



Quaker United Nations Office
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CALL to CONSCIENCE

Quaker experiences in facing the challenge of climate change

QUNO and Climate Change

The Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) views anthropogenic (due to human activities) climate change as a symptom of a greater challenge: how to live sustainably and justly on this Earth. In our work, we approach climate change as a peace and justice concern.

We recognize current and unprecedented rates of greenhouse gas emissions, if left unchecked, will likely lead to global mean temperature rises of extreme detriment to human beings. We recognize the connections between anthropogenic climate change and global economic injustice, unprecedented levels of consumption, and assumptions of unlimited economic growth on a planet with limited natural resources.

We recognize that catastrophic anthropogenic climate change is not inevitable if we, the family of humanity, choose to act now.

We focus on the impact of climate change on people's lives. We seek to highlight these impacts in the areas of peacebuilding and the prevention of violent conflict, food & sustainability, and human rights. We seek to support international efforts which uphold the rights and dignity of human beings, and which aim to create a fair, sufficient and effective international climate change agreement.

We are supported by Quaker communities who see this challenge as a call to conscience, recognizing a personal and collective responsibility to ensure the poorest and most vulnerable peoples now, and all our future generations, do not suffer as a consequence of our actions.

Foreword

QUNO Geneva has created this publication as a form of witness in facing anthropogenic climate change through love and action, rather than fear. The people portrayed span our worldwide Quaker community, from Africa to Europe, Asia Pacific to the Americas.

We asked interviewees to talk to us about what inspires, motivates and sustains them in their engagement. Collecting their stories has been a moving and inspiring experience. Our challenge has been deciding what to leave out, rather than finding good material to include. Some interviewees have been active on this concern for decades; for others the journey is more recent. Some focus on needs within their own lives and communities, others on national and international efforts. We've been surprised and delighted to hear about their lives, the innovative and diverse ways they are engaging their communities, and the depth of passion, insight and commitment they reveal.

We find similar inspiring stories and insights across all faith communities. We offer this publication as an encouragement for all readers who seek to face the challenge of climate change, and to leave a legacy of love and action for their children, and all young and future generations.



Laurie Michaelis
Writer and Interviewer



Lindsey Fielder Cook
Representative, Climate Change

Benjamin Köhler

Germany



Benjamin planned a career in international development, and as a student he spent time in Sudan working with street children. There he began to make the link between industrialized countries' greenhouse gas emissions, climate change, desertification and people being unable to feed themselves. "Climate change is one of the main issues humanity must deal with. It will influence all parts of our lives. It's not possible for everybody to have the way of life we do in industrialized countries, this overconsumption, travelling around all the time."

"Everybody should have the same possibilities and same rights. When just a few people abuse their natural resources we actually do not give these possibilities to other people. If everybody did this, our resources on the planet would be gone within just a few decades. I started thinking, 'Why do we always have to try to "develop" other

countries instead of changing our own societies?' We have to rethink our way of life to a more simple one where we don't overuse natural resources."

On his return to Germany, Benjamin shifted his studies from development politics to focus on energy and environmental management in industrial countries. He started to make changes in his own life. "First I did easy things like only buying green electricity and trying to avoid flying. I take trains and buses and in everyday life I only use a bike. As much as possible I stick to regional and organic foods." This kind of action seems much easier to Benjamin than large scale political change.

"Sometimes," he said, "you have to avoid following the daily news or the international negotiations because it gives you the feeling nothing is changing. It's all about economic growth and nothing else. It's more

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motivating when you focus on changes you really can influence and see in your community, your city, your family.”

Benjamin talks a lot about personal relationships and working through choices with friends and family.

“Sometimes it’s a big challenge not to lose motivation, but it helps when you have friends around you interested in similar issues. It’s a long process, small steps. Friends start to buy organic. They start to change their behaviour towards a more sustainable way of living. I think almost all now have a green electricity contract. It brings back hope, the feeling that it’s not worthless what you’re doing.” He now works at a solar research institute on energy system transition, which he describes as, “practical problems people face in their lives – energy supply, buildings, water, food. I don’t have the feeling that these topics are really on top of the agenda— not in Europe, not in Germany. You

have the feeling that it’s not the political will to bring renewables forward. The situation is so difficult that 50% of solar companies in Germany are bankrupt or close to bankruptcy.”

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Kate Davies

United States



Kate's involvement in movements for social change started early, when her mother took her on antinuclear marches in her pushchair. "When I was eight years old my father died and my mother was diagnosed with cancer. Although my physical needs were taken care of by family friends, I had no emotional support. The one thing my mother did was, she bought me a pony. I would ride in the English countryside for hours on end. Just being in nature nurtured and sustained me at a time when I was in severe emotional distress. Since that time, I have known that my life's work was to protect life on Earth."

"Today," she says, "I teach graduate programmes in leadership and change, to prepare students to help build a just, sustainable and peaceful world wherever they are, working for Boeing or Microsoft, or as social activists. For two years I have been working with

others to create safe spaces for people to talk about how the climate crisis makes them feel. We rarely talk about how we feel about climate disruption because in our society, it's just not considered the polite thing to do. Right now, we are working primarily with climate activists, although we want to broaden our reach to include anyone concerned about this issue. It's by talking about how we feel, seeing that we're all in this together and we're all scared, that we can find some strength and work more closely together."

"Part of our work is to respond to the climate crisis in our individual lifestyles. I'm a vegetarian for example, I limit my car use and use the bus whenever I can. We've taken care of energy efficiency in our home. But that still feels vastly inadequate and we also need to look at how society is responding at a collective level."

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“The decisions we make today will ripple forward and affect future generations in a way that decisions that previous generations made did not. How can we be the best guardians for future generations that we can possibly be? This is the work we are charged to do.”

because of the results we want to achieve. As activists, we often think we've got to stop climate disruption, pollution or poverty. And when we aren't successful, we can easily become frustrated, disappointed, or cynical. But there are other motivations for action. For instance, we can choose to act simply because it is the caring, ethical thing to do, regardless of whether we are successful. We just do it because it is the right thing to do. If we act on this motivation, I think we are more likely to be able to sustain our work over the long haul, retain our mental health and we are less likely to burn out.”

“A big question I'm wrestling with is, 'How do we have hope in these times?' I think part of the answer to this question is to face our painful and difficult feelings about what humankind is doing to the Earth, seeing that they come from love, and then using our love as the motivation.”

“We are the most powerful generation that has ever lived on the earth. The decisions we make today will ripple forward and affect future generations in a way that decisions that previous generations made did not. How can we be the best guardians for future generations that we can possibly be? This is the work we are charged to do.”

Boni Quirog *Philippines*



As a student, Boni was part of the liberation movement in the Marcos years in the Philippines. “My classmates were beginning to disappear, summarily executed by we didn’t know who. So we were moving from Liberation Theology into discernment about nonviolence. I began to study Quakerism and Gandhi. It dawned on me that nonviolence is not just about not killing fellow human beings. It has to involve the totality of nature and society. That was how we slowly moved into environmentalism.”

“Our volunteer organization,” Boni explained, “started in 1996 advocating environmental projects, vegetarianism, tree planting, coastal clean-up and sustainable agriculture. It was not difficult to encourage people to use, for example, local seed varieties. Organic and environment friendly practices were in our original culture, before the new seed varieties that need more

chemicals. We were reminding people that their ancestors used to farm this way.”

“I was in Japan in May 1998 to February 1999, sent by our government to study environmental practices in Wakayama. I saw how their original practices were similar to ours, how they’re also in communion with nature—the way they farm, the way they built their houses. Also, they had the same problem of commercial practices destroying their lifestyle. I saw how Lake Biwa, the source of drinking water in Kyoto, was polluted by products of consumerism much like what’s happening in the Philippines. So I felt like, it’s a common experience of humanity wherever you go.”

In 2010, Boni visited the annual gathering of Australian Quakers. There he was inspired by a video on peak oil. “After that we made brochures for people about how to be prepared when disaster

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comes as a result of climate change.” Then in 2013, Boni’s home island of Bohol was hit by a magnitude 7.2 earthquake. Three weeks later Typhoon Haiyan was particularly destructive in the neighbouring island, Leyte. “Of course it was natural for us to help the others but we were in a situation of, ‘How can we help them now that we are still recovering?’”

Boni saw these disasters bring out the best in people. Relief workers from many faiths and nations worked together, transcending political conflicts. “They were fellow human beings helping us. So it was really a moving thing. What if we were always like this, helping each other? Then maybe there’ll be no wars because in a very difficult situation we’re just the same. There’s been a change in motivation,” he said, “why we want to do something about this huge issue of climate change. When we started, it was part of our spiritual practices. It

became more of, ‘Wow! This is about survival already. This is about life and death.’ So this is a bit of urgency added to the inspiration of it being part of your lifestyle.”

“We planted the first peace pole at the Chocolate Hills in Bohol on January 1, 2000. The Chocolate Hills are the top tourist destination in our province. When you go there, it’s like communing with nature. So we planted the peace pole to inspire people to advocate for peace and nature. My son was 10 years old then and he was there with us. Last year, April 2013, it was my son who led a group of youth volunteers to plant the second peace pole in the province.”

Kees Nieuwerth

Netherlands



Kees has worked as a nature conservation planner in the Netherlands, and on urban and rural development in several African countries. He traces his passion for environmental issues to his childhood. “As a boy I asked my father ‘Are there birds and butterflies in heaven?’ He said: ‘No, I do not think so.’ I responded: ‘Then I do not want to go there!’”

“A few years after I was born,” Kees says, “the Netherlands was struck by an immense flood. Lots of people and animals died in the aftermath. The Netherlands may have the technological capacity to protect itself from another such flood, although I doubt technology will protect us from the sea level rise predicted when climate change is not combated! Even then, nations such as Bangladesh or islands in the Pacific do not have the Netherlands’ resources.”

Kees sees a close connection among Quaker concerns for truth, peace, equality, simplicity and sustainability. From the 1990’s he developed a concern about the ways unsustainable development and competition for scarce resources can contribute to armed conflict. “So my activities shifted to advocating sustainable development, amongst Friends and amongst churches.”

“I joined an ecumenical working group on ecology and economy which entered into dialogue with the European Institutions on EU policies. Power has shifted to impersonal global markets, international financial institutions and transnational corporations. It tends to increase inequalities within and between nations. It could be considered a new form of domination which continues five hundred years of colonialist oppression. Whilst the EU population is only seven percent of the world population we are using more than seventeen percent of its

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natural resources. Since this is a system of our own making, transformation is not only possible, but indispensable. Transnational companies need to be controlled by global institutions. A global governance is needed, integrating the social and environmental dimensions fully into economic policies.”

While Kees talks about the need for transformative leadership at the global level, he also finds satisfaction in doing as much as possible to green his own life and household. “I use the excellent public transport system in the Netherlands. However, when travelling to international gatherings (to advocate sustainability and peace), I cannot but travel by air. I compensate the carbon dioxide emissions by planting trees in Kenya through a project I helped initiate, Trees for Africa. At home we use solar energy to heat water and generate some of our electricity, installed a heat recovery unit in the kitchen and

bathroom, mainly eat biological food, some of which we produce in our own garden.”

Kees finds climate change skepticism a continuing challenge in his work to engage others on peace and sustainability. But he takes encouragement from seeing these being better connected in Quaker thinking, and taken up in the work programme of the World Council of Churches. And “being blessed with grandchildren I see that my children share these concerns.”

Sandy Robson

United States



Sandy works for Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), a Quaker peace and justice advocacy organization engaging the US Federal government. “I first heard about climate change when I was about eight. I read an article about it and felt a sense of terror that hasn’t exactly left since. I’m almost of the age where I would start thinking about having kids. Do I want to bring a child into a world where I am afraid they would fall victim to something awful?”

“Last year FCNL hosted a climate lobby day for faith leaders. I was inspired by all those individuals that had an open, welcoming, empowering sort of attitude rather than doom and gloom. They just had this way about them: ‘this is the way forward, come on, let’s do it!’ I aspire to have that attitude.”

“When I was in college I helped re-establish a local community bike shop and started a youth programme to help

young people to fix up used bikes. Due to the hard work of other people since, it’s a very successful programme that has brought a lot of people together and of course has prevented a lot of people from using cars because they’re on cheap bikes that they can afford. I feel like we got something going that is really lasting and worthwhile and has built a lot of connections.”

“I’m a songwriter,” Sandy added, “and I’m working on an album right now about how our economic system affects the people and places we hold dear. A number of the songs have to do with climate change. Whenever I talk about it as a songwriter it feels like I’m throwing a match into the room and seeing if there’s any gasoline there. I’ve started to play bluegrass festivals, and a lot of the people there have more conservative perspectives than my own. I look at that as an opportunity to share a story that might change the way somebody thinks

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about climate change. But if I cross that line too much and I am just a social justice performer, I won't get invited back. That's the frontier, where people's minds need to change. Our big challenge is really how we appeal to the hearts of people who feel differently about climate change. A lot of what is needed is people building bridges and finding ways emotionally to appeal to people, others at the grassroots level as well.”

“A challenge of this size requires us to do things beyond what is in our current imagination, things that appear impractical. While it's terrifying and sad it's also exciting as an opportunity to reinvent ourselves, to build alliances with people we don't normally work with and we don't normally agree with and to try and make sure all the different voices are at the table. My biggest hope for the climate movement is that it can serve to unite people from all walks of life and from all over the world.”

“I have come to recognize,” she concluded, “that all kinds of activism are really important. Just because I haven't chained myself to a pipeline doesn't mean I'm not contributing. We need lots of different approaches; we can't all do everything. I think a community is really important in any kind of activism. That is what we have at FCNL and we're really fortunate.”

Gill Westcott *United Kingdom*



Gill brought her children up on a smallholding in Devon. “A beautiful, very sociable, rather basic environment... part of an effort to live sustainably. That was quite satisfying because we could welcome other people into this convivial lifestyle, which didn’t use a lot of energy, and produced lovely food, little cheeses and yoghurts and things which I spent a decade selling in Barnstaple market place. So I think that choosing one’s lifestyle to be low carbon can also be a very rewarding and sociable process.”

She invited some friends to watch a video about climate disruption. “We talked about how we felt, which led to setting up a climate action group.” Gill has since been involved in practical climate responses in her local and regional communities, and is engaged in the Transition Movement as well as Quaker sustainability networks. She did a PhD on climate denial, mostly

as an opportunity for conversations with people in local government about their climate policies. “I did learn a huge amount. I feel a lot more sympathy for people in that setting, who care about climate change but are facing budget cuts. It’s like the national setup in miniature and it’s like the way individuals often deal with climate change. They hive it off to a particular department and the heavy-hitting departments like treasury and planning are not engaged. Budgetary considerations take precedence over considerations about the future. All the financial incentives are to accept development which is far from sustainable.”

Gill is on the guiding committee for a Quaker programme on economics, sustainability and peace. Their projects include promoting ethical trade and investment, and disinvestment in fossil fuels. “Some of the work has to be about

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learning different ways of organising. That’s not just about climate change, that’s about empowering people in general but it does impinge on climate and energy policy. Starting democratic economic enterprises, I think, is a very important ingredient in taking control over our lives. I would like an economic system where money creation is under democratic control; a more localized, resilient economy where there are local banks serving local needs; we have fewer things, more time with family and friends.”

Gill advocates a rising carbon tax levied on the carbon content of goods and services, which could replace value added tax. “It would lead to a more stable and predictable price for carbon emitted than the trading mechanisms we have now. The Emission Trading Scheme has been sabotaged by big energy interests and the carbon price is far too low.”

“Economic issues are made impenetrable by jargon. It is vital to understand these options as citizens, to enable ordinary people to speak out for what they want and take action for the policies which will bring it about.”

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Jacob Masinde Kenya



Jacob is passionate about nature, about maintaining God’s creation, and about improving the living standard of people in his community. In particular, he is concerned about the effects of climate change on agricultural yields, food security and access to food. “I saw the environment being destroyed. There was a difference in the rain patterns. Most rivers were drying up, areas where we had a lot of forests, they are not there and also people do not have enough firewood for cooking. So something had happened, there is a change in the climate and I started looking at the causes, and I found that the main cause is the cutting down of trees.”

“In my experience, most people are not aware of climate change. So I am just trying to introduce this topic and work with them right now. My experience is that climate change has really affected the people in my area and the country

at large.” Jacob has established seven tree nurseries in Bungoma County, near the Ugandan border in Western Kenya. He grows seedlings for farmers and communities to plant out. The county government has provided some land for the tree nurseries, but he has gotten the project off the ground with no institutional assistance. “I’m a volunteer trying to assist the groups to understand climate change. I use my own resources and a few friends also donate, especially those who are in my environmental group.”

Awareness is a central purpose and also a challenge for this work. “People had not realized the problems of climate change. Some people have a negative attitude towards management of the environment. I think there is an opportunity to make an impact, especially in the area where people are not aware of climate change.”

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The project has many benefits, including reducing air pollution, conserving soil and water, and improving food security. “There is a strong demand for trees by farmers, who are many. There are insufficient seedlings to plant in the institutions. Starting a project needs a lot of mobilization, a lot of community involvement and so on. Poor management of trees is a problem when they have been planted out. So the main challenge is capacity building; I have not yet got enough manpower and training on climate change.”

“There should be more co-operation and networking among groups internationally to understand climate change. We work closely with the county government and we are working with other non-governmental organizations, so we can together make an impact. If I could get assistance the project would go very fast.”

Rachel Howell

United Kingdom



Rachel's particular approach to climate change has roots in her Catholic upbringing, "Taking part in Family Fast Days when you'd put money in a box for poor children. It was charity but not completely condescending...

And a sense that living simply was good: that was the first thing I felt, from a very early age, probably because we didn't have a lot of money and my mum was naturally very frugal."

"I went to university and started learning about justice, unfair trade, arms trading. For a long time that was my focus: peace and justice. So I got into living in community with people who were marginalized." Rachel began to see the deep connections between climate change, injustice and conflict. "Living with asylum seekers," she explained, "I could see that climate change was going to create more refugees. Working with women involved in prostitution I learned how conflict creates trafficking

and sexual abuse. I realized that climate change is not just an environmental issue. It's an issue that affects everything. No other problem has the same sort of time limit for solving it. Climate change feels like a ticking bomb."

Rachel did a doctorate and is researching ways to encourage and enable people to act on climate change. "I'm hoping I can teach about climate change in a way that's transformative; it's not about doom, gloom and sacrifice, but about more positive visions. That's also where I struggle. My fear is that we're going to go through something awful. My hope is that we'll come out the other side a more advanced species."

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something, but not anything that affects me.’ A lot does rest on the negotiators and I sympathize with that, but they’ve got to lead. This is ultimately going to be much more important than people who had to negotiate in great wars.”

“Originally,” Rachel says, “I saw climate change as an overwhelming problem. Now I’ve picked a part of it to look at and pushed my nose so close that I only see bits of the problem, so it doesn’t overwhelm me so much. I think we have to choose a bit to focus on.”

“In my life the main thing I’ve done is give up flying. I see it as a positive thing, enjoying holidays in Britain. I do other things which mean I have a low carbon life but they’re not really in response to climate change—they’re things I would do anyway, like living with other people and being vegetarian. I still have baths—that’s my high carbon treat.”

“What’s felt good for me is to discover that on the far side of difficult decisions, it gets easier. I made a very distinct, strong commitment to stop flying. And that was hard to think about, possibly never seeing certain friends again. But now it feels very easy. While you’re trying to make the decision, it’s really difficult but it gets easier.”

Per Ingvar Haukeland *Norway*



Childhood experiences, roaming and playing in nature, gave Per Ingvar his initial commitment for living sustainably. “My brother especially helped open my eyes to the community of all life. What you gain through these deeper experiences is a force within: a force of love, for the planet, for life, for our communities and fellow beings. That’s the constant driving force to continue finding solutions in day to day life. When you broaden your care for other living beings you don’t narrow the care for human beings. Care is not a container that gets full and then stops. We need to widen our care to the people suffering in the world, to poverty and peace and human rights, social rights and so on.”

Per Ingvar has been inspired by sustainability movements around the world – bioregionalism which he encountered while studying in the United States, Transition Towns in

Britain. “My first and overall focus is try to have this response rooted in my own life.” At one point he and his family formed a community on a farm with five other families. “We had our own currency, our own system of exchanging goods. We had animals, gardening, forestry and so on. But it became too isolated when the children got older. We had to drive them around, there were lots of complications. Plus we want to be within society; we didn’t want people to see us as a sect. So we moved into a small town. I work at Telemark research institute and I teach at the college here. I teach eco-philosophy and entrepreneurship. I try to bring a deeper approach to development which looks at a broader set of values including that which is ecological, social, cultural and spiritual.”

Per Ingvar speaks of seeking maturity in his climate engagement, understanding himself as a consumer. “We live in a

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culture of consumer addiction, trapped into ways of consuming related to the business world, the oil industry, the kind of production and consumption that is causing the problem. So I spent the last three years working with former drug addicts in a rehabilitation centre to learn how to grapple with addiction.”

“As a family we’re conscious of what we consume and how we travel. We need a car; we live on the outskirts, but eighty percent of the need for a car is in nearby areas so we bought an electric car. That has been fantastic, but I had to make sure it was charged by renewable energy. When I called the company and asked them about this they said, ‘We never heard a question like that before. We can’t guarantee it’s from renewable sources.’ So I had to change to a company that could guarantee it.”

“I live in complicated times,” he said, “and my thoughts can be complicated too: what to do about it and all that.

My family, friends and neighbours are critically important to overcome these challenges. Perhaps we need an element of forgiveness or grieving for the past in order to leave it behind, as well as grappling with our own addictions. I find that a lot of people, when they open their eyes to the situation, become sad about the way they have led their lives, which I want to take seriously.”

Julie & Andrew Taylor-Browne *United Kingdom*



Julie and Andrew live on a 25 hectare farm in Cornwall, surrounded by animals including alpacas, llamas, sheep, goats, pigs, hens, horses and mules – as well as dogs and cats. Julie traces her environmental concern back to school biology lessons. “We saw an awful lot of where pollution came from and waste. I remember being absolutely shocked and appalled. I couldn’t believe humans could be so wasteful and destructive. I got to travel a bit as I got older and saw our incredibly beautiful planet and what we’re doing to it.”

“I was always interested in the link between intensive farming, cruelty to animals and climate change. I absolutely cannot see why people eat so much meat and why it needs to involve so much suffering to animals. We milk our own goats and make cheese. We have ex-battery hens for eggs. We’re vegetarians because we believe that’s best for the climate.”

“Andrew’s planted about 20,000 trees since we’ve been here and we harvest them for fuel. We have a short-rotation coppice woodland. We have a biochar maker to sequester carbon. We have polytunnels, vegetable beds, and an orchard. Each year we do one big thing, so the wood burning Rayburn (cooker) was one year, the wind turbine another. This year it’s feeding our animals. Andrew has been planting fodder trees rather than depending on imported soya. It’s not just terribly functional, it is terribly beautiful.”

“Every year we think, is this going to be the year we stop using the car, is this the year we say we’re never going to fly anywhere? You can feel guilty about not doing more. It has been quite soul destroying over the years. You meet so many people and you talk about climate change and they just blank you or want to argue.”

“Whatever we can do to help future generations feels really important. It feels like we’ve got great gratitude for what we’ve got and we’d love to just pass on whatever we could. Now we have quite a lot of hope.”

One recent project is the Quaker Community Farm – local Quakers spend time at the farm helping with the work, learning or just being. “We’ve been here about 15 years and we’ve tried various sorts of community but it’s difficult to find people with similar values. When we decided to do the Quaker Community Farm our vision was that everybody would be welcome and everybody would be able to contribute. So far that does seem to be working. Our last meeting the youngest was three and the oldest was 83. They’ll come here, they’ll do a bit of work, they’ll be very tired, they’ll sit in the garden and chat and laugh all afternoon. There’s something healing going on here. People sense that and if they’re still and quiet, they pick it up.”

“There’s something that’s changed over the last three or four years which is about gratitude for what is, rather than a desperation of, ‘we must change the

world.’ Whatever we can do to help future generations feels really important. It feels like we’ve got great gratitude for what we’ve got and we’d love to just pass on whatever we could. Now we have quite a lot of hope.”

Denise Gabuzda

Ireland



Denise is an astrophysicist at University College, Cork. “I have a 15 minute presentation about climate change that I give students with the hope of engaging them in some discussions, including why should we care and why is this an ethical issue? It’s a very emotional experience, talking to students about something I care passionately about.

But I need to keep that under control to engage with people. I’ve been especially encouraged by young people being open to the idea that the science is firm. But it’s not just a scientific issue, it’s also an ethical issue and maybe a spiritual issue as well.”

“People are much more likely,” she says, “to react positively to something they see as a spiritual issue rather than a scientific one. The most fundamental issue isn’t trying to convince people that climate change is happening. I think the most important thing is to engage with people about their relationship with each other

and the Earth. Climate change connects with how people live, how they live in communities. It connects with how much leisure time we have. Do we have time to strengthen relationships with each other? I feel people work far too hard. I think they’re meant to have much more time to just enjoy life.”

“Climate change is symptomatic of a whole attitude towards life, of modern culture and society being out of balance in a way that makes people less happy than they could be. I have a vision of being able to somehow help things get back into balance—with ourselves, with each other, with nature. My husband and I have very much been in unity. I’ve tried to be more aware of eating local produce, I walk to work so that’s not such a major thing. But in my field I’m expected to travel around the globe to conferences. I haven’t got to the point of saying no, but I have been noticing myself moving along the scale.”

“The most fundamental issue isn’t trying to convince people that climate change is happening. I think the most important thing is to engage with people about their relationship with each other and the Earth.”

“I was invited to a colloquium in Bonn, and we decided to go. We added a little bit of holiday. We flew over to London and then got on the train and let that be part of the holiday. It does feel good when you’ve had a change you wanted to make and you’ve made it, but it can be difficult when you realize there’s an awful lot yet that needs to be done.”

“I believe,” she explained, “that once we become convinced that there is that of God in every living thing and that our way of life needs to change, it will become effortless. What I need really is spiritual support from my friends to help me get far enough along my journey, to the point where I believe so firmly that this needs to be done that it will become effortless.”

“I think part of what we can do when we engage with people and discuss with them is just try to give them encouragement. They shouldn’t feel

guilty about the state that we’ve gotten in. We all did it together and if they have difficulty changing the way they eat or the way they travel it’s very natural. Just give them encouragement to stick with it and celebrate the progress when it happens.”

Tasha Harty

Ireland



Tasha has always been passionate about conservation and aware of the precarious situation the world is in. “That’s come down to me through my family,” she explained. “We had famine in the 19th century in Ireland; the stories were horrendous. One doesn’t want famine anywhere in the world but we already have it. I’ve got sons and daughters and two granddaughters. I care for humanity as well as for myself, my family and my neighbours. And also for God’s creation.”

Tasha lives in a beautiful spot on the wilder side of Cork Harbour in southern Ireland. “Occasionally the water from the high tide comes across the road to visit us. And over the last winter there’s been very low depressions. One of our neighbours who’s been here all his life says the tides are higher than they’ve ever been before.”

Tasha has campaigned on local green issues since the 1980s. “I was involved in campaigns to try to get better licences for an incinerator and chemical factories that were based across the harbour looking directly at us. Then in 1993 I organized a conference on wetlands for treating wastewater with a group of mothers from our local primary school.”

“I think climate concerns are tied up with everything. Because everything begins to fall asunder if the predicted results of climate change do happen. And they already are happening. If you didn’t get involved and start doing something constructive, you’d despair. The only sensible thing is to try and live with less of a carbon footprint. We live fairly lightly in that we don’t burn any oil or gas. We have woodstoves and a wood burning cooker. I bought an electric bicycle.”

“I’ve got sons and daughters and two granddaughters. I care for humanity as well as for myself, my family and my neighbours. And also for God’s creation.”

One of Tasha’s passions is using biochar as a soil improver in her garden and a way of sequestering carbon. “I grow some vegetables and sell them locally. I don’t sell many but it does mean people aren’t buying them in the supermarket, imported from all over the world. And my ones, particularly the days I deliver them by bike, have a much lower carbon footprint.”

“Sometimes,” she added, “I think little has changed as a result of my actions. I know there are a lot of people out of work; climate change is not an immediate thing for them. But when you mention global warming people always know what you’re talking about. They may not be taking a whole pile of notice but they are beginning to be aware. But when you look at a lot of our people in authority they seem to have other issues on their mind.”

“I think one of the biggest challenges for anyone interested in environment is that other people don’t seem to understand where you’re coming from, and don’t give it the priority you would. It takes a lot of patience and a lot of skill not to alienate them because you’re so enthusiastic. You have to be very gentle, otherwise you’ll put them off. I’ve found support in the groups I’ve been involved with... wonderful people. And a buddy is always a wonderful thing. We need everyone to take climate change seriously, and to realize that jobs and GDPs are all secondary. Following that, what is needed is a good plan for climate mitigation, with legislation and commitment at all levels.”

Phillip Toyne

Australia



Phillip is supporting Aboriginal groups in northern Australia to re-establish traditional practices of ‘patch burning’ across the savannah. “With cattle ranching and with government and church missions, Aboriginal people were drawn off their land and dissuaded from traditional patterns of sustenance. These had involved going in after the wet season and patch-burning so they’d have ease of access across the grassy woodlands. They would be able to attract their preferred animals and make them easier to hunt. Without these practices,” he explained, “fires happen later in the dry season. With lower moisture levels and no fire breaks, they develop into devastating wildfires, which result in higher carbon emissions and reduced biodiversity.”

“The key to support for traditional practices is the ability to trade carbon credits. It’s provided aboriginal communities with employment. They

can separate themselves from dependency on government because they can make commercial deals with carbon trading. It provides access to country for old people who yearn to go back and for young people who need to learn. I’ve also seen great support through bureaucrats and government ministers who are enthused and excited about the prospects.”

This project brings together the major concerns of Phillip’s working life: “I was a student during the Vietnam War years which politicized many young people in Australia. I was an attorney for aboriginal groups in the Seventies and Eighties. After nearly two decades I wanted new direction and inspiration; working for the Australian Conservation Foundation was a major shift and climate change was a major focus there. I became deputy secretary in the Federal Department of the Environment, and represented Australia as head of delegations to the climate change talks.”

“I was seeing the science in the mid-Eighties, realising climate change was something we had to address on a highly efficient basis if we were to avoid global catastrophe. All I’ve seen since is an ongoing underestimation of the urgency.”

“When an opportunity came to do things that combined the aboriginal interest and climate change,” he added, “it was a no-brainer. It’s something I want to see really thriving before I finally retire. This may be the last project I embark upon but it’s a deeply satisfying one. Climate change pervades just about everything—the way we live our lives, the way the global communities are likely to be affected by it. I was seeing the science in the mid-Eighties, realising climate change was something we had to address on a highly efficient basis if we were to avoid global catastrophe. All I’ve seen since is an ongoing underestimation of the urgency.”

“There was a higher level of awareness going into the 1990s. It’s been allowed to fall away, so I think one of the challenges has been to keep climate change up in front of the community as an issue of critical importance. We’ve seen climate change shunted backwards and forwards

as a political football, with both sides recoiling from decisive action because they think they’ll lose community support. I think it’s a matter of getting governments to unite and coalesce around a long term set of actions.”

Phillip has also been working with Quakers in Australia to establish their Earthcare commitment. “One of the main drivers is a united view that climate change will affect us all, and will affect future generations of our own families but also the world at large. Other Quakers are into permaculture, they’re into their own projects which offer them a great deal of satisfaction as well. I think it’s important that everybody finds their own path.”

Eileen Flanagan

United States



Eileen volunteers with Earth Quaker Action Team (EQAT), using nonviolent direct action to address climate change. EQAT’s first campaign is to get PNC Bank, which has Quaker roots, to stop financing mountaintop removal coal mining. They use tactics such as holding Quaker silent worship at shareholder’s meetings or in bank lobbies. Once they had sixteen actions in one day. “One group,” she explained, “was doing civil disobedience, which meant they didn’t leave when asked by police. The rest of us were standing around singing as they were put in the police vans. It was a joyous moment, being proud of these Friends standing for their convictions.” She had been involved in anti-war and anti-racist activism before but, she said, “climate change encompasses those concerns as well.”

Eileen’s family survived the Irish potato famine. “My grandmother came from

a village that was wiped off the map. Here, I’m the privileged person—a white North American who has never not had enough food. I have a fifteen-year-old. I don’t have the imagination to know what his life is going to be like when he is fifty. He has more buffers than most people in the world, and my daughter too, because of where they live, the economic resources they have.”

Eileen talks about engaging positively, practicing the Quaker call to seek that of God in everyone. “With PNC we started by meeting their regional head of Philadelphia area. We don’t want to demonize them but we want to make clear that individuals are making decisions that are harming communities. One of the big barriers to my acting before,” she said, “was my sense of despair and disempowerment. We insulated our house, we turn off lights when we leave the room, all that easy stuff. But I would find it hard to be

“I think the more that we can feel part of something larger than ourselves the easier it is to act with hope and not be stuck in despair.”

motivated to hang my laundry on the line when it's so easy to throw it in the dryer. I'm a failed vegetarian many times over.”

“I have gotten stronger in making lifestyle changes since getting involved with nonviolent direct action. I'm for real a vegetarian now. I'm much more likely to hang the clothes on the line because I'm not in despair any more. I tried going without a car, and it was just way too hard. Maybe when my kids are grown and gone. I've accepted I cannot live perfectly in this society. Feeling guilty is not actually helpful. What I can do is try to figure out what's most effective in terms of my lifestyle and my action. It's a challenge to figure out the right balance of care for my family while doing work that can be really quite consuming.”

“I've felt a lot of love and support from Friends,” she added. “When I've

committed civil disobedience, there were many people holding me in prayer. There are other people who've given financial contributions and a few who have shown up as participants in our actions. One of the things that gives me hope is hearing other people's stories. And it's been great to connect with people in other places, to feel that we really are part of a global movement around climate change. I think the more that we can feel part of something larger than ourselves the easier it is to act with hope and not be stuck in despair.”

Gelas Muse Simiyu

Kenya



Climate change became real for Gelas when a spring in his community dried up. “You could see people hanging there with containers expecting a drop of water, but there was no drop. Seasons are changing. We used to plant crops like sorghum and finger millet in February and then in May we had food. But at the moment the rain is so scarce that we no longer grow those crops at the expected time. So come May there is starvation. The other thing is that we have had a lot of unusual floods. We are bordering a very light river, River Nzoia, which floods every year. Communities in the flood plain migrate, lose property such as livestock, and even their homesteads. Something strange is happening.”

“The area where I carry out my research work,” Gelas explained, “has no piped water. Rivers are polluted. Springs, most of them not protected, are also contaminated. Then those that are

protected, the flow is not continuous, they dry up during the dry season. And some of these dry spells are very much extended, so that the community suffers.”

“The community relies on rain-fed agriculture, and when rain is scarce the harvest is poor. So they are subjected to starvation every year. This problem is compounded by abject poverty. They can’t take their children to school because they can’t mobilize resources because if the crop has failed they have no means. They are struggling to provide food on the table, not to do anything else. So that abject poverty to me is a real challenge.”

“Mainly I combine my research work with the community. I do research with the community and in the process I help them. I have been addressing groundwater, particularly spring water. I undertake the protection of a

“You could see people hanging there with containers expecting a drop of water, but there was no drop. Seasons are changing.”

spring, so that I see the impact of that protection, whether it will improve the quality and quantity of the water. When I take the science bit I will have left behind a spring for the community. A spring that has a catchment that is protected, and a reservoir from which a pipe lets water flow out, retains more water, so that during the drought periods the community has clean water to access.”

“When we protect a spring, the water clears and can be used for domestic use, so it reduces the distance of the women and children looking for water. This saves time for doing other activities, like working on farms. Children remain at home and complete school assignments. Besides, prevalence of water-borne diseases such as typhoid and dysentery are reduced. And when I see that happening and the way people are appreciating, I realize that actually I have helped.”

Gelas has been working with Quakers internationally but he particularly wants to raise awareness among all communities, all faiths, about climate change and the ways we are responsible for it. “For example raising awareness against indiscriminate felling of trees; because deforestation increases issues of climate change; and also overstocking animals leads to overgrazing, thereby degrading the environment and if the environment is degraded we cannot adapt to climate change effectively.”

Linda Whittaker

Israel and Palestine



Linda is an Israeli ecologist who got involved with climate change in the 1980s. She moved to Israel for a job researching Negev Desert vegetation, including its response to long term climatic change. She later worked for the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, developing survey and monitoring programs for areas including the Dead Sea region. “Groundwater around the Dead Sea has been dropping about one metre a year. That’s huge. Springs are drying up, vegetation is drying up, sink holes are appearing, buildings are breaking up because of the unstable ground.”

“The Middle East is the most water deficient area in world. From Turkey to Egypt, we’re in the same basket. There were major events in the past in this region probably caused by climate change. This may have caused the decline of urban life in the Middle East at the end of the Bronze Age,

and probably happened again in the Middle Ages in Egypt. It was part of a constellation of factors including mass migrations of people. It was a time of major upheaval in the Middle East, and great cities failed. The region was depopulated for centuries. That’s the kind of thing we can expect with climate change.”

“Why do I care? I have some of the skills that can address this issue, so I can be useful. I’m retired, doing archaeology now. If we knew what happened in the past it might help us anticipate the present.”

Linda talks with a mixture of frustration and respect about the way Israeli government policy has developed in response to climate change: technical fixes like desalination, and barriers to slow coastal erosion; failed attempts with publicity to get people to save water; and then much more successful financial

“Groundwater around the Dead Sea has been dropping about one metre a year. That’s huge. Springs are drying up, vegetation is drying up, sink holes are appearing, buildings are breaking up because of the unstable ground.”

incentives, with tiered water prices so that high-consuming households pay more per cubic metre. “The response to this was immediate; people started paying attention to their water meter and cutting back on what they were using.”

In the past, Linda’s work could include Israeli and Palestinian collaboration. “I got involved in three NGOs that addressed the issues of medicine, water and the environment, and these collaborations with Palestinians and later with Jordanians continued even in the worst of the first Intifada (1987-1993). The feeling of the people in these groups was that the way to make peace is to work on common problems. The combination of climate change, our increasing populations and our increasing demand for a Western style of living all put pressure on water consumption, and we were addressing it as Israelis and Palestinians side by side. We got strong support from Europe to

do this: funding and encouragement to work together. It’s something that affects the whole region so anything we learn benefits the region. Once you have some ideas about coping with the problem, the next stage is implementation; actually doing something on the ground.”

Such collaboration became far more difficult during the second intifada (2001-2003); Linda brought food and medicine to a neighboring Palestinian town while her own neighborhood experienced severe clashes.

“I’ve realized...it takes years from start to finish of getting an idea and putting it into practice; you have to learn patience. And I didn’t start off as a patient person, I must say.”

Maggie Jeffery

United Kingdom



Maggie started working on sustainability after being diagnosed with cancer. “I just had this huge compassion for my body,” she said. “It led me into much more of a grounded relationship with the Earth. I joined this sustainability group in the town after I got better, but they were project-based, raising awareness about changing lifestyle, saving energy. My interest was how people changed and were motivated.”

She now runs three projects in her local community: “I’ve got a small ‘Be the Change’ group where people share their feelings about climate change and spirituality. That’s been going about four years and there’s a strong connection between us. I facilitate a larger network focusing on whole health and wellbeing. It’s about bringing people together, mothers and grandmothers. There’s a lot of wisdom and we’re able to talk quite openly about our feelings in a safe environment.”

“My third project is called ‘Practical Happiness/Be The Change’. It operates on a casual basis in a pub in town. People discuss climate change, economic problems, and community and make connections with like-minded others. I am planning to run local workshops that enable, motivate and support personal growth and lifestyle change.”

“I’m finding it all quite empowering myself. Some of the conversations are deep and people are being quite open. My family has made quite a lot of changes to our lifestyles. We’ve put solar panels on the roof, we’ve got the house insulated as much as we can, and we grow a lot of vegetables. I do more preserving cooking, try not to waste anything. I ride my bike or walk as much as possible. I experience my local town as very settled and fairly affluent; it’s very much business as usual. There are pockets of poverty and need but my concern is about how climate change

“My concern is about how climate change will affect people emotionally and psychologically.”

will affect people emotionally and psychologically.”

“The other aspect is the young people. That’s the thing right now I’m struggling with. I’ve got two children, but very close to my daughter and her two girls. What was it the younger one said... ‘what’s going to happen when there’s water over everything nanny, where will we live?’ And that’s sad, you don’t know what to say really do you? There’s so much depression about.”

Maggie recently attended a course linked to a new movement called ‘Action for Happiness’, which seeks to apply evidence from social and psychological research for positive social change. “I think it’s going to be very important, particularly with youngsters, to help them find some hope. I find it hard to be tolerant with people who can’t understand. I know there’s a lot of overwhelm and it’s buried but I still find

the business as usual stuff quite hard to be patient with. We have an allotment. I’ll sit up there on my own and there’s just that feeling of sadness. And anger as well, huge anger. I think that drives me to do what I can with the groups because I’ve got to do something. I write little articles and stuff for local magazines. There is something, perhaps, trusting as well, that there is a reason, a plan, but that conflicts with my belief that actually mankind has to start to grow up.”

Marco Bertaglia

Italy



Marco was passionate about theatre and wanted to be an actor. In the early 1990s, he was in the midst of his literary studies when he encountered a completely different world. “I was put in touch with some missionaries and peasants from Brazil,” he explained. “It started opening my eyes to the stealing of resources from Third World countries, the despair and poverty in some countries, and the impact on the global environment of our way of life. I wanted to do something about it. I started to study forestry and environmental sciences.”

“There’s been a drive in my private and professional life to contribute something positive for the environment. I can’t say all I do is coherent with this. I’ve researched compost systems and grey-water systems. But I moved a lot around, so in my own house I’ve never yet realized any of those things. I lived a number of years without car. When I

decided I couldn’t avoid it I chose what seems the most environmental one. I believe we should buy more local and that’s something I’ve generally managed to do.”

“I tended to be the kind of noisy activist who always speaks out passionately. When I was younger I tended to think all it takes for people to be convinced is to hear me because this is so obvious. I realized many people didn’t want to hear and I came to wonder why I couldn’t make things heard.”

Marco was involved in peace activism and conflict transformation with people from the African Great Lakes region. He trained in Nonviolent Communication—a discipline focused on developing mutual empathy and compassion. “I found it had to do a lot with changing myself and my perspective of relationships. For a while I couldn’t speak the same way; I couldn’t

“Maybe I would like too much to change too quickly. I see little change as a result of my own actions. I want to do more.”

think of communication in the same manner. I came gradually to the idea that the other person whom I see as not understanding is actually not the enemy, I came to see this common humanity.”

But he still has not managed to reconcile this practice centred on empathy with the urgency of engaging people in responding to climate change.

“Even though I know the theory and sometimes it has worked, I see a lot of difficulty,” he explained. “Between 2007 and 2010 I was a contract agent in the European Commission dealing with energy and climate change. That was tremendous in a sense. I realized there were a lot of very sensible people around, even in powerful positions. There is change even though sometimes it’s cosmetic. When it’s not cosmetic and it’s serious and sincere, it’s slow. These changes are not sufficient or rapid enough if we are to believe the latest assessments of the IPCC. It’s incredibly

hard to make things change and to make the system function and evolve in a certain way. Sometimes it boils down to personalities of the people involved. It felt good to understand how it worked but it felt more painful to see that somehow in spite of all good intentions we don’t seem to be able to keep things in a good direction. Maybe I would like too much to change too quickly. I see little change as a result of my own actions. I want to do more.”

Other Quaker organizations working on related concerns:

afsc.org
eqat.org
fcnl.org
fgcquaker.org
fum.org
fwccworld.org
livingwitness.org.uk
nfpb.org.uk
qcea.org
quakerearthcare.org
quaker.org.uk
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