

Epistle from Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Concerns

17 of Second month, 2014

To Friends Everywhere,

We have gathered again in our annual midwinter gathering, this time at Oregon's Menucha Conference Center above the beautiful Columbia River Gorge.

Our theme expanded on our commitment to become a radically inclusive beloved community. We heard from plenary speaker Mariana Ruybalid, a person of color who lives with cerebral palsy. Other Friends too shared about the challenge of being differently abled and we began dialogue about how we can welcome all those whom society excludes as 'queer' for any reason. We challenge the entire Religious Society of Friends to develop their embrace for people whose needs are different; to support ministries that utilize the gifts of all whom God inspires, whatever their health, mental, and physical abilities.

We heard the struggles of two young adult Friends claiming their identities both as Gay and Christian and were inspired by their courage in speaking truth to power and remaining faithful. We are reminded to not turn our backs on these Friends or the communities in which they seek belonging.

We hear of meetings and churches that do not embrace the gifts of Friends' sexuality, gender identity and sexual orientation. Our experience is that the diversity among the members of our body enriches and strengthens our community. In this gathering, we celebrate attendance of Friends of all branches of North American Quakerism, many Friends under the age of 50, Friends of varying family structures, and Friends of diverse ethnic backgrounds. As we express ourselves authentically and we accept the challenge of loving one another unconditionally, we manifest the testimony of integrity and are liberated to live and love in the Light.

We hold in the Light all those who suffer from oppression and those who consciously or not contribute to their suffering. We wish to be allies to sexual minority African Friends whose nations have laws against homosexuality.

We accept the invitation and challenge from some Friends of Color to share our gifts, support one another, and make our own space more radically inclusive. We joyfully look forward to our work together in future Gatherings.

We honored the life of weighty Friend, Joe Franko, a member of our community whose passing leaves sorrow but whose life inspires continued joy.

We experienced the Holy Spirit of Truth moving among us in many ways as we worshipped and heard the clear call to let our first motion always be to love, especially in response to fear and hatred.

In the Light, in and for the Gathered Beloved Community of FLGBTQC,

Ted Heck & Kathy Beth, Co-Clerks