

## **A Response from Irish Friends to the FWCC Global Change Consultation**

The formulation of an Irish response to the FWCC Global Change Consultation was facilitated by the EcoQuakers Ireland Committee of Ireland Yearly Meeting (IYM). EcoQuakers Ireland organised a series of discussions, which occurred at Leinster Quarterly Meeting on 29 November 2010, at Ulster QM on 19 February 2011, and at Munster QM on 6 March 2011. The participants were divided into small groups of 5-7 people, each of which discussed two of five global-change queries, indicated below, which were based on, but not identical to, the queries distributed for the FWCC Global Change Consultation. After the small-group discussion sessions, there was a period when the thoughts of each group were shared with the entire group, followed by a short period of worship sharing. This exploration of the queries demonstrated to us the wide range of concern that exists within our Yearly Meeting about global change and its consequences, but we have been helped to understand how our seeking together (with the light?) can help us all adapt our lives to meet this challenge. This document compiles and summarises the views expressed by the over 100 Friends and Attenders from across Ireland Yearly Meeting who took part in these discussions.

### *1. How has global change affected our communities and ourselves ?*

Some of the 'big issues' of our time that came up include climate change, peak oil, food security, and global population pressures. Global change has brought uncertainty and political instability to many places, including Ireland. The Irish Government's consideration of a sell-off of Irish forest land is a great worry to many. Global change has increased inequality, widening the gap between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> worlds, and also between richer and poorer within Ireland, and has led to a decrease in interdependence in our local communities. There have been visible changes in climate both locally and globally, with a feeling that the past cold winters and flooding that have been experienced in our part of the world may be associated with global climate change. We have also seen rising prices due to depletion of oil and the introduction of carbon taxes. Although globalisation has led to a rise in Fairtrade goods, it has also contributed to the collapse of local industry; in addition, the present, highly interlinked, system of financial services is having an adverse impact on farming and small traders, with the driver being consumption, rather than need.

At the same time, global change has had a number of positive effects in Ireland: critical examination of the negative consequences of globalisation has led to a rise in Farmers' Markets and a growing recognition of the value of organic, naturally grown food. Awareness has grown in many areas – of the need to recycle and reuse; of the many ways in which things we do damage the environment, such as food miles; of evidence of environmental disruption, such as natural disasters, the reduction in the bee population, and the rapid loss of plant and animal species worldwide; of political change and political unrest worldwide; of alternative sources of energy, such as solar, wind and water (tidal) energy. Coupled with awareness are recent advances in communication, making it easier to get access to news and information, and providing a means to link people around the globe. Other positive aspects of global change include increased richness in ethnic diversity and the growth of community resilience.

The internet has given access to information, but there is also the feeling that the situation is so complex that it's difficult to get full information. We need to challenge long held beliefs, and to examine our behaviour and what we do ourselves. There is a sense of urgency, that time is running out and we need to act now.

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2. *In what ways have my own activities, or those of my community, contributed to positive or adverse local and global change ?*

A big issue here is various forms of travel – the negative impact of private car use and flying on the environment and climate, and of ‘air miles’ associated with food transported from large distances. There is a general feeling that we are somehow living with ‘too much’, and that this has a negative impact on the environment (and ourselves). We need to be aware of our own contribution to the situation, and of the consequences of our own actions, in order to affect positive change.

There are a number of ways in which individuals and our communities are trying to have a positive influence, or hoping to do so in the future. There is a growing tendency to buy locally produced foods (to reduce ‘air miles’), to buy Fairtrade goods, and to recycle as much as possible. People are starting to make increased efforts to use public transportation, to carbon-offset when flying, and to look into the possibility of using solar power or other alternative forms of energy. We are starting to raise awareness of ecological issues in our Meetings, and to embark on ecologically-oriented projects, such as carrying out eco-audits of our Meeting Houses and fostering biodiversity in our Meeting House grounds.

3. *How does my relationship with God affect my responses to the changes around us ?*

We should allow our relationship with God to be manifest in everything we do, including our shopping – what we buy, where we buy it. We should try to be more spiritual in our approach to everyday life and our communities. Our actions affect others. Our awareness of the exploitation of workers and animals should lead us to buy ethically produced food and brands which support disadvantaged producers in the developing world, such as Fairtrade products, and to actively avoid unethically produced products and foodstuffs, such as ‘sweat-shop’ produced clothing or factory-farmed meat. We must respect how others live, and support minority groups in our communities. We should aim to learn greater creativity that doesn’t require spending money, and move away from the culture of shopping as the new religion.

We are experiencing a rise in ecological awareness and a greater understanding of our own role, and we must exert personal discernment in relation to action on and concern for ecologically related issues. The Quaker testimonies remind us of our responsibilities to ensure that God’s creation is allowed to flourish; the ‘green agenda’ can be viewed in this context. However, in this time of transition, the need to try to live ‘greener’ can feel like a burden, and sharing helps lessen our guilt. We should strive to use what we need and no more, and think about what we can do without. We must challenge each other and ourselves, but avoid guilt, guide each other gently, and lead by example as part of our relationship with God. There appears to be a lot of negativity in society concerning ecological issues; we hope that Quakers can provide more positive leadership through our testimony-based approach. The capacity of the living world to recover also gives us cause for hope.

4. *In what ways do I and my Friends’ meeting community bear witness to our Testimonies in our daily lives?*

We should aim to be aware of our Quaker heritage and testimonies and be prepared to speak out to others from this awareness; learn from experience, not from hearsay; and actively seek support from people of goodwill from other faith traditions and like-minded groups. We should actively advocate trying to live simply, distinguishing between our ‘needs’ and ‘wants’, reclaiming time for ourselves and our communities. We value everyone in the Meeting, recognising the worth of all. We actively promote

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the purchase of Fairtrade and other ethically manufactured products. We should aim to move toward living sustainably.

We improve our relationship with the environment through gardening and composting, and various activities on our Meeting House grounds, such as planting fruit and nut trees, beekeeping, keeping a wildflower garden, and installing bird boxes. We try to recycle and reuse whenever possible, and to avoid wasteful use of electricity and other resources. We are beginning to educate ourselves about a wide range of issues – ways in which human activity is harming the environment, and what options are available for environmentally responsible energy suppliers, food sources, water use, and ethical investment and banking. We can also educate ourselves through inhouse presentations and visits to places such local forestry preserves and wildlife refuges. Then, in turn, we can play an educational role, raising awareness of environmental issues and our responsibilities both within and outside our Quaker communities. We are becoming increasingly aware that some causes of war are tied up with the consequences of global change, such as changing climates and resource depletion, and this ties in our Peace Testimony with environmental concern.

5. *What stories and experiences from past times of catastrophic happenings, such as major droughts – perhaps from Scripture, perhaps the record of regional or local events – might inspire us to respond to the changes the world is facing today ?*

We are all aware of many past catastrophes: the Black Death, the Great Famine in Ireland, various oil spill disasters Chernobyl, AIDS, Hurricane Katrina, to name a few. We are often moved to give money to aid the victims of a catastrophe, but we must ask whether this is an adequate response, or whether we need to ask what else (in practical terms) we can do – or perhaps what aspect of our own behaviour may have contributed to the catastrophe. Thinking globally is about seeing possible connections between our own behaviour and its effect on people in the developing countries, as well as working to resolve conflicts peacefully. We should also seek to know our own localities; poverty, for example, is local as well as global.

Throughout history, there have seemed to be cyclical changes, crop failures, catastrophes. This can make it tempting to look at what is happening now as just one more natural cycle; there is a tendency to go into denial about the imbalance between our consumption and the available resources. We need to get a clear picture of the responses and actions needed, and the means to do this. We are aware of the need for action, yet the magnitude of the challenge is daunting. Survivors of past disasters can make a huge difference, since they have seen the disaster, lived through it and come back afterward. Their stories can be an inspiration and help harness the will to act in a positive way.

Ironically, we can identify positive consequences of catastrophes. They can help communities become self-reliant, can lead to a healthy self-discipline with regard to diet and waste, and can bring out the best of people and raise awareness. This also gives us hope for dealing with catastrophes that may come about in connection with global change.

#### *Final Worship-Sharing*

As mentioned in the opening paragraph, each of the consultation sessions at the three Quarterly Meetings concluded with a period of worship-sharing. This sharing had as its theme Query 6 distributed by FWCC: *"How can we support one another in kindling our love and respect for God's Creation in such a way that we are messengers of the transforming power of love and hope?"* This concluding part of each Meeting brought forth some beautiful and inspiring vocal ministry, a timely reminder to us of the power of God's Love supporting us in caring for Creation.

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