QEW Shines at Southeastern Yearly Meeting

By Mary Jo Klingel

Each year, Southeastern Yearly Meeting Friends come together for our annual meeting on the beautiful grounds of a Methodist camp in central Florida. This year our Gathering was titled "Becoming Whole in Mind, Body, Spirit and Planet."

The highlight of our week is the Walton Lecture on Saturday night. This year our Lecturer was QEW’s rising clerk, Roy Taylor. Roy began the Gathering by leading two workshops: first on "Green Building for Homes and Meeting Houses" and a second one on "Community Transitioning to Resilience." Roy shared his information about green building and community living, as well as his energy and love for his work. His Walton lecture, "Friends Leading: Climate Change—A Crisis of Spirit," asked of us that we ground ourselves in our testimonies and step into the roles of leadership that these times ask of us.

There were numerous workshops with a focus on Earth. QEW members offered three. The first offered a focus on Active Hope by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone. I brought statements about parts per million of CO2, mass extinction, melting ice, climate-related deaths, and the decline of large mammals. I selected 12 fact-based statements to read. One person read a statement, and then we sat in silence as though we were hearing a bell toll, and then the next person read. The silence after the readings was profound: the impact of global climate change was in the room with us. We then went on to look at the equally significant potential for Active Hope.

The second QEW workshop was led by Barbara Letsch, based on the book High Tide On Main Street by John Englander. With facts and maps, Barbara brought home the potential sea level rise in South Florida with a presentation that was both precise and very alarming.
Our Yearly Meeting welcomed David Millar, a QEW Friend from Canada. In addition to many conversations with Florida Friends, David led a workshop based on Friend’s testimonies and the Kabarak Call for Peace and Eco justice. He encouraged people to talk to one another about their passions and leadings. By the end of the workshop there was tremendous energy and hope in the room. We hope to continue to discuss our leadings with Friends across the continent in the Circles of Discernment (See BeFriending Creation, May-June 2013, p. 5).

There were many other Earth-focused workshops, such as the scriptural basis for care for the Earth, drawing in nature, sustainable living from the Coalition for Peace and Justice, and the sacredness of nature as seen through photographs of wild places in Florida. Our daily worship sharing offered Earthcare queries for our focus. Our Earthcare Committee began the yearlong process of seasoning and approving a minute so that SEYM will speak with one voice about our concern for Earth and our commitments to protect her.

Our QEW Vision and Witness Statement says, "We work to integrate into the beliefs and practices of the Religious Society of Friends the Truth that God’s Creation is to be respected, protected and held in reverence in its own right . . ." At this Gathering, Southeastern Yearly meeting showed its awareness and commitment to care for our Earth.
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