

Dear Higher Ground,

This year, more than ever, you have felt like a living friend: someone we know, someone we return to, someone we keep choosing again and again.

And so I want to speak to you directly, because I know you are listening.

I want you to know that we worked hard for you this year.

We showed up for you in workdays, in meetings, in conversations, and in decisions (big and small).

We looked closely at what keeps you healthy, what makes you strong, and what allows you to continue being the home we all love.

Every step we took was in service to your well-being, to your future, and to the people who live inside you.

We worked carefully to keep you strong.

We learned that caring for you comes with real costs, so we began honest conversations about commitments and dues.

These conversations were more than numbers; they were difficult acts of care, made to protect you, our home, so you remain stable, supported, and ready for the years to come.

We also opened your doors wide to the outside world during the OSU Garden Tour, letting others see the beauty we get to live with.

It was a proud moment, a moment where you shared your open heart, full of trust.

This year wasn't easy. The outside world was already heavy, full of tension, uncertainty, and rapid change.

And change also found us here.

Higher Ground, this year you held us through change.

We said goodbye to neighbors we cared for, and we welcomed new neighbors who now bring their own hopes into your shared spaces.

With every goodbye and every hello, you reminded us that a community is always in motion: always growing, always expanding, always making room for what comes next.

We navigated disagreements, shifting needs, and new situations that pushed us to grow. But even in the hard moments, we adjusted because our neighbors needed us to.

We made space for one another. We practiced patience. We tried again (and we are still trying). And in doing so, we proved that love is not just a feeling. It is a practice.

Change didn't only touch the people, it touched the way we organize ourselves. We began the important work of reshaping our rules, so they match who we are today and who we are becoming. We looked at how to protect your heart while supporting the evolving needs of the people who live in it.

This year, we began to document you.

The Higher Ground History Project started gathering the memories, voices, and moments that built you.

We are writing down what makes you special, not in abstract ideas, but through the people who shaped you with their work, their dreams, their conflicts, and their care. You deserve to be described in their words.

We also turned inward, beginning a deep exploration of who we are and who we want to become.

Through our work refining our mission, vision, and values, and in our Dragon Dreaming conversation, we listened, we spoke honestly about our hopes, and we began imagining a future built on the same strong foundations that have carried us this far.

We did this because you matter.

In those conversations, we saw again what you bring out in us: belonging, connection, kindness, and the simple truth that life is better when shared.

We spoke of feeling welcomed and safe, of neighbors stepping in without hesitation, caring for our families and loved ones, reaching out during illness, holding us through difficult times.

We remembered moments of support, moments of joy, and moments of quiet help.

Our words painted a picture of who you are at your core: a place where love becomes practical, where help is given freely, where kindness is part of the everyday rhythm of life.

And then we returned to one of our most powerful insights: your garden.

Your garden became our guide: a model for what is possible when we shift from "me" to "us," from separation to sharing and caring.

Your garden thrives because we keep tending it, learning from it, and improving it together, year after year.

The beauty we enjoy is possible only because we invest in the soil beneath us.

And Higher Ground, we want our whole community to work that way, to feel nourished, supported, and alive, even through the quiet winters of our lives.

Today, we gather to speak to you.
Some of us are still discovering our place here.
Some of us are keeping the place we have always had.
Some of us are redefining our place as life evolves.
And all of this belongs.
All of this is part of learning how to live together under one name: yours.

So, as we step into a new year, here is our promise to you:
We will keep learning how to care for each other.
We will keep learning how to care for you.
We will keep welcoming new neighbors with love.
We will keep honoring those who leave.
We will keep living our shared story.
We will keep dreaming big dreams together.
We will keep our roots strong while allowing new branches to grow.
We will keep building the culture that helps us stay connected, even when life is difficult, even when we are misunderstood, even when we are tired.
And we will keep practicing what it means to be "us."

You have carried us through many years.
Now we walk into the next one with gratitude, with humility, and with hope.
We are a bit more in love with you than we were last year, and we are still learning how to love you better.

Thank you for being our home.
Thank you for giving us a place to grow.
Thank you for letting us shape you, and for shaping us in return.

With love,
Your community