

Albany Friends Meeting
Witness for Planet Earth

Planet Earth is at a crossroads. As the peoples of the Earth band together to avert the crisis of global warming we have the unprecedented opportunity to develop new ways that will preserve the resources of our planet as a home for diverse ecosystems and diverse human cultures and assure an equitable and sustainable share of these resources for all of Earth's inhabitants, now and in the future. The Society of Friends is called to contribute our experience to help make this possible.

The Albany Friends Meeting has a long history of joining with others with others in the community in witnessing against war and other affronts to human dignity. Out of concern for empowering our children to work for a better earth, we hold an annual Peace Week. This program honors our heroes who have contributed to making the earth a more peaceful and healthful place for humans and other living things, and trains the children in skills for growing a peaceful and healthy world. Our children and families also participate, through the Council of Churches, in the Annual CROP Walk, to raise money for food projects, both locally and world-wide, thus contributing to solutions to what will surely become one of the most urgent consequences of global warming. The melting glaciers are already resulting in increasing shortages of both water and food that are increasingly posing a threat to world peace and human dignity.

The Meeting has formally adopted the Earth Charter which states our commitment to building a sustainable Earth and a peaceful world community where there is dignity and opportunity for all. In June, 2007, we sponsored a presentation by Robert Howell (representing New Zealand Friends and the Institute for the Future) on "A Moral Economy for Planet Earth". This book-in-progress stresses the urgent need to transform our global economy that is currently based on the continual growth in consumerism, into an economy based on human physical and spiritual needs, environmental preservation, and the stewardship and equitable sharing of the finite resources of our planet. This requires a commitment to sustainable living within the framework of a cooperative global community.

We have sought a tangible symbol of our witness for sustainable living and respect for the Earth. A current goal is to transform our beautifully historic, but old and energy inefficient, meetinghouse into an inviting space, friendly even to those extraordinarily challenged by toxic chemicals, and representing our best skills at living with a small carbon footprint in harmony with the Earth. We aspire to make this space as nearly net zero-energy and zero-waste as possible. The building would be surrounded by native plants adapted to the local environment and therefore requiring little additional water or chemical treatment, with spaces (including the front porch) adapted to informal interactions with the community.

The Trustees are currently engaged in the repair and weather-proofing of this leaky building and are considering proposals (as funding can be obtained) for replacing as many windows as possible (consistent with local codes for historic buildings) with Energy Star windows. Stimulated by the interest of our children, we have had an energy audit and have plans to replace the refrigerator with a more energy-efficient model. We routinely use compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs). Immediate plans include construction of a compost pile to involve all members of our meeting community, but especially the children, in our commitment to properly handle, and minimize, our waste stream. Longer-term goals include finding ways to use renewable energy, including solar, to meet the energy needs of the meetinghouse. The over-all goal is to generate and share ideas about how to live more lightly on the Earth.

An essential part of our commitment to Planet Earth is a commitment to all of her people to help empower them to pursue a better (and sustainable) life in healthy communities on a healthy planet. This includes universal access to clean water, sanitation, adequate diet, health care, housing, and education. Specific interests and concerns of some members of our meeting that will lead to ongoing dialogue and future projects include:

- *Management of household and municipal waste.* Local landfills (current and proposed) are sources of intense local controversy because of their negative impact on nearby human communities and on environmental ecosystems. We are in contact with community groups committed to responsible community waste management and, ultimately, to zero waste. Can we, as individual households, reduce our non-recyclable waste to zero?
- *Strengthening local agriculture.* This will help to minimize carbon emissions from food transport, and to make the food supply resilient to the potential consequences of global warming. How can we best make our diets compatible with the needs of other members of our global community?
- *Development and use of alternative energy and means of transportation.* How can we, individually and as a community, in our energy and transportation choices further the development of a livable world?
- *The still-growing human population.* This is an overwhelming issue for the integrity of our planet and its ability to sustain human life. Friends may wish to consider these issues as they plan the size of their families, and consider possibilities for adopting children who already need homes. All people worldwide must have access to a choice of safe and effective methods for family planning. How can the Society of Friends best advocate for social services to optimize the success of adoptive families?

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