



NEW ENGLAND  
YEARLY MEETING  
OF FRIENDS  
QUAKERS

## Call to Urgent, Loving Action for The Earth and Her Inhabitants

We urgently call New England Friends to enter into discernment of loving actions that we, our meetings, and our society can take to help remedy systemic problems of racism, social injustice, violence, greed, and failure to act on the climate crisis. These problems are inextricably bound together and our very existence here on Earth depends on our addressing them as such. This “Call to Action” is a collective, outward rallying cry for Friends to engage in God’s work to restore right relationship to the earth, to each other, and especially to those who have everywhere been traumatized, grief-stricken, and brutalized by the very nature of the culture we all inhabit.

The roots of systemic injustice run deep in our minds, hearts and culture. At the core of these injustices is the belief that certain groups of people, by virtue of their race, nationality, religion or income, are entitled to amass wealth and to consume resources at the expense of the health, safety, and even the survival of all the others. This belief, dating at least to the Doctrine of Discovery<sup>1</sup>, is so firmly entrenched in our thinking that we must begin by explicitly acknowledging it.

Many of us from New England who identify as white were brought up to believe in the superiority of our white, Western, Christian culture. We have looked with pride on our perceived advantages and have striven to “raise up” others but now we can more clearly see the consequences of putting ourselves over and above other human beings and other life forms: genocide of much of our Indigenous communities, and the confining to reservations, usually in abject poverty, of those who survived. The labor-intensive nature of our early economy and white Americans’ belief in their own worth led to the enslavement, first, of millions of Native Americans, and then, of Africans. These peoples and their descendants were subjected to forced labor, separation of families, rape, murder and other cruelties. To this day people of color face widespread health disparities, their work is undervalued and underpaid, and their schools are underfunded. Many have no chance of a better life.

Quakers must acknowledge that we are also complicit. As described in an Epistle from this year’s Pre-Gathering Retreat of Friends of Color and Their Families with FGC<sup>2</sup>, Quakers were reminded of the systemic racism experienced by Friends of Color in our

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<sup>1</sup> A full explanation of the impact of the Doctrine of Discovery can be found in Lisa Graustein’s Virtual Plenaries at <https://neym.org/recordings/news/invitation-2019-annual-sessions-plenary>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fgcquaker.org/news/outgoing-epistle-2020-virtual-pre-gathering-friends-color-and-their-families>

Quaker communities. So as we examine the systemic problems in America, we can start with ourselves and our own communities.

As a country the U.S. has believed in the importance of having an enormous, militarized police force to protect us from the perceived criminal intents of others. Many of us often hold simplistic views of people of color, including offensive stereotypes regarding their criminality. This has led to the over-policing of communities of color and the abuse and murder of Black Americans.

Americans believe we have benefitted from having a strong military. As a result, our government has continued to wage wars and to develop and refine weapons of mass destruction. We are the only nation to have used nuclear weapons against another people. We also continue to lead the world in making these weapons ever more “efficient.” Other nations have responded by developing their own weapons, to the point where we are now just “100 seconds to midnight” on the doomsday clock maintained by the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists.<sup>3</sup>

Our country has built a mighty industrial empire which creates and sells goods and services across the entire planet. But we now realize that among the effects of this industry are enormous amounts of waste: of our land, our air, our water, and almost every resource on the planet. Mother Earth gives us life, food, medicine, and wonder for our souls. And yet we receive these gifts not with gratitude but with disrespect and destruction.

The human cost of our mighty industrial empire has been extraordinarily high, particularly in poor communities and communities of color, where disease, malnourishment and lead poisoning are much higher than elsewhere. Climate change disproportionately affects communities of color and the poor. The consequences—including drought, famine, catastrophic weather events, and wars arising from competition over scarce resources—have led to an ever-growing refugee crisis. America has provided neither safety nor refuge to those fleeing the effects of climate change.

Americans need to acknowledge that the relatively comfortable lives of some of us have come, in large part, from our control of material resources including fossil fuels. Coal, oil, and gas have literally fueled our economic growth for over one hundred years. We have done enormous damage in order to keep that fuel supply going. The Earth continues to warm at an alarming rate, and we are now just ten years away from the point at which we can no longer avoid some of the most serious consequences of the global crisis unless we take immediate action. Species on our planet are disappearing at an alarming rate in what some call the “Sixth Mass Extinction.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/current-time/>

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Holbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2014.

But there is hope. This seemingly inexhaustible list of problems on our Earth can make us fearful, angry, hopeless, depressed, or incapacitated. But we need not follow that path. We are being called instead to take the path that comes from love for others, and love of truth and justice.

We strongly state that the Quaker testimony of Equality is universal and speaks to our need to love one another. We can no longer privilege one person, one group, one set of gender identities or sexual orientations, or one species above another and hope to survive. We can no longer ignore that the earth is dying. We can no longer tolerate any form of injustice toward one another or towards the earth.

We humbly ask Friends to join together in a year of faithful discernment and action, and to share with one another what we have been led to be and to do in a world that desperately needs faithful leadership guided by God's transforming, powerful love. Let us trust together in the God who feeds the birds of the air and clothes the flowers in the field.

We especially ask you to follow the lead of people of color. It may help to begin with the Call to Action within The Outgoing Epistle of the 2020 Virtual Pre-Gathering of Friends of Color and their Families. In the Epistle, Friends are given six specific queries. Sit with these queries. Listen deeply. We ask White Friends to undertake the work needed to recognize their own assumptions so that they may truly "see" the Friends of color among us, respect their journeys and their struggles, stand with them, and let them breathe.

Lord, we wait on your guidance. Open us to your will. Thank you for our many spiritual teachers throughout history. Let us be faithful to Your Teaching, Lord, as they were. Lead us to love one another, act justly, love mercy, walk humbly with You, and learn to live sustainably in peace. Let us discern together, whom you would have us be and what you would have us do.

### **Hence, our Call**

At this critical time, the Earthcare Ministry and the Racial, Social and Economic Justice Committees invite Friends to a year of spiritual and intellectual discernment regarding social injustice, including racism and the plight of Mother Earth. We ask you to answer this Call, to discern actions that can address the challenges of injustice. We further call upon meetings, after suitable discernment, to share with others in our Yearly Meeting the actions they have taken and to bring to 2021 Sessions minutes describing recommended actions for our Yearly Meeting to take.

Let us take action together.

We understand that this is a large undertaking, but we call upon you to be part of NEYM's Body of Action.

There is joy and strength in taking action together.

They also will answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?"

He will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." (Matthew 25: 44-45)

*God, Creator, Inner Guide, Universal Source of Love, Spirit of Christ, please guide us in our spiritual discernment and in our actions. We join together as a community in that never-ending circle of seeking, and strive to be faithful to your guidance. We long to be ever open to your love.*

Let us take action together.