

2023: TOWARDS TRUSTWORTHY MEETING

Faith and Practice Committee report

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Some history:

The Faith and Practice Committee has faced challenge in these first years of SCYMF. In our early discussions, we did not find unity on many words, and emotions were high. While many words felt threatening or divisive, few words felt adequate to articulate who we are to more than some of us. We longed for words that would welcome, and they were hard to find.

Our committee's challenges, shaped by grief and trauma, reflected the Meeting (and members') struggle with changing identity, faith, and values. Among these, our struggle to decide if we can once again discern in the Spirit (or if doing so is dangerous) and if we can develop a safe way to approach potential conflicts so that we don't do harm. There were times when we questioned if we should even try to have a faith and practice document. If we did, what could we say in truth and power about ourselves? How could we say it in a way that did not exclude?

Then this year, our committee was challenged to find a regular way to meet as busy Friends in three (sometimes more!) different time zones. A baby was born, and *not* at the appointed hour! Two of us moved time zones several times throughout this year, zooming in from across the globe! Nonetheless, we have managed to meet monthly since October 2022!

We spent time sifting through our mission, as well as by-laws and minutes from the past 5 years, working to ground ourselves in where we have found unity and been directed as a Meeting, looking for nuggets where there might be new life. We found some, as well as some unusual artifacts—we found there were some minutes that may need to be revisited or revamped. More on that later...

Upon reflecting on what God might be teaching us through these challenges, and on the mission of our committee, we found unified sense that the purpose of the Faith and Practice is for TRUSTWORTHINESS.

Here are some of the initial thoughts members of our committee had about this:

- We can think of Faith and Practice in terms of the idea of “covenant”: what we all agree to do so that we can trust each other.
- The most important thing is that the community of SCYMF is trustworthy for vulnerable people. AND, all of us are “vulnerable people” in some ways, so what we really mean is that we be trustworthy around people's vulnerabilities.

- Evidence of trustworthiness of the Meeting would be willingness to be open about our spiritual experience. The more we are honest about ourselves the more trustworthy we will be, and the more trustworthy, the more people will be honest.
- When you are a trustworthy community, you liberate members to live their gifts- prophets to be prophets, mystics to be mystics, pastors to be pastors, community organizers to be community organizers, etc.

Our committee has had openings about spending extra time just listening and seeing where we find unity, also promoting collective reflections at the Yearly Meeting.

Our present research method:

- Looking to SCYMF By-laws to see what also needs to be developed in the F&P
- Gathering stories from individual members through “listening posts” at SCYMF gatherings and private interviews
- Intentional listening for sense of the Meeting/Holy Spirit movement in SCYMF gatherings through the lens of Faith and Practice
- Listening within our monthly meetings and bringing these to committee for brief monthly report (1-2 minutes)
- Looking at other F&Ps from Friends and other documents
- Looking to SCYMF By-laws to see what also needs to be developed in the F&P

Highlights:

- A highlight of our 22-23 work was meeting online with Britain Yearly Meeting’s Faith and Practice revision committee to exchange experiences. They encouraged us to “fail fast!”, to get drafts written and out there for revision or rejection as soon as possible. We were inspired by their creativity and their patience with a multiyear process of revision, and related to some of their challenges.
- Another highlight was our workshop about membership held at quarterly gathering. This was well-attended and we got lots of ideas generated about how our Meeting thinks and talks about the idea of membership.

Status:

So far our Meeting has been able to affirm that:

The Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends is a voluntary association of meetings, churches, and individuals that supports worship, ministry, and service through the cultivation of Christian faith in the Quaker tradition. We are led by the Spirit to commit ourselves to recognizing the full participation of LGBTQ+ people in all aspects of the life of Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends.

We were also able to adopt a safeguarding policy in 2022 that will apply to all meetings.

Our by-laws hold a tension between our leading for unified (though not uniform) movement together, and our leading for individuals and monthly meetings to have the freedom of conscience to dissent. There are areas where this balance may be confusing that might need to be addressed, but we also recognize that this is an important tension to maintain integrity.

Beyond our written language, sense of the Meeting is that we are building trust as we demonstrate with time that we are who we say we are, and continue to love one another above all else.

This means people first, not decisions and statements, but one another. We are small enough to know one another and that helps. That doesn't mean that we don't hurt each other or make mistakes or have blind spots. But it means that people trust that the authority of the meeting as a whole will be respected, and that our decisions will err on the side of people before expediency.

We have identified specific areas where we are listening to the community and writing. Everyone is invited to participate in this process! Please email if you would like to talk or exchange correspondence about these topics:

Opening statement

What Faith and Practice is and isn't

Christ

LGBTQ affirmation

Friends worship practices

Membership

Monthly Meeting polity

Sierra-Cascades

Pastoral ministry

Recording

Death practices

Marriage practices

Traveling ministries

What else would you like to see on this list? Please contact Faith and Practice to share ideas, writings, or thoughts: jadethedoula@gmail.com