

Worship and Action Update, 8/1/03

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

During annual sessions at Silver Bay, reports were offered on how Friends across the nation and beyond our borders are upholding our Peace Testimony. Retha McCutchen, general secretary of Friends United Meeting, asked: "What is the right thing to do?" and urged us to pay attention to a natural tendency toward denial. Elizabeth Duke, general secretary of Friends World Committee on Consultation, reported that Friends around the world are looking to Friends in the United States, who carry a special burden of witness to our Peace Testimony in these times, and are praying for us as we do so. She urged NYYM Friends not to be afraid to be responsive to the call.

From the podium and from the floor, and in study groups and spontaneous gatherings, Friends spoke during the week to a dawning opportunity to engage with other Friends and non-Friends around issues of war and peace. The question was posed, how can we be effective in making contact with, relating to and communicating with neighbors, communities, society and Friends who may not agree with us?

If Friends' testimonies are expressions of our faith on living in harmony with God, with each other and with our world and universe, do we diminish those testimonies by accepting war making and nonviolence as alternative methodologies for achieving the same goal? Do organized violence and studied nonviolence really seek to attain the same ends?

The immediate goal sought in the use of lethal violence is not peace, nor justice. Deadly force is employed to inflict vengeance, fear, intimidation, terror, in the service of power through domination. Peace is not a consequence of war. Those who direct the machinery of war are not engaged in the science, art and labor of peace building; peace and justice are neither a concern nor an objective.

The vision of the Peaceable Kingdom inspires neither power nor domination. The word "peace" may be thought of as a shorthand for a complex of relationships among persons and with our environment characterized by the sanctity and dignity of all. In giving voice to that vision, we may invoke advices like the Golden Rule ("Do unto to other as you would have them do unto you."), or words attributed to Jesus ("Love your enemies," "the kingdom of God is within you," and so on), or wisdom of those experienced in faith (such as the declaration of George Fox that "I told them that I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars."). In the journey toward that world of peace, we seek ways to transform conflict resolution from power struggles into shared understanding and enlightenment, to attend to the needs of all while preserving our heritage, to celebrate both the individual and the community without diminishing either.

How can we share such a vision of right relations with a society entranced by symbols and styles of domination? How can we communicate with neighbors and colleagues who ask "what alternative is there to the use of force for imposing our nation's will" (even if for laudable purposes) when our vision precludes imposing one's will? What are

the messages we want to convey? How can we make that different perspective comprehensible and compelling?

Jonathan Schell explores some of these questions in his new book *The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, and the Will of the People* (Henry Holt & Company, Incorporated 2003) (also drawn upon in the June 27, 2003 Update).

In a chapter entitled "Living in Truth," Schell offers lessons from nonviolent revolutions, including Poland (Solidarity), Czechoslovakia (Chapter 77) and Hungary, and the movement led by Mahatma Gandhi in India, on the nature and potential of peaceable direct action. He concludes (at page 201):

In both [the Eastern European and Gandhi's] movements, we find a conviction that the prime human obligation is to act fearlessly and publicly in accord with one's beliefs; that one should withdraw cooperation from destructive institutions; that this should be done without violence ...; that means are more important than ends; that crimes shouldn't be committed today for the sake of a better world tomorrow; that violence brutalizes the user as well as his victim; that the value of action lies in the direct benefit it brings society; that action is usually best aimed first at one's immediate surroundings, and only later at more distant goals; that winning state power, if necessary at all, is a secondary goal; that freedom 'begins with myself,' as [Adam] Michnik [of Poland] said, is oriented to love of truth, and only then discovers what it hates and must oppose; and that state power not only should but actually does depend on the consent of the governed.

In a subsequent chapter, Schell reflects upon the insights of Hannah Arendt on power, violence and transformation. He notes (at page 226):

To the question what the usefulness of violence was and was not, Arendt answered that violence, even when used in the service of goodness, lies outside politics and is destructive of it. And to the question what the role of nonviolent action in politics is, her answer was: politics *is* nonviolent action.

In this light, Retha McCutchen's query reported above - "What is the right thing to do?" - gains deepened vigor and pertinence.

Friends are organizing a gathering for the weekend of October 31 to November 2 at Powell House to worship, consider and share around the concerns of "Where does our peace testimony lead us now?" We will provide additional information as the plans develop. In the meantime, those interested in helping can contact Paddy Lane at grodlane@dmcom.net or 607-263-5817.

Friends in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting continue to find the strength to act "fearlessly and publicly" in support of the peace witness of Priscilla Adams. When Priscilla was led

by her conscience to withhold taxes destined for use in war making, PYM declined to comply with an Internal Revenue Service levy against her wages. In response to the government's suit to compel compliance by PYM and exact stiff penalties, Thomas Jeavon, General Secretary of PYM, remarked: "We view this as an opportunity for witness." (The case is reported in an article posted by the Philadelphia Inquirer on July 23, 2003, "'War-tax' protest prompts U.S. suit," which can be found at www.philly.com/mld/inquirer/living/religion/6361483.htm.)

Three Dominican Nuns in Colorado - Sisters Jackie Hudson (age 68), Ardeth Platte (55) and Carol Gilbert (66) - also continue to find the strength to act "fearlessly and publicly" in support of peace witness by acting to focus publicity on United States weapons of war. In October, wearing white chemical weapons suits, they cut through a fence at a Minuteman nuclear missile site, struck a nuclear missile silo with hammers and painted a cross in blood on the structure. Last Friday, July 25th, the nuns were sentenced to jail terms of 2.5 years, 3.5 years and 2 years. (An Associated Press report on the case by Judith Kohler was printed in numerous papers, such as the Buffalo News, "Nuns sent to prison for anti-war protest," www2.buffnews.com/editorial/20030726/1018482.asp.) At the close of this Update, we offer extracts from the Statements Before Sentencing of Sisters Jackie, Ardeth and Carol.

And in the wake of the sentencing, hundreds of demonstrators protested on Saturday, July 26th, in Colorado and Nebraska. The Associated Press reported that "religious and political activists targeted the Minuteman III site, known as M-11, about 140 miles northeast of Denver - one of 49 silo sites in Colorado - to pray, sing, dance, beat drums and hang an eviction notice. Officials said protesters also gathered at three missile sites in southwestern Nebraska." ("Hundreds Continue Nuns' War Protest," by Judith Kohler, available at www.dfw.com/mld/cctimes/news/breaking_news/6387001.htm.)

Are these the kinds of direct action Friends are called to support? When is civil disobedience an aid to communication? When does it impede or distract? When is civil disobedience justified or necessary?

Friends are invited to offer their reflections on these queries for sharing with Friends in future Worship & Action Updates. (Reflections should be emailed to paul@nnyym.org, or sent by postal mail to the NYYM office, 15 Rutherford Place, New York, New York 10003.)

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Many opportunities to witness for peace over the coming months are being developed. Some of these include:

Remembering Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9:

- In Binghamton, New York, on August 6th, there will be a breakfast at 7:00 AM with a guest speaker. Contact for breakfast reservations: Broome County Council of

Churches at 607-724-9130. Contact for organization co-sponsorship: George Haeseler at 607-729-1044 Contact for General info: PeaceactionNYS@earthlink.net.

- In Princeton, New Jersey, on August 6th, at 6:00 PM, the annual picnic and program commemorating the bombing of Hiroshima will be held on the Woodrow Wilson School Plaza near the fountain. Contact: Karen Mazzola, Associate Director, Coalition for Peace Action, 609-924-5022; www.peacecoalition.org.

- In New York City, on August 9th, a Ceremony for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament - to honor the victims of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and to say "Never Again!" - will be held in Central Park at 6:00 PM on Pilgrim Hill at 72nd Street and Fifth Avenue. Contact: Yuko Tokuhisa, Nagasaki Day Committee at yuko@haguepeace.org; aug9@haguepeace.org; <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/9august2003.html>

- In Flushing, Queens, on August 9th, from Noon to 2:00 PM, the Queens Network for Peace & Justice will hold a program titled "Renounce All Weapons of Mass Destruction," at Roosevelt Avenue between Main Street & Union Street. They plan to exhibit photos of the bombings, lobby against all WMDs, register new voters to the beat of Korean drums & folk songs. Information is available at: 718 507-4467, clairevogel1@juno.com.

- Information on other Hiroshima /Nagasaki Day local events can be found at the website of the Alliance fo Nuclear Accountability: <http://www.ananuclear.org/HiroshimaDays2003.html>.

The NAACP, the National Peace Action and others are sponsoring a march and rally call for "Jobs, Peace and Freedom" on Saturday, August 23rd, in Washington, DC, to commemorate the 40th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's "I have a dream speech."

Remembering the tragedy of September 11, 2001:

- As they did last year, Flushing Friends will open the Meetinghouse (137-16 Northern Boulevard) from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM on Thursday, September 11th, to all who wish to come in, sit down and be still. From 7:00 - 8:30 PM, a candlelight vigil will be held in front of the Meetinghouse. For more information, contact Naomi Paz Greenberg, naomipaz@nyc.rr.com; or leave a message on the Meeting's answering machine at 718-358-9636.

Peaceable greetings,

Linda Chidsey, Vicki Cooley, and Fred Dettmer
NYYM Worship and Action working group

From Statement Before Sentencing of Sister Jackie Hudson, July 25, 2003
(www.coloradopeace.org/2003/NunsStatements/):

We went to that specific silo to Inspect, Expose and Symbolically Disarm one of our 10,455 nuclear weapons and to declare it a crime scene....

We went to the silo site because of a burden of knowledge.... I refer today to the Nuremberg Principles and the Tokyo Tribunal.... They declare that: *Individuals have international duties which transcend the national obligations of obedience.... Therefore [individual citizens] have the duty to violate domestic laws to prevent crimes against peace and humanity from occurring.* - Nuremberg War Crime Tribunal, 1950.

We will enter the courtroom in silence praying for Peace on this Earth and silently repeating our mantra: "O God teach us how to be peace makers in a hostile world."

We are living in a period of History, which will see a BAN ON WAR FOREVER.... What gives me such hope? Earth's inhabitants have come to realize the barbarity of war as it is waged today. Millions in the streets of the planet stated this loudly and strongly prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Leadership will have to begin to listen ... and as the quote says ... at some point governments will get out of the way and let the people have peace, a just economic system and an equally just judicial system.

The hope of the world rests on each of our shoulders..... I promise to do my share..... How about you?!?!?!?

From Sentencing Allocution of Sister Ardeth Platte, July 25, 2003
(www.coloradopeace.org/2003/NunsStatements/ArdethPlatte.html)

While we were at home at Jonah House, we opened our liturgy with the music, "Here I am God. Is it I God? I have heard you calling in the night. I will go God, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart." We closed the liturgy with: "Be not afraid. I go before you always. Come follow Me and I will give you rest." Faith and the words of the stanzas to these hymns record key notes in my journey of life - in waging peace, led on a quest....

With a vision for disarmament, a mandate to speak truth, and a mission to halt the sinfulness, illegality and criminality being touted in my name, I march to the Drummer of my soul Who instills **faith** rather than fear, **trust** not hopelessness, and **love** instead of hatred and enemy relationships made through endless threats, innuendos, propaganda, and permanent warmaking.

This journey has included numerous direct actions over decades: forums, vigils, lobby, processions, demonstrations, boycotts, and civil resistance in various areas of the country. Our social analysis, along with the need to

unmask urgent and sometimes secretive matters, has led me into nonviolent symbolic public actions of resistance....

How will we wage the struggle together to keep democracy alive, to bring our nation from its killing mode to a life-giving mode, to keep the tenets of the beatitudes, commandments and Sermon on the Mount practiced by the nation as well as by us as individuals? ... Whatever sentence I receive today will be joyfully accepted as an offering for peace. With God's help it will not injure my spirits. In the sacred moments or years of imprisonment, I will remain with you in prayer and walk together with you for the good of all humanity and creation.

From Sentencing Statement of Sister Carol Gilbert, July 25, 2003
(www.coloradopeace.org/2003/NunsStatements/CarolGilbert.html)

For many months I have pondered what to say, if anything at all. St. Francis once said, "Preach the Gospel at all times, if necessary use words." It seems that today a few words are necessary.

We have read in the press and in our pre-sentencing reports that the lengthy sentence is for deterrence - both for ourselves and others.

But, what the government fails to recognize is that long prison sentences will only energize the movement. As a tee shirt in upstate New York reads, "You can jail the resister but not the resistance." We will not be silenced.

[H]eed these words from one of my church's social justice documents, Gadium et spes. #16 "Deep within their consciences men and women discover a law which they have not laid upon themselves and which they must obey. Its voice, ever calling them to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, tells them inwardly at the right moment: do this, shun that. For they have in their hearts a law inscribed by God. Their dignity rests, in observing the law, and by it they will be judged. Their conscience is people's most secret core and their sanctuary. There they are alone with God whose voice echoes in their depths."

Someday history will prove what we did on the early morning of October 6, 2002 - inspecting, exposing and symbolically disarming a Minuteman III, a weapon of mass destruction - was legal.

Until that day I will continue being led where I would rather not go. I will continue to resist with every fiber of my being so that not one child will ever ask, "Why were you complicit?"

Lastly, a few words about fear. I don't fear going to prison. I don't fear loss of freedom to move about. I don't even fear death. The fear that fills me is

not having lived hard enough, deep enough and sweet enough with whatever gifts God has given me.

The demons are banished by light and like the prophet Micah, this is what God asked of us, only this - "To act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with our God."

There is a story told of Daniel Berrigan, Jesuit priest, prophet and friend, that he was once asked to give the commencement address at a prestigious university. He stood up, walked to the podium and said, "Know where you stand and stand there" and then he sat down. My friends, "Know where you stand and stand there."