

Alaska Friends Conference (a Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends)  
Annual Gathering, Dickerson Friends Center, Wasilla, Alaska, 28 – 31 July 2016

To Friends Everywhere:

Alaska Friends Conference (Yearly Meeting) met at Dickerson Friends Center in Wasilla, Alaska July 28 - 31, 2016. We revel in the majesty of Alaska's natural landscapes and we sorrow at the increasingly visible effects of warming in our homeland. For several years, Alaska Friends have felt the leading to learn, pray, and seek right action to address climate disruption. We have come to recognize that our moral witness to address climate change will be a long-term struggle for cultural, social, and economic change. During our weekend together, we focused on deepening our spiritual community in order to sustain our witness over time.

Alaska Friends have a strong, visceral, first-hand experience of intact, functioning ecosystems and the communities they sustain. We feel deep love for the land, the waters, and the life around us but we see the effects of climate disruption occurring in our state. It is our witness to the world that we will act on this love.

Alaska Friends met five times in the past three years to discern our way forward. We had been looking for the one "aha" project, honestly, into which we could throw ourselves. Would it be in the realm of policy advocacy? Or a listening and accompanying project? Or creating and modeling sustainable lives, buildings, and communities? Meanwhile, individual Friends and meetings have been doing all of the above; we have been led to the conclusion that we need to expand and support each of these diverse paths.

Meetings and individuals in Alaska Friends Conference have recently:

- co-sponsored a climate jamboree, a climate symposium, and an ongoing climate coalition
- lobbied our members of Congress for recognition and action on climate;
- led workshops, appeared on panels, and spoken out on the moral and spiritual imperative in our climate change work;
- been invited to a Yup'ik villages to share our perspective on faith communities and climate change;
- partnered with the NAACP on their climate justice work; and
- taken a case to Federal Court to spur action. In the words of one 16-year-old Alaska Friend:  
I am suing the executive branch of the U.S. government for not protecting the Constitutional right of youth and future generations to live in a stable climate. I am called to act out of my Quaker value of equality, because previous generations have reaped the rewards from damaging the environment, endangering the future of others. I am acting out of the Quaker Value of stewardship in recognizing that we are part of the biota and must protect it; “that of God in everyone” means more than only humans.

At our Gathering this week, Visiting Friends facilitated our discernment of ways to address Alaska Friends ongoing concern for earthcare, climate disruption and sustainable community.

Members of our Yearly Meeting have been active in attempts (many coordinated by Friends Committee on National Legislation) to alter national policies to acknowledge climate disruption triggered by our prolific use of fossil fuels, and to encourage renewable energy. We determined to ramp up these efforts, to recruit additional Alaska Friends into this work, and to develop and emphasize specific stories about the impact of climate disruption on Alaska communities. We watched the world premiere of a music video featuring young Alaska Friends based on the song "Thinking Like a Mountain." We heard from one young Friend that our efforts to bend national policy are not sufficient, leading him to take legal action for the right of the next generation to a future free from climate disruption.

We were inspired by American Friends Service Committee's model for witness and social action by "accompaniment" or humble service to those people and communities most impacted by injustice and conflict. Small groups discerned organizations or collaborations we might accompany as they work for needed changes and adaptations in the face of climate disruption, including local interfaith, justice, and rights organizations. Recognizing past deep ties of AFSC to Alaska, we determined to host a traveling exhibit celebrating AFSC's 100th anniversary next year.

We reflected that the transition from a society and economy based on exploitation to one based on sustainability and equality is profound and long term; we asked ourselves how we will maintain hope and joy through inevitable delays and setbacks. In a workshop on the Spiritual Deepening work of Friends General Conference, we reflected on the ways in which Quaker faith and practice at once break open hearts and require us to act in the face of injustices. We recognized that our work in the world has to be based on our faith and spiritual practices and a positive vision of blessed community even as we are accompanying and serving others.

Climate disruption, for Alaska Friends, is a place where the world's great need and our great love intersect. We will become sharper about what is most effective. But always our Quaker values will guide us.