

Worship and Action Update, 12/13/02

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

Report on Representative Meeting (December 6-8, 2003):

On Friday evening at Summit Meetinghouse in New Jersey, we heard about the village called Oasis of Peace, Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, in Israel where Palestinian and Jewish Israeli families live together. (More information about the village is available at: www.nswas.com). Then on Saturday at Chatham Middle School and Sunday morning at Summit Meeting, Friends shared in worship and the business of NYYM and committees. We heard of heartening work for peace: the work of Carolyn Keys of Montclair Meeting at the Trauma, Healing and Reconciliation Service in Burundi, under the care of Friends Peace Teams; Spee Braun's service with Christian Peacemaker Teams in the Middle East; the on-going efforts of the New York Metropolitan Regional Office of AFSC, and its blossoming consultative relationship with NYYM; Friends traveling in the ministry in NYYM; Meetings' efforts to address issues of conscientious objection to military service, including a report on the training session held at Summit Meeting on October and information about the comparable session to be held at Purchase Meeting on January 4, 2003.

During the Meeting, Friends adopted the Minute on Registration for Selective Service forwarded from Purchase Meeting and Purchase Quarter. The minute explains: "Our commitment to nonviolence and the free exercise of religion impels us to make plain our objection to legislation introduced by New York State Senator William Larkin and signed in September as Chapter 533 of the Laws of 2002 by Governor Pataki. This law denies a driver's license to any New York State man who does not register for Selective Service between the ages of 18 and 26." Under the law, a male between the ages of 18 and 26 who is applying for a driver's license, learner's permit, renewal of license or nondriver's identification card either must be registered with selective service or must authorize the commissioner of motor vehicles to register him (unless the person is not required to be registered with selective service). The application, itself, will be deemed the person's consent to have the commissioner register him, and the law directs the commissioner to forward the registration information about the individual in electronic format to the selective service system. (The full text of the provision is available at: <http://assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?bn=A05510&sh=t>.)

The Minute will be distributed with a cover letter from the Clerk to the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General and state legislators of New York, and to other national and regional organizations. It also will be provided to the Monthly and Regional Meetings in NYYM for use with government representatives and others, including in New Jersey and Connecticut as Friends find openings (see the account below of the meeting with congressman Christopher Shays of Connecticut.).

International Human Rights Day Actions (December 10, 2002):

International Human Rights Day Actions were held on Tuesday throughout the nation. In New York City, Friends joined with hundreds of other faiths to celebrate our belief in nonviolence and to stand in civil disobedience to the country's plans to wage war on Iraq.

Among those arrested for their action for peace were Sally Campbell, Elizabeth Enloe, Jim Morgan and John Perry (and John Humphries at a gathering in Connecticut).

John Perry writes: "Please note how heartening it was to see Friends in the crowd across the street (including Cheshire Frager and Helen Garay Toppins) and the big banner held by Wilton Friends Winnie Keane and John Lee. I asked whether I qualified to be included in the civil disobedience group ('Religious leader') and was told by the organizer, when he discovered I was a Quaker: 'Of course you qualify. All Quakers are Ministers!' What an awesome responsibility."

Elizabeth Enloe provides a moving report (from which we offer some excerpts):

At Dag Hammarskjold Plaza near the United Nations in New York several hundred people gathered in a large circle to witness *for* the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. War was clearly the greatest violation of human rights. Opposition to the proposed war on Iraq was the galvanizing force. Speakers of all faiths, and musicians of many instruments, upheld the UN while masked women in black robes held rag children and wept.

With church bells tolling, two streams of people organized themselves – those prepared to commit civil disobedience, and those prepared to accompany them and stand watch. I stood with a friend, Sister Liz, a Catholic sister whom I met after September 11th. She was the first to be arrested, and I asked to be next. With courtesy the officers helped each of us into awaiting wagons.

In the station house approximately 25 women waited in two lines until officers escorted us to the cells. The heavy metal door clanged. Large keys were inserted. The cell was clean. Concrete floors were gray, the surrounding metal a mustard color, and the toilet aluminum. A bare bulb in the corridor gave light. This is the stuff of nightmares. I calmed my heart and my breath and began conversation with four interesting women -- two professors from Union Seminary, a free lance writer, and Sister Liz. A cheerful police officer sat outside willing to banter and answer questions. We shared snacks and made phone calls. During a trip the bathroom we saw 10 officers around the table filling out paper work for ninety-nine arrests. We saw the 61 men standing in the large holding cell who, from the sound of it, seemed to be in good spirits.

Three hours after the arrests, our arresting officer, Bartholomew Gugel, handed us our summonses for January 17th. We shook hands and left the precinct one by one, waving to the remaining women in neighboring cells and the men.

At the AFSC office at Rutherford Place, I was supported by colleagues eager to hear of the experience. I was moved that one had stood outside the station house the entire time waiting for my release.

Much of this experience I have yet to understand and explain. At its most basic, it was my leading to relieve some of the anxiety of the children I love by letting them know that someone cared enough about the possible war to try to stop it.

As we seek to worship and act for peace, we often struggle to remain focused on the spirit of affirmation and growth intrinsic to our faith. (As Elizabeth noted: "several hundred people gathered in a large circle to witness *for* the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.") We strive not to be seduced by the ease of expression in negatives ("anti-war") into describing our faith in terms of oppositions.

Meeting with Congressman Christopher Shays (December 12, 2002):

Guided by the power of this positive light, a delegation from Purchase Quarter (Tom Martin of Wilton Friends Meeting, and John Benson, Fred Dettmer and Rosa Packard of Purchase Friends Meeting) met again with Representative Christopher Shays of Connecticut on Thursday, December 12th to resume a dialogue on issues of conscientious. Christopher Shays commented upon the video, "Committed to Conscience", developed by the National Campaign for a Peace Tax Fund, which had been given to him at the prior meeting and which he had watched. This time the group gave him a copy of the Minute on Registration for Selective Service adopted at December Representative Meeting and the pamphlet "Conscientious Objection to the Draft" published by the Center on Conscience and War. Christopher Shays reminded us that he had been a conscientious objector in the Vietnam War and listened with sincere concern about the disabilities and hurt being suffered by persons whose religious convictions preclude their registration with the Selective Service System because they cannot receive acknowledgment of their conscientious objection or their voluntary payment of taxes used to wage war. He offered a willingness to work with Friends to develop means for addressing these concerns and a desire to continue the dialogue in the near future.

In continuing care,

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Words of Thomas Kelly, from *Reality of the Spiritual World* (shared with Friends at Representative Meeting):

People who know one another in God do not need to talk much. They know one another already. In the last depths of understanding, words cease and we sit in silence together yet in perfect touch with one another, more bound into the common life by silence than we ever were by words. . . .

Within the fellowship there is an experience of relatedness with one another, a relation of upholding one another by internal bonds of prayer that I can only call the prayer of carrying. Between those of the fellowship there is not merely a sense of unity when we are together physically; with some this awareness of being bonded through a common life continues almost as vividly when separated as when together. This awareness of our life as in their lives and their lives as in our life is a strange experience. It is as if the barriers of individuality were let down, and we shared a common life and love. A subterranean, internal relation of supporting those who are near to us in the fellowship takes place. We know that they, too, hold us up by the strength of their bondedness. Have you had the experience of being carried and upheld and supported? I do not mean the sense that God is upholding you alone. It is the sense that some people you know are lifting you and offering you and upholding you in your inner life. And do you carry some small group of acquaintances toward whom you feel a peculiar nearness, people who rest upon your hearts not as obligations but as fellow travelers? . . .

These are not a chance group of people. They are your special burden and your special privilege. No two people have the same group to whom they are bound in this special nearness. Each person is the center of radiating bonds of spiritual togetherness. If everyone . . . were faithful in this inner spiritual obligation of carrying, the intersections would form a network of bondedness whereby the members of the whole living church would be carrying one another in outgoing bonds of love and prayer and support. . . .

This mystical unity, this group togetherness of soul, lies at the heart of the living church.