

Walk Gently on the Earth.

During my lifetime, we, Americans, have seriously altered our environment and many blithely do not acknowledge our role in the melting of glaciers, the polar ice caps and the permanent destruction of many species. As a youth, I was taught to accept responsibility for my actions and if my actions caused harm, to make amends. Many who argue against global warming preach individual responsibility unless it means that they must change. If we do not own up to our own culpability, how can we make the changes needed to save the environment?

As Quakers we strive to follow the testimonies of Simplicity, Integrity, Equality, Community and Peace. If we are mindful of each of these testimonies in our daily lives, we can individually change our lifestyles that we accept as our right.

Peace activism cannot start when war is declared but must be a long term, life changing commitment where each of us recognize that what it takes to support our life styles cannot be sustained. In this age of excess consumption by Americans, shrinking world resources and growing inequities, the Quaker Testimonies are relevant guides as to how we can live our lives and help reduce the occasion of war. Today the 60's expression of thinking globally while acting locally remains vital. By living our lives mindful of our own economic and ecological footprint, we each individually can become instruments of peace.

The Testimonies are not regional but universal; we are part of a world community. International borders are the arbitrary creation of men. When we look at the difference of poverty and privilege, they are not restricted to out corner of the world. If we consume more than our fair share, who receives less; when we lie that affects our relations with others and when resources are unevenly distributed based upon racial, ethnic or religious reasons the seeds of war are planted.

Here at William Penn House, our staff of seven have for several years shared one vehicle, my 1994 Mazda pickup. For daily transportation, we have bicycled, taken the bus or subway, or have walked. My truck had low mpg and the seven of us drove less than 500 miles per month. In March, after 238,000 miles, I replaced the pickup with Susan's 1996 Saturn with 120,000 which averages 25 MPG and Susan and I bought a Honda hybrid. These are small steps but reflect a changing of behavior as well as technology.

Changing our way of life, to walk more gently on the earth is multifaceted. We as a culture continue to ignore reality by not investing in public transit and by not using it when it is available; by building these large, basically empty houses; by commuting dozens of miles daily; by not buying produce grown locally. Some steps are easy, stop drinking water from plastic bottles; in the summer raise and in the winter lower our thermostats. Garden or buy locally. Reduce our carbon and ecological footprint is a moral imperative and the time is now.