



FACING THE CHALLENGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE AS FRIENDS

ROB LEVIN NEW ENGLAND YEARLY MEETING, USA

"Each person who joined the vigil and that act of walking itself infused energy into me, an IV line to my soul."



Rob Levin (back right) with Portland Friends and supporters during the Walking Climate Vigil



Rob raises the United States flag to half-mast on the steps of the federal courthouse

On 11 December 2017, Rob Levin from Portland Friends Meeting in Maine, USA undertook a Walking Climate Vigil and an act of civil disobedience, supported by members of Portland Friends Meeting.

The idea felt like a Leading to Rob; in essence, a call from the Divine to do something. Beforehand, he was supported in the process of deep spiritual discernment by a Clearness Committee - a small group of Friends who come together to help someone reach clarity on a momentous question or decision. The basic idea is that true discernment should happen through community, and not by one individual alone.

At the stroke of midnight on the two-year anniversary of the signing of the Paris Climate Treaty, Rob began walking around the federal courthouse in downtown Portland. It was dark and cold, and there was a storm on the way. Hoping to see two or three Portland Friends Meeting members there, he was overjoyed when thirteen people appeared out of the darkness - members of the meeting but also friends, acquaintances and even strangers who had felt called to come in the middle of the night in witness. They started out on that first lap together, holding the Afghanistan flag, the first of 195 flags Rob had assembled for the day.

Over the course of the next 15 hours, he was joined by waves of friends and strangers. People came and went throughout the early hours of the morning, and all through the next day but at no point was he walking with fewer than three others, and often they were a dozen or more.

They circled the building 195 times, once for each country that is an active supporter of the Paris Climate Treaty, a distance of 30 miles. They walked through the night, through snow, sleet and freezing rain. At 3pm, having completed all 195 rounds, they walked one lap in reverse, to mark how one nation, their own, the United States, has withdrawn from the Paris Climate Treaty and is going backwards on climate change. After this Walking Vigil, Rob then raised a United States flag to half-mast in a display of mourning, in recognition of the people who have already died, and who will continue to die, as a result of climate disruption. He walked with the flag on to the steps of the federal courthouse, which is a form of criminal trespassing, and was prepared to be taken away and arrested.

Once he was on the steps of the courthouse, a federal officer asked him to move aside. "I cannot in clear conscience," Rob answered and he was led away. After some discussion, the officers decided to let him go - they did not want to arrest him after all. They told him "You seem like a pretty peaceful guy".

It had not been an easy decision for Rob to break the law in this way. He had doubts along the way. Getting arrested for federal criminal trespass is much more serious than getting arrested by the Portland Police under a state charge. In fact, he had been advised by the most experienced criminal defence attorney in town not to get arrested by the federal police. But Rob explains: "Faith here is not the absence of doubt. Faith, to me, is action in the face of doubt, rather than abolishing doubt altogether. In this sense I was being more faithful than I'd ever been in my life."

"When I took the leap, I had faith I'd find the net; instead I learned how to fly." - John Calvi