

Worship and Action Letter, 8/18/04

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

How do Friends in this political season hear the call of the Spirit?

When the air is filled with rhetoric and sniping, how do we offer public witness while remaining centered in faithfulness to God?

What is it we are asking of ourselves when we commit to acting “with a tender hand”?

We rest in God when we worship. We worship when we find our still center, the quiet we seek and which we can offer to others. There we find our capacity to act, in small and sometimes hidden ways or in public witness.

In her letter from Danbury Federal Prison Camp, Shirley Way wrote that “*when there is public evil, there must also be public weeping.*” She drew our attention to the need to take action when seeking in worship brings insight:

My faith tells me I must seek Truth and when I find it, I must speak it, live it. It is really quite simple and easier than we sometimes allow ourselves to believe.

My experience shows me that when I say “yes” to the Spirit, way opens and the service becomes a gift, not a burden. As Caroline Fox (1819–1871) said, “Live up to the light thou hast, and more will be granted thee.”

In taking action, we understand that we cannot judge the success or failure of what we do, which will be realized over a broader scale and longer time than we can conceive. We are called, therefore, not to success but to faithfulness.

As New York City prepares for the convention of the Republican Party, Friends in and around the city have been deeply involved in many planned actions for peace. New York City Peace Friends (a network of the peace and social action committees of the Meetings in New York City), in conjunction with seekers of peace throughout our society, invites our attention and participation:

- **Boston-to-New York “Stonewalk”**: September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows (a group of 120 family members of 9/11 victims) and the Peace Abbey are sponsoring a walk pulling a 1,400-pound granite memorial honoring the “Unknown Civilians Killed in War” from Boston to New York. Peaceful Tomorrows expresses the purpose of this project: “Through this walk, and through speaking events in dozens of communities along the way, [we] will bear witness to the tragic reality that civilian casualties constitute 80% of the deaths in

war, and ask that this human toll be a prime consideration in U.S. policymaking decisions.” The American Friends Service Committee, New York Metro Region, and NYC Peace Friends are supporting this effort and have provided walkers and hospitality as the Stone makes its journey. The procession arrived in Connecticut on August 7th; it will arrive in New York State (at Port Chester) on August 25th, and New York City on August 28th, when an interfaith service is scheduled for 7:00 P.M. at St. Mary’s Episcopal Church, 521 West 126th Street. The stone will travel in Manhattan through September 11. On September 2, the stone is scheduled to join the Eyes Wide Open exhibition. Friends will find more information on the project at the Web site of Peaceful Tomorrows: www.peacefultomorrows.org; the current schedule for the Stonewalk is posted at www.stonewalk.org/pt/schedule.htm.

- **Eyes Wide Open: The Human Cost of War in Iraq:** The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is hosting the EYES WIDE OPEN exhibition, highlighting the human costs of the Iraq War, in New York City from August 28th through Labor Day, September 6th. The exhibit consists of over 945 pairs of empty combat boots—tagged with the names of U.S. soldiers who died in the Iraq war—and a 24-foot “wall” of names and incidents identifying Iraqi civilian deaths. The exhibition will be shown at three locations in Manhattan from 10:00 A.M. until dusk or 7:00 P.M.: Central Park (Cherry Hill, near Strawberry Fields at 72nd Street) on August 28; Judson Memorial Church (55 Washington Square Park South) on August 29–31, and September 2–6; and Union Square Park (14th Street at Broadway) on September 1. Volunteers are needed to help set up and put away the exhibit each day. For more information and volunteer opportunities, contact AFSC, NYMRO at 212-598-0961 or eyes.ny@afsc.org or www.afsc.org/eyes.

- **Ring of Hope:** Under the sponsorship of Riverside Church, concerned persons and members of New York’s varied faith communities will form a circle of light around a significant portion of Manhattan on Tuesday evening, August 31. Riverside Church describes the purpose of this event: “Each participant will hold a light [a battery-operated flashlight] to affirm hope, to reclaim our spiritual, moral, and democratic values, and to establish prophetic justice that prioritizes the needs of the poor and marginalized in America.” Participants are asked to gather at 8:30 P.M., and to stand along the “ring” with their flashlights turned on from 9:00 to 9:30 P.M. The Ring will be preceded by an interfaith service, rally, and festival, including a talk by Dr. James A. Forbes, pastor of the Riverside Church, at Riverside from 6:30 to 8:30 P.M., which will be broadcast on WBAI (99.5 FM). 15th Street Meeting has undertaken to fill an arc of the Ring (First Avenue between 14th and 18th Streets) and would welcome volunteers to participate. Contact: Tom Rothschild at tomr@tnrmediate.com.

- **March for Peace:** United for Peace and Justice is organizing an “impassioned, peaceful, and legal” march for peace in Iraq on Sunday, August 29, beginning at 12:00 Noon. The march will proceed up Seventh Avenue (with marchers feeding

in from assembly areas on the streets from 15th Street to 22nd Street between Fifth and Ninth Avenues) past Madison Square Garden, the site of the Republican Convention. (A permit has been issued for the march, although the city and the organizers are still attempting to resolve questions about the location for a post-march rally.) 15th Street Meeting invites Friends to join them in worship at 11:00 A.M. before proceeding to the march.

Brooklyn Meeting intends to be open every night from August 29 through September 1 to offer overnight hospitality in a safe and peaceful space to people coming to New York City for the events happening during that time. Friends who are willing to help with hospitality should contact Tom Rothschild at tomr@tnrmediate.com. (Bring your own sleeping bag or blanket.)

In his "I Have A Dream" speech at the Lincoln memorial, Washington, D.C., in 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. spoke about acting with faith "that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together." He spoke of his vision:

With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

In the Stonewalk, the Eyes Wide Open Exhibition, the Ring of Hope, the March for Peace, and innumerable other actions large and small, public and private, corporate and individual, Friends are saying "yes" to the Spirit and hewing a stone of hope.

In care,

Linda Chidsey, Vicki Cooley, Fred Dettmer, Lu Harper
NYYM Worship and Action for Peace working group