

New York Yearly Meeting Religious Society of Friends

InfoShare

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Editor, Paul Busby, paul@nyym.org

Connecticut Ends Death Penalty

On April 5, 2012, the Connecticut State Senate voted to end the death penalty in the state, and on April 11 the state's House of Representatives approved the bill. Governor Dannel P. Malloy commented, "I'm pleased the House passed the bill, and when it gets to my desk I will sign it."

New York Yearly Meeting had advocated for abolition of capital punishment in Connecticut. On March 14, 2012, Judy Meikle (Wilton Meeting) had testified before the Joint Committee on the Judiciary of the Connecticut State Legislature in Hartford on SB No 280 An Act Revising the Penalty for Capital Felonies. Her testimony follows:

My name is Judy Meikle and I am grateful for this opportunity to testify today on behalf of New York Yearly Meeting (NYYM) of the Religious Society of Friends regarding Senate Bill No 280. The NYYM is a gathering of Quaker meetings and worship groups in New York State, northern and central New Jersey, and southwestern Connecticut.

I am a member of Wilton Monthly Meeting, which is located in Wilton, Connecticut, and I have also attended the worship group in Sing Sing Correctional Facility in Ossining, New York. I am an active facilitator of the Alternatives to Violence Project, an international violence prevention program which is well known both in prisons and in the community. As a Friend whose concerns for the criminal justice system run deep, I speak to you today on behalf of my Yearly Meeting about our beliefs and prayers concerning abolition of the death penalty.

Ours is a simple faith and a radical witness. Our guiding truth is that the Divine is in every person. From this belief flow our historic testimonies—our corporate witnesses to truth, which we live out in our everyday activities as we "let our lives speak." These core values of peace, simplicity, equality, community, and integrity guide our decisions and form the foundation of all our endeavors.

Our position on the death penalty is set out in our book of *Faith and Practice*:

We have consistently opposed capital punishment. We are clear that each person is uniquely valuable and divine, and none is totally beyond redemption. The death penalty rejects the message of forgiveness. In some cases, it legally destroys innocent persons, and in all cases it degrades the humanity of the executioners and of the society that endorses the act.

As Quakers, we place deep faith in love before fear and in the transforming power of peace. We recognize that murder is a terrible tragedy, wreaking havoc and pain on everyone that it touches. We therefore recognize that murder is simply wrong no matter who perpetrates it—whether an individual or the State.

The decision before the legislature is a weighty one. There will be many facts and opinions laid before you today. In January 2005, the presiding clerk of NYYM stood before the State Assembly in Albany and reminded them that theirs was a moment in history. She asked them to think about the legacy that they were leaving future generations. She compared the antiquated and barbaric notion of justice that is capital punishment to slavery and child labor and Jim Crow—as practices once accepted by society but now deemed relics of a misguided past. She urged the legislature in Albany to seize the opportunity to abolish capital punishment in the State of New York.

And they did. Followed by the State of New Jersey in 2007, and the State of New Mexico in 2009, and the State of Illinois in 2011.

I stand before you today to fulfill a personal and religious obligation to urge *this* legislative body to seize *this* opportunity to be on the right side of history and abolish the death penalty in the State of Connecticut in 2012.

Thank you.

Judy Meikle, Darien, CT, on behalf of New York Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

Follow the Sixth World Conference in Kenya on the Web

When the Sixth World Conference of Friends begins on Tuesday, April 17, the conference Web site will be updated in as close to real-time as possible with full coverage of the event, including the texts of speeches, video, photos, blogs, etc. Visit <http://bit.ly/Hzitt4> and check back regularly.

NYYM Friends planning to attend include Sylke Jackson, Diane Keefe, Margaret Mulindi, and Christopher Sammond.

New Meeting Room Open House New Brunswick Meeting Welcomes All

New Brunswick Friends Meeting welcomes everyone to join us as we celebrate the completion of our new meeting room addition with an open house and luncheon on Sunday, May 6, 2012, beginning with meeting for worship at 10:30 a.m., open house luncheon at 12:00. No need to RSVP. Welcome all!

New Brunswick Meeting is at 109 Nichol Avenue, corner Hale Street, in New Brunswick. Free parking across the street in Rutgers parking lot behind the Little Theater.

It's an easy train ride from NYC direct to NB train station on NJ Transit (www.njtransit.com). The station is a few minutes' drive from the meetinghouse, and transportation to and from the station can be provided with advance notice to Keith Voos at keithvoos@aol.com or 732-951-9154.

Join the Nightingales Again Mohawk Valley Meeting, May 4–6, 2012

Nightingales is a gathering of Friends bound together by the joy of music and the love of singing. Song after song is sung from the circle, each person picking one and sharing the story (or not)...setting the tempo and pitch.

Learn more about this amazing experience in March *Spark* at <http://bit.ly/HdYQFd>.

If this sounds like fun, come join the Nightingales once again at Mohawk Valley Meeting, on May 4–6, 2012, for fun and music, company and Friendship. A potluck dish and donations of \$10 and your joyful assistance are all it take. This time is open to all. Everyone is most welcome, regardless of singing ability.

For our planning for meals and beds, please make reservations with Buffy Curtis, havehelpinghands@gmail.com (508-566-6639) by April 15. After that date we may not be able to offer more than camping as accommodations.

AVP Advanced Trauma–Healing Workshop

May 4–6, 2012, Powell House

Anyone who's attended an Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) Basic Workshop is invited to this active experiential workshop where we'll be open to Transforming Power, a palpable power in the world available to each of us to change ourselves, others, and situations for the better and to practice nonviolence and healing from violence in our daily lives.

This workshop will help you: (1) gain an understanding of trauma, (2) learn tools to create safe space and face trauma events; and (3) rebuild social relationships and trust.

This workshop will be similar to the one done by Peacebuilding en las Américas, the Latin American initiative of Friends Peace Teams. We will use techniques of psychodrama, art journaling, relaxation, centering, and other methods of dealing with painful memories. By drawing on the strength of the community we will create, we will gain insight on our own and others' losses. This workshop is *not* personal therapy, although it provides therapeutic tools and approaches you may use yourself afterward.

Facilitators: Margaret Lechner and Val Liveoak.

Cost: \$ 170 for adults, \$85 for infants through age 22, and \$85 for commuters. No one is turned away for lack of funds.

Childcare with 3 weeks' notice

To register: go to <http://bit.ly/IurXb7> or contact Powell House, 524 Pitt Hall Rd., Old Chatham, NY 12136; 518-794-8811; info@powellhouse.org.

Travel Calendar for Christopher Sammond

NYYM General Secretary

April 1–May 31, 2012

April

13–14 Attend Spring Sessions, Rye NY

15–25 Travel to and attend FWCC World Gathering of Friends, Nakuru, Kenya

25–28 Visit Chwele YM to explore their invitation to be a partner YM with NYYM

28 Visit Friends School in Davanga, Kenya (supported by Manhattan MM, NYQM, and NYYM World Ministries Committee)

29 Travel home

May

- 4–6 Facilitate Nightingales Singing Weekend, Mohawk Valley meetinghouse, Clinton, NY
- 18–20 Attend and cofacilitate Advancement Consultation on Supporting Ministry, Stony Point Retreat Center, Stony Point, NY

**Travel Schedule for Gabrielle Savory Bailey
Young Adult Field Secretary**

- April 6–7 Young Adults Concerns Committee weekend, Quaker Intentional Village Community, East Chatham, NY
- April 13–15 Spring Sessions
- April 20–22 Farmington-Scipio Spring Gathering
- May 18–20 NYYM Advancement Consultation, Stony Point Retreat Center, Stony Point, NY

Help Us Keep the Young Adult Field Secretary

We need our Young Adult field secretary! But the grant money that helps support the position is running out. We are actively seeking possible new funding to extend this very important service. If you know of any grant opportunities please let us know. Contact office@nyym.org or call 212-673-5750. You may also write New York Yearly Meeting, 15 Rutherford Place, New York, NY 10003, attention Helen Garay Toppins.

**Schedule for Anita Paul & Barbara Spring
ARCH Coordinators**

April

- 13–14 NYYM Spring Sessions - Barbara and Anita are available for consultation about senior issues.
- 22 Long Island Quarterly Meeting—Anita: Q&A about ARCH and senior issues
Barbara: ARCH presentation, consultations, helping with ARCH Visitors

May

- 5 Montclair Monthly Meeting—Anita: Workshop on the Testimony of Community
- 6 Manasquan Meeting (pending)—Anita & Barbara: Aging, ARCH, and the Meeting, How does it Work?

Aging Resources Consultation and Help (ARCH) offers older adults and persons with disabilities the information they need to enhance quality of life. Understanding and insight are nurtured, and one-on-one listening is available for individuals and families as they deal with the last third of life.

Barbara Spring, 406-544-9476 cell, 518-772-2290,
barbaraspring4@msn.com; Anita Paul, 518-374-2166,
anitalouisepaul@gmail.com

Become an ARCH Visitor!

Join Friends from throughout NYYM, who reach out with practical, spiritual/pastoral care to persons over 60 or with a disability.

Training will be held at June 8–11, 2012, at Stony Point Center, Stony Point, NY. We begin with supper on Friday evening, have a full day session on Saturday, and end with lunch on Sunday.

The sessions are filled with information and interactive experiences, very enjoyable and *all costs paid*.

For details and an application contact: Barbara Spring, 518-772-2290 or 406-544-9476 Barbaraspring4@msn.com.

Women's Intergenerational Weekend

Powell House

April 27–29, 2012

For people in grades 7 and older

It's wonderful being women. Sometimes it's hard, often it's breathtaking, always it's who we are...or not. There are some things unique to us and much that is really just about being human. All of us have stories from our journey so far. In sharing our stories we all grow more deeply connected and deeply grounded. And sometimes sharing our stories and hearing our stories is just what we need to let go and soar. Come fly with us, sit with us, sing with us, share with us. We'll enjoy each other and spring in full bloom at Powell House. Kites anyone?

For information and to register, www.powellhouse.org;
info@powellhouse.org; Powell House, 524 Pitt Hall Rd., Old Chatham NY
12136; 518-794-8811.

Remembering Trayvon Martin: Bedford Stuyvesant WG

On Sunday, March 25, the Bedford Stuyvesant Worship Group honored the life of Trayvon Martin. The group was small, but the worship was deep. We entered in hurt, anger, and pain, and we left acknowledging the healing power of worship.

Everyone is invited to join us at the Bedford Stuyvesant Worship Group. Our next meeting will be fourth Sunday, April 22, from 3 to 5 p.m., at Restoration Plaza, 1368 Fulton Street, Brooklyn, NY 11216. Nearest subway stop is the Nostrand Avenue station of the A and C trains.

The Bedford Stuyvesant Worship Group is sponsored by the NYYM Black Concerns Committee.

QUAKER SPRING

June 24–29, 2012

Stillwater Meetinghouse & Olney Friends School
Barnesville, OH

Are you longing for more quiet opportunities to worship and share with other Friends? Would you enjoy taking part in a radically unprogrammed retreat with Friends from a variety of theological backgrounds? Come join Friends at Quaker Spring, where we gather to experience the Inward Christ together through Bible study, worship, quiet time, evening explorations, and fellowship.

Welcoming to all Friends. Low and flexible fees to attend (as low as \$25/day for adults). Children's program and childcare available by advance request. For registration details and more information, please go to: www.quakerspring.org, or you can contact Janet Hough at janet.hough5@gmail.com.

Youth Workcamp to Akwesasne Reservation

August 15–19, 2012

Liseli Haines for the NYYM Indian Affairs Committee

Are you 12–14 years old and interested in traveling to another Nation?

We have been invited to help the Akwesasne Freedom School, a private school teaching Mohawk language and culture, to set up for their annual dinner and quilt auction.

We will be guests of the Mohawk Nation, and when we are not helping set up we will be involved in activities planned by our hosts. Some of the possible activities are a social dance, bonfire with storytelling, or crafts.

We will share who we are with our hosts and with each other and learn more about the Mohawk Nation. We hope to establish ties that we can strengthen by future youth visits to Akwesasne.

We will meet at Mohawk Valley Meeting, Clinton, NY, on August 15, 2012, at 7 p.m. for an overnight at the meetinghouse before driving to Akwesasne. You can arrive at Mohawk Valley meetinghouse by car or take the train or bus to Utica, NY. We will arrange for pickup. We will be staying at cabins at Akwesasne, so bring a warm sleeping bag and a pillow.

Food, lodging, and this workcamp are made possible by the Akwesasne Freedom School and the Indian Affairs Committee of New York Yearly Meeting.

Liseli Haines, a member of Mohawk Valley Meeting and a registered nurse, will be leading the group.

For more information or to request a registration form, contact Liseli Haines, liselih@juno.com, 2936 Austin Rd., Clinton, NY 13323, 508-566-5441. Cost \$50, nonrefundable, due at registration. Register by July 1, 2012. Space is limited to eight. Register early. Send the registration form and \$50 to Liseli.

Come work, play, and learn!

FUM Seeks Communications Manager/Editor

Friends United Meeting (FUM) is seeking qualified applicants for our Communications Manager/Editor position. This full-time, Richmond (IN) based staff person will receive a competitive salary, including benefits.

A successful applicant for this position will:

- Possess a strong and growing Christian faith
- Be committed to the work, witness and future of FUM
- Help us better communicate the message and ministry of FUM to our constituents and beyond and develop avenues to share our ministry resources with others
- Seek to understand and engage with the breadth of our global community

- Have strong editorial, administrative, and communication skills
- Be a college graduate (minimum)
- Work collaboratively in a healthy team environment

Résumés, along with a letter of interest, may be e-mailed to: Colin Saxton FUM general secretary, colinsa@fum.org, or sent to him at: 101 Quaker Hill Dr., Richmond, IN 47374.

A complete job description is available at www.fum.org or by contacting the FUM office at info@fum.org or 765-962-7573. Applications will be received through April 20, 2012.

FOR Delegations

The Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) has been advocating nonviolence and peaceful resolution of conflict since World War I. One of the ways we at FOR practice building bridges of understanding among nations is civilian diplomacy. Since the 1920s FOR has practiced international civilian diplomacy.

FOR sponsors delegations to Iran, Colombia, Palestine, and Israel.

Some upcoming delegations (for which the registration deadline has not passed) are:

Iran

Each trip is scheduled to spend 10 days in Iran, visiting the cities of Tehran, Qom, Isfahan, Shiraz, and Yazd.

Upcoming delegation:

November 4–15, application deadline Aug. 1. To apply: <http://bit.ly/HZfFD7>

Colombia

July 21–August 4, application deadline June 1. To apply: <http://bit.ly/HgzUTI>

Palestine and Israel

October 21 to November 3: African Heritage Delegation

This delegation will raise awareness, heighten activism, and further link struggles between African Heritage communities in the United States and those working for justice in Israel and Palestine. Individuals of African descent are encouraged to apply.

Application deadline: Rolling basis—apply early at <http://bit.ly/I1RMeV>

October 21 to November 3: Olive Harvest Delegation. Applications accepted on a rolling basis until September 1—apply early at <http://bit.ly/HeBi2T>

For more information contact Fellowship of Reconciliation, Box 271, Nyack, NY 10960-0271; 845-358-4601; <http://forusa.org/contact>.

NCPTF seeks Board Member from NYYM

Lily Dalke, NYYM appointee to NCPTF

The National Campaign for a Peace Tax Fund (NCPTF) seeks a new board member from New York Yearly Meeting. The NCPTF advocates for passage of legislation that would recognize the rights of those conscientiously opposed to paying for war. For more information, please visit www.peacetaxfund.org/

For the past three years, I've served as NYYM's appointee to the NCPTF board. I am now needing to turn my energies and attentions elsewhere, and need to identify someone to take over my responsibilities from this meeting. The main requirement for serving on the board is an interest in and dedication to passing the Religious Freedom Peace Tax Fund Act. The board meets between two and four times a year in its offices in Washington, DC, and members are encouraged to attend most if not all of those meetings (financial assistance for travel has been available from NYYM in the past). Prior experience serving on boards is not a requirement, and board members are not required to support NCPTF financially.

To find out more about the responsibilities and joys of serving on this board, please e-mail me at lily.dalke@gmail.com or call 646-662-7486.

If you are interested in serving as board member, contact the coclerks of the Nominating Committee, Jill McLellan, mclellan@frontiernet.net, and Deborah Wood, dnbwood@aol.com.

FGC Pre-Gathering Events

This year's Friends General Conference (FGC) Gathering will take place July 1–7, 2012, at the University of Rhode Island, Kingston. Information at <http://bit.ly/A7gP2J>.

This year we have three exciting pre-Gathering events. All events are open to FGC Gathering attenders. Some are also open to those not attending the Gathering.

Join the FGC Gathering Choir

Are you an experienced choral singer who would like to sing a Quaker choral piece with other Friends? This is your chance to rehearse *The Fire and the Hammer* and perform it at the Gathering!

The choir will rehearse Friday evening, June 29, through Sunday afternoon, July 1, and then again on the afternoon of July 6 prior to its performance that evening. Choir membership is by application only and is open to qualified singers who can attend all the rehearsals, regardless of whether they register for the Gathering.

Read more about *The Fire and the Hammer* at <http://bit.ly/FQp2Eo>. Read more about joining the choir at <http://bit.ly/FPQRyC>.

Finding Purpose: Adult Young Friends Seek Clarity (June 30 AYF Retreat)

This one-day retreat will focus on the clearness process in relation to AYFs' lives. By the end of the retreat, participants will have gotten a clearer sense of how to use the clearness process to deepen spiritual community and in clarifying life purposes—both passions and ministries.

This retreat is open to young adults, 18–35 years and not registered for Gathering High School program, who also register full time or half time (first half) for the Gathering.

Read more about the retreat at <http://bit.ly/A6MKmF>. Read more about the AYF program at the Gathering at <http://bit.ly/FW8CtI>.

Registration opens April 4 for all these pre-Gathering events and for the FGC Gathering itself. We are still adding information to the Web site about this summer's Gathering. Take a look at what is there; more details will be added soon. <http://bit.ly/A7gP2J>

Friends General Conference, 1216 Arch St. #2B Philadelphia, PA 19107; 215-561-1700; www.fgcquaker.org.

FLGBTQC Epistle to World Conference of Friends

February 27, 2012

Dear Friends attending the World Conference of Friends 2012,

We send you love and support from Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns (FLGBTQC). FLGBTQC is a faith community within the Religious Society of Friends in North America that

affirms that of God in all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

We share Friends' conviction that there is that of God within each person and uplift the focus of the World Conference of Friends on truth telling, education, and doing God's work.

Within Friends for LGBTQ Concerns, we are learning that radical inclusion and radical love bring further light to Quaker testimony. We are called to share what we have come to know experientially: that we are all children of God, that loving same sex relationships come from the same divine source as heterosexual relationships, and that gifts of ministry are distributed without regard to sexual orientation or gender identity. We stand in a place of solidarity both with Friends everywhere and with our brothers and sisters who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. We are called to speak out against discrimination or persecution on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation wherever it may occur.

We will hold you in prayer as you engage in God's work of speaking your truth and listening for the truth in the words spoken by others.

In faithfulness,

Kody Hersh and Wendy Sanford, coclerks, Friends for LGBTQ Concerns

New FWCC General Secretary

The Central Executive Committee of Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) has agreed that the name of Gretchen Castle of Philadelphia YM, currently acting dean at Pendle Hill, should go forward for approval as Nancy Irving's successor as general secretary. This proposal will be considered at the International Representatives Meeting at the World Conference. Once Gretchen's name is approved, she will join the team at the World Office in London as associate general secretary in October, taking over from Nancy in January 2013.

New Directors for Quaker House

Quaker House, the GI rights center in Fayetteville, NC, has found new directors. After a search process that lasted two years and ranged across the US and beyond, the Quaker House board found the successors to director Chuck Fager right across the table.

Steve and Lynn Newsom, of Charlotte, NC, Friends Meeting, had

represented their Meeting on the board for several years. In addition, as part of Chapel Hill Meeting in 1969, Lynn was a member of the first board that came together to rent a house in Fayetteville and launch the project. While teaching art for more than thirty years, she has also been a peace activist, and an involved Friend in meetings in Ohio and North Carolina.

Steve has been a peace activist too, and he's a veteran who was once stationed at Fort Bragg. He's also been an accountant and run his own remodeling service.



Steve and Lynn will be visiting Quaker House through the summer and fall, learning the ropes. They are also eager to visit Meetings to get acquainted with the Friends who have been the bedrock of support for Quaker House during its 43 years of peace witness.

"Quaker House has been a unique and satisfying opportunity to serve Friends," Chuck Fager said. "Even with the Iraq occupation 'over,' and Afghanistan drawing down, there's still plenty for us to do. The GI Hotline, for instance, is taking calls at a pace we haven't seen since 2008. The pressures for a new war with Iran are mounting. The legacy of torture, which is right in our backyard, has yet to be addressed. Violence within the military is at record levels. And war spending is at an all-time high too.

"So Lynn and Steve will have a full plate."

Britain Yearly Meeting

According to their Web site, www.quaker.org.uk, "Around 23,000 people attend nearly 475 Quaker meetings in Britain." Their *Faith and Practice* is available at www.quaker.org.uk/qfp.

Their excellent pamphlet on Quakerism, *A Quaker View on . . .*, is available at <http://bit.ly/HcFsc2>. Friends in other meetings may wish to glean ideas from this pamphlet.

Turning the Tide is a program of Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW). QPSW works with and on behalf of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain. Check out their newsletter at <http://bit.ly/HHTvrV>.

Indian Affairs Committee on Doctrine of Discovery

Susan Wolf, coclerk, Indian Affairs Committee

Note: A comprehensive factsheet on the Doctrine of Discovery is available at <http://bit.ly/GXNTEj>.

The Indian Affairs Committee has been working to bring forward a minute on the Doctrine of Discovery (DoD), a pernicious doctrine mandating that European explorers, conquerors, and colonizers seize lands belonging to non-Christian peoples, thus "discovering" them and claiming them for European powers. This doctrine is alive and well today in United States jurisprudence, and it has been used to deny justice to Native American peoples in the courts. Quakers are but one religious body calling on people to repudiate this doctrine, and other religious bodies have already gone on record to do so.

A minute currently before the Yearly Meeting also calls upon the United States to make the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) the law of the land. When UNDRIP was brought forward by the United Nations in 2007, only four countries failed to support it: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States. The US was the last country to come forward in support of UNDRIP, doing so only in December of 2010.

The Indian Affairs Committee first brought this minute to the floor of the Yearly Meeting in 2010. The minute was read before the body in 2010, but has not yet come forward for approval. It was felt that Friends needed more time to learn about the issues involved before they could be asked to consider this minute. The Indian Affairs Committee hopes to bring this minute before the body of the Yearly Meeting and have it approved this summer. If this happens, NYYM might be the first Yearly Meeting in the US to do so, and this would be a significant event. Indian Affairs would like to send a representative or representatives to monthly meetings or regional/quarterly meetings to do a presentation on this minute and on the issues and concerns that were the reasons for bringing it forward. If you would like someone to visit your monthly or regional meeting, please contact Susan Wolf at QuakerWolf@gmail.com, 607-272-1618 / 718-702-8903 (c) or Joan Cope Savage, jcopesa1@twcnny.rr.com, 315-472-5785 / 315-415-4290 (c).

After Indian Affairs representatives were invited to present there, Rahway & Plainfield Monthly Meeting approved the following minute at business

meeting on February 19, 2012.

“Rahway & Plainfield Monthly Meeting, having learned of concerns embraced by Native American legal scholars and activists, and indigenous people throughout the world, joins with Syracuse Friends Meeting and Butternuts Monthly Meeting in approving the following minute to support the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery:

We seek to live in a just peace with our fellow human beings, both as individuals and as peoples. We call on the U.S. Senate to ratify the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples so that it becomes the law of the land in the United States of America.

We repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery. We cannot accept that the Doctrine of Discovery was ever a true authority for forced takings of persons and land. It is false for the United States to assert the Doctrine of Discovery to compel a jurisdiction over Indigenous peoples or their land.

We honor the inalienable rights that sustain the existence of Indigenous peoples. An Indigenous people has rights to their homeland, water, spiritual practices, language, cultural practices, and self-government. An Indigenous people has the right to make decisions and conduct international relations on their own behalf.”

An Anthropologist’s Meditation for Earth Day 2012 Questions and (some) Answers

Bill Mueller

St. Lawrence Valley Friends Meeting, Potsdam, NY
(allowed meeting under the care of Ottawa Monthly Meeting)

How old is the earth? 4.5 billion years, give or take.

How old is life on earth? 3.8 billion years, give or take.

How old is human life on earth? 2.5 million years, give or take.

How many times in the evolution of life has the reproduction of a single species so dominated the earth and its creatures, that the existence of the whole is threatened? Only once.

When was that? 10,000–20,000 years ago.

What about the dinosaurs—they were wiped out, weren't they? Species have come and gone and the composition of life has changed over evolutionary time, but never did the advent of one species threaten the existence of life itself until 10,000–20,000 years BP (before the present).

What species was responsible? *Homo sapiens* ("We have met the enemy and he is us" —Pogo).

Do you mean that for only 2/3 of 1% of human evolution, people have been in crisis? I do.

And how do we know this? Because it is then that archaeological evidence presents us with violence for the first time, commonly known as "man's inhumanity to man."

What is the evidence? Fortified villages and towns, the artifacts of war, and the wounds of war on the skulls and long bones of our ancestors.

Are you telling me that for 99% of human evolution we lived in peaceful coexistence without "worry or thought for the morrow" (Mt 6:34), as if in a garden "in which there grew every tree that was pleasing to the eye and good to eat" (Gn 2)? I am.

Was there no conflict among humans then? There is always conflict in social species, and we are no different from other species in this regard as Charles Darwin proved beyond doubt on November 24, 1859.

How did we handle conflict in ancient times? Evidently every conflict had three sides then, one to mediate the two in conflict; we could call it a period of "cooperative conflict" with caring elders of prime importance (Ex 20:12).¹

What happened to "cooperative conflict"? In the ecological crisis that ensued "when people began being numerous on earth" (Gn 6:1) cooperative conflict was forgotten and in its place arose something we could call "coercive conflict."

Why was cooperative conflict forgotten? Human beings would not at first realize the cause of the chaos, that it was indeed the result of their overpopulation, for they would have had no previous experience like this. All they knew was that things were different before as told in the oral

¹ The importance of the work of anthropologist William L. Ury for peacemakers cannot be overestimated: *The Third Side: Why We Fight and How to Stop*, Penguin, 2000. In his book he discusses evidence for cooperative (helpful) conflict resolution during 99% of human evolution.

traditions of the ancestors, and now “something” had changed. Not knowing, they felt boxed into a corner, described in Hebrew Bible narratives as feeling naked, afraid, and compelled to hide for the first time in earthly existence (Gn 3).

Was there a creative human response to this dilemma? Yes, concerned people began to explore cause and effect; the results are the narratives of the great religious/philosophical traditions of the world, which followed close on the beginning of sorrows, about 3,000–4,000 years BP.²

Which of the religious traditions began this quest for answers? That is the funny thing; all of them, from Europe to East Asia appeared at the same time (or nearly so).

Does that mean that their appearance was not by cultural transmission, but everyone, everywhere, suddenly sought answers to some widespread problem? I believe so.

Does that suggest that all over the then-known earth the same ecological crisis was at work? It does.

Didn't humans in the first 99% of their evolution have religion? Yes, they did, but it was of an entirely different kind. These new religions spoke not of village or tribal realities, but of general philosophical and spiritual principles to which all human beings respond by nature rather than culture.

What is the nature of “coercive conflict” in this time of a new kind of religious awareness? Conflict is resolved by the strong overpowering the weak, politically sanitized as “aristocracy.”

What are the effects of aristocracy? Aristocracy separates the powerful few from the powerless many. The result is widespread lack of basic needs: Hunger, thirst, nakedness, homelessness/estrangement (ceaseless wandering far from God and a promised land (Gn 4 and the books of Moses), disease, and torture (imprisonment) visited on the powerless, described in Christian scripture as “the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine” (Mt 25).

So ecological crisis led to stratified social systems and the awareness of evil/death (Gn 3)? Yes, the original vision of cooperative conflict, described, for example in Hebrew Bible narratives as “suitable helpers” coming together as “one flesh” (Gn 2), is testimony to God's original intention for

² Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions*, Anchor Books, 2007

people to live in Community, with Equality, Simplicity, Integrity, Peace (cooperative conflict), and Care for the Earth by restoring life to the original condition that God saw was very good (Gn 1).

Is the main problem human population growth? Yes.

Where do we start and when? "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?" —Hillel

Could you be a little clearer? (1) I have to take responsibility to find out who I am and what I was sent here to do. This I discover "in the primal relationship that, from God to man, is called mission and commandment; from man to God, seeing and hearing; between both, knowledge and love."³ (2) Then I have to help my fellow-sufferers in the way I live out my life and vocation, for if I do not, I am nothing. (3) I have to decide when to take the first step "and walk with God" (Gn 5) toward this mutual goal, restoration of life on earth, and I must do that before my powers fade and I return from where I came, the dust of planet earth (Gn 3.19).

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³ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, W. Kaufmann, trans., Touchstone, 1970, p. 133