

Epistle 2025

June 27-29, 2025 Sierra Cascades Yearly Meeting (SCYMF), made up of ninety-eight in-person participants and thirty through Zoom, met together at Reedwood Friends Church in Portland, Oregon with the theme of *Centered in Love*. This was the eighth annual session held for SCYMF. We met as the question of “How do Quakers act in the world as Friends?” was rising to the forefront of SCYMF. In 2025 we have a US administration cutting and abolishing many programs that serve the most vulnerable among us, and public rhetoric has become increasingly bitter and vile. Discrimination against “others” has become commonplace and even encouraged. Friends expressed experiencing the heaviness of the current political climate but saw it as a call to action. We heard from individuals and communities engaging in ministry from Klamath Falls, Oregon to Baltimore, Maryland to Tbilisi, Georgia, near Russia, and we were inspired by the light within their leadings. We also held space for meetings throughout SCYMF to share the ways their meetings/churches were living out their individual and corporate visions of a more loving world.

A common theme was the need for our prayers for growth, healing and inspiration as well as giving financial support for church missions, foreign missions, and helping individuals reach their goals toward a more loving and viable world in which Quakers exist and work. Countering isolation with community came up again and again including community for Young Adult Friends, member churches, and Friends abroad. We repeatedly considered the questions: How can we support those with ministries, and how do those ministries enrich our spiritual community?

In our diversity of beliefs and modes of worship, we found joy and strength together in singing and in prayer. We gave each other quiet support knowing we are all facing the civil rights violations that are rampant in our country. Specifically, showing up clearly as Quakers who affirm the equal human rights of our trans and queer Friends should be a simple expression of centering love. Matt Boswell helped us identify this as core to how we want to live in the world. As part of open worship, Matt asked us to consider a time when we felt truly loved. The words from a participant in FWCC challenged us to support the ministry of others by picking up the pieces of ministry that are ours.

Friends were asked to follow their leadings, and communities were asked to recognize the light of Spirit within these leadings. It was recognized that these leadings were energized by love and manifested their goals of a more caring world specifically through Quaker action. Many of the examples were of letting go of something important and attaining stability through downsizing or changing expectations. We came to the realization and an articulation of cooperation, stating as fact that “we can go further together than we can alone.” Friends noted the importance of authenticity as important as we take off our masks and find ways to be vulnerable with each other and ourselves. “It gives me hope for our community and our world to hear stories of unconditional love,” Matt concluded.

Friends pointed out these traits as some of the reasons that Joe Tolton, Associate Pastor of Klamath Falls Church was being recorded as a Quaker minister. LeeAnn Williams from Nurturing of Ministry Committee presented some of the ways that Joe lived out the theme of being centered in love by reading affirmations from people who recommended Joe for leadership and ministry: “displaying kindness, loyalty and commitment,” “putting his words into actions,” and “modeling what he believes.” Griffin Toffler from his congregation in Klamath Falls

came to speak on behalf of the church and spoke of his other qualities that showed love to others. She pointed out his ability to remain vulnerable, and that he was honest, ethical and understanding. These are the qualities we all have to show in times like these for Quakers to become able to take on this environment.

Eric Muhr from Barclay Press talked about the history of the press, and how he has recently purchased the equipment to become a printing press once again. As Cherice Bock reminded us in a session on conscientious objection, Friends have long relied on the written word to spread our convictions, all the way back to George Fox's Peace Testimony. Through song, spoken prayer, written poetry, and deep conversations this weekend, Friends in SCYMF continue to connect to that of God within each of us.

Eric provided closing word with a poem by Peg Edera called Begin Again, and the excerpts from stanzas that read:

BEGIN AGAIN

Start anywhere.

It doesn't matter,

A start's a start.

The baby does it.

The first kiss, too.

Let the courage rise in you

like a pot of water starting to boil-

you've got the water,

now give it some heat.

That's what the heart lends-

what's more than strong or brave or motivation.

Erin Craig Co-clerk

Norma Silliman Co-clerk

Sierra Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends

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