

The climate emergency demands a response from all quarters – including the arts. *Linda Murgatroyd* discusses the Loving Earth Project

‘Perhaps textile art can be a form of prophecy?’



It can be difficult to engage deeply with environmental challenges. But if our faith has real value, it should help us to address challenges like these, and guide us in our actions. The Loving Earth Project (LEP) aims to help people address some of the challenges of environmental breakdown without being overwhelmed. It uses a variety of creative, spiritual, practical and community means to do so.

The starting point is love, so the project invites people to explore three questions:

- What or who do you love that is in danger from environmental breakdown? This could be a danger from drought, famine, pollution, fire, flooding or other factors; it could be a person, creature, place or a whole community or species.
- How do you contribute to the threat? Do you understand how your activities and lifestyle, or the way society works is making things worse?
- How could you become part of the solution? What is the tiniest thing that you could do that would make a difference? What is the most radical thing that you could do? Might you need to work with others to bring about some of the changes needed?

These are challenging questions. We can explore them in a number of ways, but at some point we may find we need help from our spiritual practices and our

community. Most of us are likely to need to learn more about some of the issues. Bringing them into our prayer life and into our hearts in Meeting for Worship is a good start. Friends have a range of spiritual practices that can help, such as those outlined in Ginny Wall's little book, *Deepening the Life of the Spirit*. We can also draw on other traditions and practices, on the arts and simply read, think, or talk to people.

The Loving Earth Project started out as a community textile project for the *Seeking Routes* art exhibition at Swarthmoor Hall last summer. Friends were invited to illustrate their responses to the three questions above in the form of a small textile panel, thirty centimetres square (plus a small margin around), in any style. Some beautiful panels were sent in and they were displayed hanging from a string, like prayer flags, each accompanied by a short explanatory text. They were all shown anonymously and offered examples of steps we can take, one at a time, to address challenges we may all face. The process of making the panels also motivated and empowered some people to take steps they might not otherwise have taken. People said how much they had enjoyed the process, sometimes getting together with others to stitch and chat together, making new friendships and deepening existing ones. Others found it relaxing and nurturing to sew quietly and mindfully, and a comforting respite from their activism.

It quickly became apparent that this project had further potential, and it started growing in several directions, with support from the Quaker Arts Network (QAN) and the Friends World Committee

for Consultation (FWCC). A website has now been set up which introduces the project and has links to help people learn more about their environmental impact and what they can do. It provides guidance

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on making textile panels, with a gallery showing the rich variety of panels already sent in. Anyone can join in the project, making as many panels as they wish, as individuals or groups. Groups (such as faith groups, schools and colleges, art groups or community groups) may wish to display what they have made locally first, or they can simply post their panels to the FWCC office at Friends House, to join the travelling exhibition.

The project offers opportunities for learning, outreach, and spiritual growth as well as witness, and it can be a way for Friends to make links and alliances with a wide range of other communities. It can be interpreted in whatever way seems suitable locally. We really hope to receive panels from different cultural traditions and from around the world; the only constraints are that they should be textile and the standard size. It is now for others to spread the word and to take up the project as they are led. Human beings are imitators. Sharing examples of the big and small steps we are taking, and explaining why we are

taking them for the sake of love, is therefore a good way to change what is socially acceptable. The climate emergency means that we now need to do this in as many ways as possible. Perhaps textile art can be a form of prophecy?

From 2020 the project will be working with Woodbrooke as part of its work on ‘Climate crisis – spiritual nurture and learning’, commissioned by Britain Yearly Meeting trustees (see *Meeting for Sufferings report 20 & 27 December 2019*). The Loving Earth Project and Woodbrooke are together planning a range of offerings to Friends and Meetings. We also hope that the project will feature in some way at Yearly Meeting Gathering. More widely it can be a good way to engage with others as we prepare to host the critical Conference of the Parties (COP) 26 climate change talks in Glasgow in November. Already some Friends have started working with others to set up local projects. We hope to display the travelling exhibition in Glasgow next autumn, and then in many other places, to discomfort, inform, comfort and inspire. ●

Linda is from Wandsworth Meeting. For more information please see: www.lovingearth-project.uk. You can also interact on Facebook @LovingEarthProject. Please send finished textile panels and accompanying texts to: Loving Earth Project, c/o FWCC, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ. Please include your contact details, though panels will be published anonymously. Further enquiries can be directed to lovingearthproject@gmail.com.