

**Epistle from South Central Yearly Meeting
Of the Religious Society of Friends
2025 Annual Sessions
4th month, 13th through 20th 2025**

South Central Yearly Meeting extends warm greetings to Friends everywhere.

We write to you from Greene Family Camp, located on unceded Waco, Kickapoo, and Tonkawa land in Bruceville-Eddy, Texas. We gathered, both online and in-person, for a week of learning, fellowship, and labor, centering on the theme “Creating Collective Integrity Through Personal Experience.” Though we were ensconced in the natural beauty of the Texas Hill Country, the larger cultural context was ever present in our thoughts and work.

SCYM has joined Friends General Conference (FGC) in a lawsuit to keep US Immigration authorities out of our meetinghouses.

The Peace and Justice committee proposed two minutes: one updating an earlier proposed minute and making it more specific about the urgent need to bring humanitarian aid to Gaza Palestinians and a ceasefire in Gaza. SCYM approved the minute. The second proposed minute called on the Trump administration to cease the lies and violence which they have used as tools in their current attempts to seize power. That minute too was passed.

AFSC presented a movie covering the aid efforts in Gaza, after which Palestinian AFSC workers on the ground in Gaza were able to answer questions via Zoom. Seeing this real-time account of the Palestinian people’s condition made a profound impression on the attendance. One Friend shared that she felt deeply moved learning about the Quaker presence in Palestine since the 1948 Nakba.

The importance of integrating online participation into in-person gatherings became abundantly clear during Yearly Meeting. During business meetings, the keynote address, the Faith & Practice forum, and other events, Friends who could not join us in person could join online. Using hybrid meetings is not unique to SCYM. We learned from FGC visitors and other Quaker organizations that online attendance at gatherings has become the primary way Friends interact with Quaker groups worldwide. Some events have now transitioned to being entirely online. SCYM now has at least one monthly meeting that meets only online.

As we looked at who was in the room during our time of worship and business, we noticed more Young Adult Friends. They assumed significant responsibilities during our Yearly Meeting sessions and plan to continue their commitments year-round. Their energy and ability to connect deeply with each other and older Friends have helped ease older Friends’ worries about SCYM’s future. Adult Young Friends appreciate their elders’ attention, passing Quakerism down, and helping them deepen their faith and commitment. But the learning and deepening are not just one way, they are mutual and rich. What a joy to have so many younger voices.

We recognized the labor of SCYM committees and individuals in the minutes and reports they presented. What may not be apparent is the many hours of labor required of these committees and individuals. Sometimes, their work may not result in a minute or identifiable product that can be presented at a larger meeting. However, Friends working in these committees state that the value of their collaboration is not primarily found in the fruits of their labor but in the time spent together working towards a common goal and learning to navigate the varying perspectives within the group.

We thanked SCYM Friends who are leaving their roles this year. The work accomplished by this meeting could not have been done without them. We are blessed to have so many Friends participating.

One thing that came up repeatedly during business meetings and in fellowship with one another was the importance and purpose of the Quaker process and the role it plays in our work of building community with one another. One Friend expressed a sense of frustration during a business meeting with Friends who did not engage in the process of forming minutes or committee work, waiting until the approval process to weigh in on issues. A few folks shared that they feel various levels of tension with the members of their meetings when the traditional Quaker process is not adhered to. Other folks said in conversation that they found the Quaker process too lengthy or complicated. Some felt it should be simplified with a more

executive approach. Others felt that an involved, more collaborative process better reflected their faith values. SCYM Friends seem to be in a collective period of considering how their involvement within the Quaker process can best be done with integrity to themselves and their communities and in a way that best utilizes their gifts and talents. One Friend expressed a sense that the meeting felt “different” this year, because Friends were being more candid and straightforward with one another than in past years.

Worship sharing deepened our spiritually, individually and as a community, as we considered our own integrity dealing with the challenges of life, and how living with integrity impacts our community. Queries this year focused on what integrity means to us as individuals and to our communities. One Friend said in response to a query “Quakers aren’t Boy Scouts.” It seemed to be a recurring sentiment among Friends, that while we are committed to our testimonies of integrity and honesty, we are still human beings who can make mistakes. We can fail ourselves and our communities.

Our Faith and Practice committee has completed its 13th year of work on the first SCYM faith and practice document. The committee is now ready to find a copy editor and hopes to be able to present the finished document for approval as soon as next year’s Yearly Meeting. The session in which we considered some final edits to this document was a continuing testament to the unique culture of SCYM and the place we have in the wider tapestry of Quakers. We expressed appreciation to the many Friends who have served on the Faith and Practice Committee over the years and in particular, the present committee and clerk, John Coffin, for their dedication to this project. In turn, John Coffin thanked Friends for their “enheartened participation” in the process.

One of our workshops focused on using centering as a way to diffuse tension in the self and in relation to others. Several participants shared that they experienced an intense, heavy silence with one another after completing an exercise. One Friend described this as “an expansion of my energy that merged into that of others.” This sense of feeling connected to the energy of one another was expressed in various formats by Friends in worship sharing settings, workshops and community time.

The keynote speaker, J.E. McNeil, gave a presentation on “Speaking Truth to Power” that emphasized taking action as a way of claiming our authority. She asked us to feel empowered to use our voices to speak out about the issues important to us and to consider whether something must be “effective” to be important. One of the most impactful statements she left us with was “God is the clerk of the results committee”. Many Friends echoed this sentiment throughout the gathering, that an important part of their personal integrity and the integrity of their communities centered on their willingness and ability to take action on the issues that matter the most to them.

The children reported they enjoyed learning about inner peace in the youth program. Some young Friends stated that their favorite thing to do was spending time with their peers and making crafts like bracelets. Feelings were mixed about the hiking activities. The time outside was enjoyable and peaceful, but a few kids reported feeling tired or hot. One shared that they learned about guided meditation and how to sink into their surroundings from an older Friend. That Friend was taught that practice by an elder during the Friend’s childhood, testament to the fact that when we engage in community building with one another, the impact can be felt generations later.

An important element of our fellowship is the annual talent show. This year it featured performances ranging from a miniature theatre troupe, through a trio of yogis, to an annual favorite - the previously named “The Quaker Oats Boys”, now the “Quaker Oats People”, to be more inclusive. The whole audience broke into song several times around the theme of continuing “doing the work we are doing” to heal the world through love. This evening of laughter, song, love, and creativity was a moving way to spend our final night together as a community.

As we leave the windy countryside at Greene Family Camp, and return to our monthly meetings and worship groups, we bring with us the rich connections we formed, the knowledge we received, and the recommitment to integrity in our communities, essential to doing the work of the Spirit so necessary in our troubled world.