

Pacific Yearly Meeting Eldering Subcommittee Report to Annual Session, 2021

The words of Douglas Steere offer a poetic but not inaccurate description of the work of eldering:

To "listen" another's soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another. But in this scrutiny of the business of listening, is that all that has emerged? Is it blasphemous to suggest that over the shoulder of the human listener, there is never absent the silent presence of the Eternal Listener, the living God? For in penetrating to what is involved in listening, do we not disclose the thinness of the filament that separates a person listening openly to one another, and that of God intently listening to each soul?

~ from GLEANINGS by Douglas V. Steere

The Eldering Subcommittee of the Ministry Committee of Pacific Yearly Meeting is now five years old and this past year saw significant growth and promise in the work of the committee. Beyond a core group who have been with the committee since, or close to, its inception, several new members were added. The request from Friends for "an elder" has increased considerably during the life of the subcommittee and has informed our leading to build greater eldering capacity in our yearly meeting. There is still growing to be done, but this year has felt particularly rewarding in many ways; as though the subcommittee has come of age.

Several notables:

The pandemic gave us many opportunities to experience and acknowledge the power of eldering from great distances, online. We have found that love and Light have no bounds!

At the request of monthly meetings, we were able to offer eldering workshops to three meetings, San Francisco, Grass Valley and Santa Cruz. Each of these workshops was 90 minutes, held after Meeting and on zoom. All of the workshops were well attended, with participants fully engaged, and the feedback being positive. We feel led to do more and are letting monthly meetings know we are offering workshops in the coming year.

Also on zoom, we had our annual retreat and explored ways to strengthen eldering in our PYM community and explored ways to support the work of Ministry, the Clerk and others. As we grow, questions about how to serve the work of the Yearly Meeting in faithfulness call us to meet for an extended annual retreat, to discern our path forward as a committee in service to the ministry of PYM. Although we missed being with each other for our retreat, and eating M&M Peanuts together, we found that the intimacy and spiritual nurturing we experienced in our in-person retreats was not missing in our virtual gathering. We do hope to have an in-person retreat this coming year, with M&Ms!

Echoing the call of Micah 6:8, "Do justice, love (mercy) kindness and walk humbly with our God", Clerk Sandy Kewman posed this question in her call to the body "What acts of love and justice are necessary for us to re-center our Society to a place of justice, of love, for all?" We in the Eldering Subcommittee are noticing that the practice of eldering rests on the intention to provide a centering presence of love to others. The act of eldering midwives ministry into our community of Friends and world. How our actions and hearts are most faithful to this call is a question we are considering deeply in this coming year. What does feel clear is this: We are called to love and we are called to truth in equal measure. Acting on this in our practice and supporting this in the body is what we understand to be the work of, the practice of, eldering.

Elaine Emily, Valerie Nuttman, Chamba Cooke, Paul Harris, Gordon Bishop, Dinah Bachrach, Nancy Wilkinson, Mica Estrada and Dorothy Henderson (Co-Clerks)