

19 June 2022
Canby, OR

Proverbs 4:23 Above all else, above all else, let us guard -keep with all diligence- and watch over our hearts because from our hearts the springs and issues of life, everything we do, flows. [an amplified version given as vocal ministry this morning]

To all Friends everywhere:

Greetings from the 5th annual sessions of Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends. A few dozen of us are here at Canby Grove Christian Conference Center to experience that Presence in our midst. We meet together in Christian love, to work and to worship, and to reconnect after two years of COVID restrictions that forced us to use computers, phones, emails, and other distanced ways of gathering. Even this weekend, 20 or more Friends have joined us by Zoom, and we used a hybrid format to welcome these dear Friends from far-flung places including the Philippines, Honduras, and even Ohio. It is sweet to see their faces and names on the monitors, but our hearts hurt that we cannot give them hugs or fist-bumps or walk arm-in-arm. We have no doubt that those of you reading or hearing these words are nodding in sympathy and recognition.

There is a sense among us that we are starting over after two years of COVID. One Friend expressed that we are only 5 years old, so we know our colors, we can count, and we have begun to read. We pondered other metaphors, one a vivid image of the coat-of-many-colors wrapped around a skeleton with bones awaiting a beating heart and life-giving breath. "Now hear the word of the Lord." Yet after our meeting for worship with an eye to business, we attest to a difference, a sense of flesh and blood covering those bones, a beating heart, and the breath of the Spirit blowing into new lungs. Parents report that their children who gathered here have connected and bonded, and that makes us all sit up a little straighter and feel a little prouder of ourselves and our yearly meeting.

During these COVID years our local meetings have lost attenders, and this loss carries over to our yearly meeting. Our committees are mostly functional, but with fewer people sharing the work. Nevertheless we have some weighty decisions on our agenda:

- We are making good progress on a policy to safeguard our children and vulnerable adults. The "abuse prevention working group" has requested a name and status change to "Committee for Safeguarding," borrowing language from Britain Yearly Meeting. They have brought an excellent 22-page draft for our consideration, which we approved.
- Our Equity and Inclusion Committee worked hard in concert with North Pacific Yearly Meeting, and brought us a proposed Minute on Right Relationship with Indigenous People. The minute was approved as presented. We also approved an introduction which will frame this minute and the minute we approved in 2020 in support of Black lives.
- From our beginnings as a collection of Quaker meetings split off from Northwest Yearly Meeting, we knew there would be Friends who wanted to worship and work with us, even as their local meetings needed time to discern their involvement. We also have people with no local membership who are clear they want us as their larger Quaker association. Our bylaws allow these individuals to hold membership at the yearly meeting level. Membership requests come to our Clerks or to our People Care Committee; the Committee brought a recommendation for minor changes in our bylaws to clarify the process and to change a few terms.

We have also lost members who died during the past years, and we held them and their loved ones in our hearts as their names and photos were projected. "The water is wide, I cannot

cross o'er and neither have I wings to fly..." But we do not grieve as those who have no hope, and trust that their spirits have returned to the Creator.

Because we don't have our own Faith & Practice or Book of Discipline, nor have we borrowed such a document from another yearly meeting, some Friends wonder who we are, what we believe, and where we stand. If you still have doubts, consider this conversation one of us had with an Ohio Yearly Meeting (Conservative) Friend some years ago:

Inquirer: "Faye, what do Conservative Friends believe?"

Faye: "If thee would know what Conservative Friends believe, thee must come and spend several months with us, walking and worshipping with us, and then after observing our lives thee would know what we believe."

If you want to know what kind of Quakers we are, and what matters to us, then come and spend some time with us. We fall short, of course, but we aspire to live lives of love, sharing freely the Divine love that resides in each and every one. We assure you that you are not only loved by God, but that you are **wired to love** and that our Creator rejoices when we recognize this fundamental truth.

The only thing that counts is Faith expressing itself in love. Galatians 5:6

Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations against another; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand. Isaac Penington, 1667

With gratitude to the wider world of Quakers, many of whom sent us words of greeting and have been holding our meeting this weekend in prayer, we offer a poem that arose during this sacred time we savored:

Sunday Morning Covid Protocols

by Derek Lamson, used with permission; 2022

Start with open doors
to the world, and how
it was June. And supposed to be
hot, but drizzled instead, cool.

Open doors, outside airs eddy
across our faces,
eye lashes, upper arms, bared ankles.

We invite you, O Breath of God,
make the hairs on our necks
stand up.

Your Friends in the Truth,
Norma Silliman
Mike Huber

Clerks, Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends