Climate Change—Embracing Corporate Quaker Action

By Mt. Toby Friends Climate Witness Committee

Over the past three years a group at Mt. Toby Friends Meeting in Leverett, Massachusetts has studied the issue of climate change. In that time, the meeting made a number of structural improvements to reduce carbon use in the meeting house. In the past year, the study group began to address climate issues as shared responsibility, focusing on the carbon used weekly in driving to the meeting.

Dime-A-Gallon Fund

The proposal for the "Dime-a-Gallon Fund" grew out of our realization that just getting Friends to our Mount Toby meeting on Sundays uses a lot of gasoline. We hoped to raise awareness in order to motivate more carpooling. Our meeting is rural and draws from a wide area. It takes approximately 2,500 gallons of gas per year just to move Friends to the meeting and back home. A self-tax of a dime per gallon amounts to $250 per year. The meeting agreed to send this $250 to Quaker Earthcare Witness and to set up a collection device to let Friends drop in dimes and dollars to pay the meeting back for this self-tax.

It was hard for Friends to get the idea that their donations were for our collective use and were not a "tax" on their own personal drives. We did not want people with longer drives to feel they should pay more and those living nearby less. We hoped that all travelers would bear the weight of our collective gasoline usage and find ways to minimize it.
The project raised $200 plus awareness about fuel use. A number of Friends bicycling plus some carpooling reduced our weekly carbon footprint. The awareness-raising is ongoing: We continue to realize that our meeting is deeply dependent on the use of irreplaceable fossil resources.

**A Voluntary Carbon Tax Witness**

Messages rising in worship moved seven of us to a Voluntary Carbon Tax Witness. We decided individually the amount of self-tax that is right for us and whether we calculate it based on a single source of the carbon we use or on many sources. The level of each person’s voluntary tax is confidential (known only to the fund steward), but the witness is public. Others have since joined and there are now 13 of us involved in this witness.

George Fox is reported to have advised William Penn to wear his sword as long as he could. Aware that we are still wearing our carbon swords, we encourage each other in this witness.

Although the Voluntary Carbon Tax is an individual commitment, our Meeting supports it by receiving our earmarked personal checks on a quarterly schedule. The meeting treasurer then submits a single check for the total to the recipient organization or group selected by the Climate Witness Committee. After some discernment, the meeting agreed to this process which is described in full at http://www.mounttobyfriends.org under the Action tab. (The first check of more than $400 went to QEW.

**Toward a Corporate Quaker Witness**

Meeting support is a key to the larger purpose of the witness. Individual action on climate change is not enough; groups and organizations must come together to act and urge others to join.

The 2009 Copenhagen Accord, stating any global warming above 2°C would be unsafe for human habitation, was signed by 167 countries (including the U.S., China, India, and Russia). In spite of this near-universal agreement, our government is unable to act. Friends are called to "Be models, be examples..." (George Fox). This issue, like slavery, is deeply imbedded in our culture and economic system, and we as individuals and as meetings have a calling to respond.

Friends in our Quarter (Connecticut Valley Quarterly Meeting) have expressed interest. We are hopeful their meetings and others will feel led to set up their own Voluntary Carbon Tax Witness. Please visit our website for more information and examples you can use in your own meeting.

**For More Information**

- Mt. Toby Friends: www.mounttobyfriends.org
- A calculator to help you determine your own Voluntary Carbon Tax: www.mounttobyfriends.org/gascalc/gascalc.html

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