

Advance Report from the Nurture of Ministry Committee Quarterly Gathering, October 28,2023

The Nurture of Ministry Committee continues to meet monthly. Our clerk is currently Faith Marsalli, and we're in the process of appointing a co-clerk to work with her. I continue to serve as recording clerk. The other members are Anna Baker, Mark Pratt-Russum, and Leann Williams.

We are aware that many Friends do not have a clear picture of what Nurture of Ministry does, beyond the traditional "recording committee" role of helping our churches and our Yearly Meeting identify, recognize, and support Friends who are gifted public ministers.

We also have a general mission of helping our whole Sierra-Cascades community grow in the ability to nurture ministry, and we see ourselves as serving you all by encouraging this growth in every way possible. This means developing relationships with each of your churches, and with direct members of Sierra-Cascades. We want to respond to individuals and meetings who may need particular kinds of support -- for example, in times of transition (in between pastors and when welcoming a new pastor), technical help in conducting hybrid meetings, and support for churches looking for more ways to open our Quaker doors to the wider community. We hold in prayer and walk in companionship with meetings as they do their work of dealing with external crises and internal conflicts. We have made in-person and online visits, we have arranged workshops, provided speakers and consultants, and contributed to our Sierra-Cascades Web site and bulletin.

So far, this has been a list of activities. We feel we need to go beyond this kind of list, and reveal something of our hearts. Why are we serving on this particular committee? How do we try to lead our committee's internal life in a way that could be helpful to the whole Sierra-Cascades community? These questions led us to provide some of our stories for a recent issue of our Yearly Meeting's Bulletin. Here are those stories, framed by an introduction from the Bulletin's editor:

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"I want to be a part of nurturing this life among us..."

Here are the raw (and beautiful) answers to the question "Why do I serve on the Sierra-Cascades Nurture of Ministry committee?"

These stories came from an impulse expressed in a Nurture of Ministry meeting, "to tell who we are and where our hearts are. Let's be up front about that."

They want your blessing to do this work.

From Mark Pratt-Russum:

I felt called to serve on the Nurture of Ministry committee because I've finally figured out the point of a yearly meeting. I became a released minister at West Hills Friends (WHF) in 2010, just a year before the OneGeorgeFox letter was published. West Hills informed Northwest Yearly Meeting elders of our intentions to fully welcome LGBTQIA+ people.

Note: March 1, 2012, “an open letter was sent to the GFU administration, and posted on a new website, from a group calling itself “One George Fox.” The group described itself as “LGBTQ and Allied Alumni of George Fox University.” It had an explosive impact on George Fox, a conservative evangelical university. Read about the letter and Sierra-Cascades’ painful split from Northwest Yearly Meeting [here](#).

This was my only experience with a yearly meeting. My time/energy/commitment was 100% with WHF, I felt no draw to NWYM. I think I carried that arrangement over to Sierra-Cascades.

My commitment has always been heavily skewed to West Hills Friends, and Sierra-Cascades received whatever bits of time I had remaining. But then I saw people I like and love pouring more like 80% more of their energy into Sierra-Cascades as they were their local Meetings.

Why were they doing that? Well, because they knew something I had yet to realize—Sierra-Cascades supports ministers that are doing their ministry in unconventional places.

Looking at our list of recorded ministers, I see so many ministries that do not happen in a meetinghouse, or whose community is small and completely volunteer run. I realized that these ministers love Sierra-Cascades as much as I love WHF, and I want their ministry to thrive.

Once I made this connection, I shifted my energy from viewing the yearly meeting as mostly an obligation, to seeing that I can be actively supporting a community that is holding up a larger

network of ministers. I want our chaplains, our Godly Play trainers, our environmental activists, Friends working on right relationship with Indigenous Peoples, folks who are learning about trauma and its impacts on individuals and communities, our poets, writers, thinkers, ALL to feel like they have a community of support and encouragement. Sierra-Cascades can be that community for these ministers, and that is why I feel called to serve on a committee dedicated to nurturing the ecology for these ministries to thrive.

Note: Instead of ordaining pastors, Quakers simply recognize members whose on-going public ministry is empowered. We “record” our clarity in the minutes of a meeting for business—hence the terms “recording” and “recorded minister.”

From Faith Marsalli:

This is my story...

I was still actively serving as pastor of Klamath Falls Friends Church (KFFC) when we split from Northwest Yearly Meeting (NWYM). I had come to Quakers in the 1990's, so much of my Quaker formation occurred while I was under the care of NWYM. I was recorded in 2002 and had many wonderful mentors and kindred spirits who agreed to journey with me. In addition to that, Colin Saxton and Becky Ankeny's companionship in their roles as NWYM superintendents, were lifelines for me on many occasions, especially as a new pastor.

When Sierra-Cascades was formed I agreed to serve on the Nominating Committee. After I retired several years ago, I felt my gifts of encouragement and life experience could better be used in

the committee for the Nurture of Ministry. When I came onto the committee I felt a leading to encourage us all to move beyond just our responsibilities of the recording of ministers to stepping into gaps I saw in Sierra-Cascades.

Who was coming alongside pastors and local meetings to encourage and pray for them? Who was offering what had so generously been given to me through the years? I wanted to be available in this way.

Sierra-Cascades has become my primary spiritual community since retirement, as I have needed to step away from KFFC to allow them to create a new thing. On Sundays, I attend the various meetings which have hybrid worship via Zoom. This has given me a bird's eye view of the different personalities of each of the meetings. It has allowed me to give witness to the ministries of each meeting and how to pray for them. It has become a new season of community for me.

I have an even deeper appreciation for the value of the beloved community of Sierra Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends. I want us to flourish and grow. I want to be part of listening for how Christ, our Teacher, is leading us into the future in this complex world.

We are all connected to something larger than ourselves! I want to be a part of nurturing this life among us and to offer a heart of service and faithfulness to this community I love.

From Leann Williams:

Long ago in a far-off land named Northwest Yearly Meeting, I heard a whisper calling me to support people who had left traditional church. I dared to speak of the voice I heard. Some listened to my tales and named the thing I was called to do —“pastor”.

That name was too much for me partly because the pastors I knew spent years hurting each other fighting for purity or faithfulness or things I didn't understand. While hurting each other, the people they served suffered greatly.

I spent years following the voice but resisting the name “pastor.” In those years communities I was part of formed and reformed as Bridges and Friends in Common. Along the way “pastor” kept coming to me from different voices inside and outside our faith communities.

I had been very involved in Northwest Yearly Meeting before the split. When Sierra Cascades Yearly Meeting was born, I was too tired of the struggle to engage in Sierra-Cascades.

At the same time, ministry among Friends in Common was sweet and difficult, sometimes gut wrenchingly so, and it was good. When I felt strong enough to venture back to the communal waters of Friends, I did so tenuously.

I dared to go to a Sierra-Cascades pastor's retreat and found the kind of pastors I can appreciate and respect as mentors. Surprisingly, they called me “pastor” and it felt o.k. this time. The greater community of Sierra-Cascades received the request from my beloved local community to see me recorded. It was an

unexpected gift of affirmation and support to be recorded. It meant far more to me than I expected.

When I received the gift of recording, I couldn't stay distant from Sierra-Cascades. They cared about me and I cared about them right back. I found mentors and kindred spirits that read the same books and listen to the same podcasts and care about how the church, the followers of Jesus in many forms, is stumbling and failing in big ways and small. I found people who want us to do better and yearn for our health and wholeness. Those people invited me to join the Nurture of Ministry committee and I said yes.

In my year of service on the NOM I have fallen in love with every person on the committee. It has been life giving and soul sustaining work because of the hearts of the people I get to work with. Sometimes the work is tricky. The description of what we do is entirely inadequate. We listen, we pray, we imagine us healthier and more whole, and follow the Spirit for how to love and support this beloved community well. Since Quakers believe we are all ministers, we ask how we can support local meetings to name and equip people to follow their leadings particularly in nontraditional ways. That's why I belong to Sierra-Cascades. I don't fit into any box and I'm still supported as a minister. That's what we, the committee for the Nurture of Ministry, hope to do for all of you.

From Johan Maurer:

I can say confidently, having been a member of this committee almost from its beginning, that I've rarely if ever been part of a group that is so devoted to its publicly stated goals ("... the development, recognition and nurture of public ministries for

Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends"), so saturated with mutual love and trust, and so free from narrow agendas. I'm sooooo grateful!

In our committee meetings, we have the freedom to talk about the biggest possible questions (examples: how do we help Sierra-Cascades listen more closely to the Holy Spirit and to each other? How do we help promote healing?) and at the same time attend to the needs and the support of specific individuals with all their (our) gifts and oddities.

I became a Friend because, back in 1974, (a) I learned I could trust Jesus; (b) I came from an anti-church family, and had inherited a huge chip on my shoulder about the religion industry; and (c) Friends gave me a way to live and learn with both (a) and (b). All my adult life since age 21 I've been looking for ways to express my gratitude to Friends for giving my mixed-up self a home in the Body of Christ, and for these last few years, serving on this committee has been a wonderful way to do that.

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The Nurture of Ministry Committee has also carried on the far-from-routine work of recognizing individual ministers. You saw some of this at our last Sierra-Cascades annual sessions, with the recordings of Jade Rockwell and Mark Pratt-Russum, the welcoming of Leigh Tolton to our community as pastor at Klamath Falls Friends Church, and the recognition of long-serving former pastors. Since annual sessions we have provided a ministry license (see "More About Licensed Friends Ministers" on this page: <https://www.scymfriends.org/recording-process>) to Kathryn Heape. It's worth outlining this decision in some detail so that it

can be considered as a possible ongoing policy when such cases come up in the future.

Step by step:

1. Cherice Bock is our contact with the Veteran's Administration for ecclesiastical endorsements from Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends for those wishing to serve as chaplains within the VA.
2. In that capacity, Cherice received a request from Kathryn Heape, who is a Friend in Davidson Friends Meeting in North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative), and is attending Tacoma Friends Meeting in North Pacific Yearly Meeting. Neither of these yearly meetings are approved through the VA to provide ecclesiastical endorsements. Katie's chaplaincy training was coming to an end, and she was hoping for a VA placement but needed that endorsement. Many unprogrammed yearly meetings, such as the two that Katie is affiliated with, don't provide for this kind of formal endorsement.
3. Cherice passed that information on to us through Norma Silliman, and we considered whether we were in a position to be helpful. We agreed to consider providing Katie a license with the understanding that Katie would meet with our committee and pass a background check, and that her meetings (Davidson and Tacoma) would send us their endorsements of her service.
4. Nurture of Ministry met on August 15 and had a good conversation with Katie. By then, we already had the background check and letters of support from Davidson and Tacoma Friends Meetings. We approved licensing her for her proposed chaplaincy

ministry and communicating that approval in a form that is consistent with the "ecclesiastical endorsement" that the VA requires.

5. Her license from our Yearly Meeting runs through 2024, by which time we hope that Davidson Friends Meeting will have the necessary standing with the Veterans Administration to provide a direct endorsement.

We believe that the web of relationships that made this action possible is an encouraging sign for our work within our own community and in the wider Quaker world. We were delighted to participate.

At our quarterly gathering in Eugene, Mark Pratt-Russum will speak on our behalf concerning the spirit in which we seek to nurture ministry in our beloved community. We would like your blessing for this work, and we welcome your questions and advice.

Johan Maurer
Recording clerk
Nurture of Ministry Committee