

GLOBAL CHANGE

The Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) has called for the responses of Friends, worldwide, to the massive ongoing changes in our environment, climate, economy, and society, which – together – they call ‘Global Change’. FWCC emphasises the importance of understanding the close causal inter-dependence between these seemingly very different aspects of change, and hence the importance of responding to them as a whole.

Members of Oxford Quaker Meeting met together on 17 December, 2010, to try to find a shared response to this challenging consultation from FWCC.

- What do we, as Friends, have to say to ourselves and to the world about the colossal changes that are happening in our world? How do we articulate the spiritual basis of our response? What actions are we taking?

Note from a meeting of Oxford Friends held 17.12.10

At the start of our meeting, we were reminded of the 1991 World Conference of Friends, convened by FWCC, where the increasing impacts of global change, and the inextricable linkages between justice, peace and the integrity of creation, were already made plain. Epistles from the 1991 World Conference remind us of this:

“We stand at a turning point in human development. The dignity of human life and the sustainability of all life forms on the planet are at stake.” (Epistle from the 1991 Kenya Gathering)

“Some Friends now realise the garden of paradise may have been like an untamed rain forest... In Faith in Action groups we learned how that Spirit has led Friends to confront evil in many forms throughout the world, including greed, poverty, oppression, and the destruction of the environment. If we do not take action to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted, we run the risk of losing the garden.” (Epistle from the 1991 Honduras Gathering)

Now, two decades on, these overwhelming global changes are upon us. Our industrial-consumerist society is heading towards catastrophic climate change, environmental degradation, and extinction of life forms on an almost unimaginable scale.

We are moved to the very core of our being. We are anguished by the prospect of an earth unfit for human habitation, and – on the path towards it – untold human suffering. And we, as participants in the industrial-consumerist society, are contributing to this devastation. We have to change – not only ourselves, but also the economic, social and moral system in which we live. Our Testimonies demand no less of us.

The task is immense: to speak Truth to Power, to challenge the military-industrial complex, the global corporations, ‘the market’. These systems are world-wide and seem unassailable. But there are alternatives. We must assist the growth of new kinds of interconnectedness: practise new ways of exchanging, trading, travelling, generating power, of being human. We need to be in the business of constructing and demonstrating that there are other ways to be human, to be fair and to be joyful.

Equity and fairness were key words among early Friends. They tried to live in a manner which gave new meaning to these words. They spoke bluntly about injustice and evil in systems, believing that there is an inward light available to all people, however obscurely, which if seen can bring them to new Life. Can we learn to live in that same manner, where our lives speak?

Challenging or changing the system can be effective when we work together with others, with strong mutual support. The same is true in changing our own lifestyles. **We need now to find new and more effective ways of acting together.**

We want to be better connected to the efforts of the wider body of Friends, using all possible means, especially via IT and the internet. And we should look beyond our Quaker networks as well, to partnerships with others who are working for positive change. We need to deepen our listening to, and learning from, each other, at all levels.

In all that we do we need also to turn inward, to our 'inner plumb line', to that of God within, to find our direction and strength of purpose.

This note is sent to our newsletter for publication and to Meeting for Worship for Business in February. We hope all our members can reflect upon this and that we can begin to discern what is required of us, individually and collectively, to respond to this call from FWCC.