

Worship and Action Update **10/03/02**

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

Despite an outpouring of voices urging restraint and the exploration of alternatives to waging war, we see an implacable administration determined to use violence against Iraq and Congressional leadership unwilling or unable to exercise independent judgment. In these times, the words of Advice # 14 of NYYM's *Faith and Practice* ring particularly true:

Friends are advised to maintain our testimony against war by endeavoring to exert an influence in favor of peaceful principles and the settlement of all differences by peaceful methods. They should lend support to all that strengthens international friendship and understanding and give active help to movements that substitute cooperation and justice for force and intimidation.

Words from an old friend of the peace movement, Daniel Berrigan, have a special pertinency as we contemplate living our testimony before a political leadership that refuses to listen:

One is called to live nonviolently, even if the change one works for seems impossible. It may or may not be possible to turn the US around through nonviolent revolution. But one thing favors such an attempt: the total inability of violence to change anything for the better.

Last week saw gatherings of peoples of peace around the world to lift their voices in opposition to war. On Saturday, September 28th, between 300,000 and 400,000 people rallied in London; another 100,000 came together in Rome; perhaps 10,000 marched in Washington, DC; and over the weekend other events took place in the State of Washington, Minnesota, Illinois, New Mexico, Missouri, Colorado, Texas and California, among other states. The Emergency Lobby Day in Washington, D.C., on Monday, September 30, saw at least 140 concerned citizens meet with 102 Congressional offices to urge them to vote against a war resolution on Iraq, and public communications to Congresspersons are running overwhelmingly in support of nonviolent alternatives to war.

Friends in New York Yearly Meeting have continued to place advertisements urging nonviolent resolution of our government's differences with Iraq, to hold vigils, to meet with congressional representatives, to write letters to congresspersons and to editors, to organize programs, to visit with students and to conceive of new and different ways to engage our communities while remaining grounded in our faith. On October 2, 2002, ZNet

Commentary published an article by George Lakey, "Strategizing against The Iraq War," that offers a provocative strategy for activists in small groups to rouse the public to act to halt war. It can be found at www.zmag.org/sustainers/content/2002-09/15lakey.cfm. And a cogent analysis by Jay Bookman, "The President's Real Goal in Iraq," on the purpose of our country's leadership in taking the country to war was published on the op-ed page of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on September 29th. It is available at www.accessatlanta.com/ajc/opinion/bookman.

As some consider whether a moment has arrived that demands acts of worshipful civil disobedience, we may find sustenance in remembering advice from 350 years ago: "We therefore think that as we cannot be concerned in wars and fightings, so neither ought we to contribute thereto . . . though suffering be the consequence of our refusal, which we hope to be enabled to bear with patience." ("An Epistle of Tender Love and Caution to Friends in Pennsylvania")

New York Yearly Meeting is a member of the New York State Community of Churches, and as clerk, Linda Chidsey sits on the Collegium, its governing body. At its meeting on September 23 the Collegium endorsed two significant documents:

1. A letter sent September 12 to George Bush by the Churches for Middle East Peace about military action in Iraq. A copy of the letter was faxed to New York's congresspersons with a cover letter signed by the NYSCC president and executive director indicating support. The letter of September 12 was signed by individuals representing 48 religious and religiously affiliated bodies, including Thomas Jeavons, general secretary of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting; Mary Ellen McNish, general secretary of AFSC; and Joe Volk, executive secretary of FCNL.
2. A document titled "Religious Declaration on Liberty, Security and Faith," developed by the Interreligious Staff Community in Washington. This document has been signed by eight religious bodies and organizations, including AFSC, and was sent to President George Bush, Attorney General Ashcroft, and the chairs and ranking members of the House and Senate Judiciary Committee. Signatures continue to be collected on this document.

With our participation in the NYSCC, we are drawn into ecumenical dialogue that provides opportunities simultaneously to witness to the distinctive principles of the Quaker faith and to join our voices with the wider faith community. As many have pointed out, our presence at the table is particularly important in these times.

Complete copies of the above documents, along with the NYSCC Collegium resolutions, will shortly be available on the NYYM Web site.

In the coming week, there will be more opportunities for Friends to join with others in

expressing our convictions, including these:

The Coalition for Peace Action will hold an Emergency Rally against War with Iraq on Saturday, October 5th, from 4-5 P.M., in Tiger Park, located in Palmer Square in Princeton, New Jersey. The Princeton Peace Network, a Princeton University based peace group, is cosponsoring the Rally.

The Not in Our Name rally will be held on Sunday, October 6th, from 1-5 P.M. in the East Meadow of NYC's Central Park (enter at Fifth Avenue and 96th Street).

A No More War on Iraq vigil will occur on Monday, October 7th, from 7:30-9:30 A.M. outside the New York City offices of Senators Schumer & Clinton to collect signatures against the coming war. Friends are asked to assemble at the north-west corner of Third Avenue and 48th Street and to WEAR BLACK. All literature & signs will be provided. For those so led, there will be a separate civil disobedience action. (Participants in the civil disobedience action should attend a planning meeting on Sunday, Oct. 6, at 6 P.M. at Catholic Workers' Mary House, 55 E. 3rd Street (between First & Second Avenues).

Connecticut Peace Action is sponsoring a program on Prevention *Not* Pre-Emption on October 8th, from 7:30-9:30 P.M. at the YWCA in Greenwich, Connecticut.

In continuing care,

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

How do we shape our efforts at peacemaking in ways which seek to appeal to the potential for good within others? I don't think there's one answer. Sometimes we appeal to the potential for good through rational argument and sometimes not. October through December of last year, a ragtag group of us gathered each Friday evening at the corner of Church and Main calling for an end to the bombing of Afghanistan. We held signs, passed out leaflets and reaped the rage of more than a few passersby. In more than one instance, drivers pulled to the side of the street and got out to yell at us. One man I remember in particular. . . . When he approached me and yelled, "Why are you here? You're just supporting the terrorists," I responded, "I'm here because I believe that we must return good for evil, that we must do good to those who persecute us." It was

immediately clear that, whether or not the yelling brother was a member of a church, he had enough familiarity with the biblical tradition to know when the Sermon on the Mount was being quoted. Now, I don't pretend for a moment that the man was converted or that I had shown any particular wisdom in quoting the Bible to him, but it was an interesting moment. While he was fully prepared to declare that our protest was a bunch of crap, he was not prepared to say the same about the words of Jesus. He fell silent, had this momentary look that was a cross between confusion and disgust, and then he got in his car and left. Whether or not the mind and spirit of the yelling brother was changed, each effort to speak for peace is also an effort to change me--to remind me of the Sermon on the Mount. The effort to appeal to the potential for good within others is also an effort to allow the light within ourselves to govern our own words and actions.

Warriors and powerbrokers need this reminder: There is no place to aim our weapons that is not holy.... But peacemakers need this reminder too: there is no place to practice peacemaking that is not holy. There is no possible word which I could offer to others which is not also a word of which I need to be reminded. As we seek to speak a word of peace and to appeal to the potential for good within others, whether we are met by kindness or scorn, we are in the very presence of God.

Lee Griffith, from remarks made at Elmira Meeting, May 22, 2002 (The full text of his message has been posted on the Peace Action page of the NYYM Web site at, www.nyyym.org/qr/nyympa/elmira22may02.html, or can be obtained by calling the NYYM office.)