

**Worship and Action for Peace**  
**April 7, 2006**

Dear Friends,

The following words of Francis Howgill aptly describe the deep and powerful experience of New York Yearly Meeting Friends assembled at Spring Sessions this past weekend (March 31–April 2):

**The Kingdom of Heaven did gather us and catch us all, as in a net...**

**We came to know a place to stand in and what to wait in...**

(Francis Howgill, in Edward Burrough's

*The Memorable Works of a Son of Thunder*, 1672)

On Friday evening Nadine Hoover and Deborah Wood reported on their recent trip to Aceh, Indonesia, to provide ongoing tsunami relief and offer Alternatives to Violence training. On Saturday evening Jeff Hitchcock spoke to the body about racial privilege and racial discrimination, inviting us to reflect upon how Friends might better love one another as we work together to achieve racial justice in our community.

On Saturday afternoon the Yearly Meeting body, gathered in worship, bore witness to Friends' historical peace testimony. The gathered Friends approved having NYYM submit an *amicus curiae* ("friend of the court) brief in support of the war tax witness case of Dan Jenkins. Friends also approved a minute from Farmington-Scipio Region proclaiming our belief in the Power of the Living Spirit to bring peace and prosperity to all people and acknowledging that paying taxes to support war violates our conscience. The minute reads:

The Living Spirit works to give joy, peace and prosperity through love, integrity and compassionate justice among people. We are united in this Power. We acknowledge that paying for war violates our religious conviction. We will witness to this religious conviction in each of our communities.

We will publish this Truth widely through a press release being issued today to the media, legislators, Quaker bodies, organizations, colleges and seminaries. The press release is included at the base of this Worship & Action Letter.

In ministry on First Day, a Friend observed that we had experienced Pentecost during Spring Sessions weekend. It was a time when "we could see, hear, and taste what the world is like in the Peaceable Kingdom." She shared further that "those present at Pentecost then scattered to proclaim the good news that love overcomes hate, strife and oppression." She concluded: "May the unity that we experienced in Spring Sessions strengthen us to do likewise."

The worship, the reports, the listening and discernment of the weekend were all of a piece. Friends were upheld by the fullness of God's Power and Life.

In the Fellowship of Peace,

Linda Chidsey & Fred Dettmer for the  
Worship & Action for Peace Working Group

PRESS RELEASE (4-7-06):

### **Quakers Issue Statement against Paying for War**

Quakers from New York State and parts of New Jersey and Connecticut have issued a statement affirming that the use of their taxes to pay for war violates their religious conviction and their faith in the Power of the Living Spirit to bring peace and prosperity in this world.

Representatives of New York Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, the umbrella organization for Quaker meetings and churches in the tri-state area, approved the following minute at their Spring Business Sessions on April 1:

“The Living Spirit works to give joy, peace and prosperity through love, integrity and compassionate justice among people. We are united in this Power. We acknowledge that paying for war violates our religious conviction. We will witness to this religious conviction in each of our communities.”

This statement reflects Quakers' steadfast testimony that any participation in war, including payment of taxes for war, is a violation of our faith. By compelling support of war making through taxation, our government and political leaders have forced many people of faith to subordinate God's Word to the dictates of the state. The statement seeks to uphold a foundational principle of our nation that freedom to practice our religious faith is a matter of moral imperative, and is not dependent upon the grace of rights or privileges granted by the legislature.

For nearly 350 years, members of the Religious Society of Friends, commonly known as Quakers, have upheld a testimony of peace and nonviolence that embodies their belief that God's spirit, present in every person, empowers all of us to resolve disputes without resort to the machinery of war. Quakers, Mennonites and other faiths came to the New World to escape persecutions in Europe for their religious convictions. The work of these “peace churches” in the United States eventually led to the legal recognition of the right of all persons not to be forced into military service in violation of their conscience. To date, however, the United States government has failed to respect the right of religious conscience, recognized by the First Amendment's guarantee of free exercise of religion, not to be compelled to support war through the collection of taxes.

The US Congress has before it legislation introduced by Congressman John Lewis of Georgia and supported by 35 Representatives -- H.R. 2631 (the "Religious Freedom Peace Tax Fund Bill")—that would provide conscientious objectors to military taxation with an option. Individuals who establish a sincere religious objection would have their tax payments directed towards non-violent and life-affirming means for protecting and promoting national security, consistent with their faith. Until that time, many Quakers and others are being forced to choose between being faithful to their religious convictions and being in compliance with our federal tax laws.

“As a religious body, we cannot in good conscience support war, and we have borne that witness for over 350 years,” said Christopher Sammond, General Secretary of New York Yearly Meeting. “We are clear that violence only begets more violence, in a never ending cycle of horror that diminishes all humankind. Being required to pay almost half our taxes to support war-making is a violation of our religious convictions, and we will be seeking ways to redress this, individually and corporately.”

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