential to preserve, in a sustainable way, what is already here so that future generations can thrive.

As we consider the enormity of right relationship with our Earth Mother, and what we are led to do, we can prayerfully consider queries to help us stay true to our values as Quakers and live our faith in the world.

- How do we live simply using only what we need?
- How do we live peacefully, respecting the dignity of each person and their communities, while also working to alleviate the violence of environmental racism, war, poverty, and all that destroys nature?
- How do we live with integrity when we are part of a system that encourages us to live beyond our means and use too many resources, causing harm to both people and our natural environment?
- How do we live equitably in a culture that depends heavily on inequality to make our economic systems work?

It is critical that we live in harmony with the Earth, continue to cultivate love and respect for her, and teach our children to do the same. If we are attentive to the Spirit within, traditional cultures, and even the Earth itself, they can teach and guide us. They can help us to make meaning of our existence and offer spiritual lessons that we can use as we rebalance our relationship with and work to restore our home, Mother Earth.