

Worship and Action Update, 1/17/03

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

As Friends and neighbors prepare to celebrate the life and insight and spirit of Martin Luther King Jr. with activities both spiritual and political, our government pushes closer to the abyss of war and continues to dismantle social-service programs. The sense of being assaulted by our own state lends greater urgency to our common dedication to act in worshipful faith that Jesus calls us to a life of nonviolence and love.

"Difficult and painful as it is, we must walk on in the days ahead with an audacious faith in the future. When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds of despair, and when our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, let us remember that there is a creative force in this universe, working to pull down the gigantic mountains of evil, a power that is able to make a way out of no way and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows. Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

—Martin Luther King, "Where Do We Go from Here?" August 1967.

As we walk with "audacious faith," we can cherish the many creative inspirations for peace and justice in our midst.

A New York Yearly Meeting worship and action gathering drew 18 Friends, from Butternuts, Manhasset, Westbury, Summit, Chappaqua, Purchase, Scarsdale, New Paltz, Poughkeepsie, Catskill, and 15th Street Meetings to Poughkeepsie meetinghouse Friday-Saturday-Sunday, January 10-11-12 to worship and act around the theme Living the Peace Testimony Now: What Shall Our Witness Be? Sharing the looming sense of deep grief about the state of our planet and also ways people are witnessing for peace in the world, taking time to enliven the body and spirit through simple yoga practices and circle dance, participants found inspiration and closure. A report from the retreat is posted on the Peace Activities page of the NYYM Web site <http://www.nyyym.org/qr/nyympa/rpt-lpn10jan03.html>; here is a short excerpt:

"We asked: What does it mean for a witness to be effective? We realized that the effectiveness of our witness might not be observable at the time we are doing it. Witnessing for peace often does have some observable effects. It opens hearts and minds and gives courage. Effective witness puts things in terms that others can hear, and plants a seed. It helps if it comes from a respected source, like the signatures of groups in ads. It empowers and helps us to speak out by participating with a supportive, small group and connecting with like-minded people. This can lessen the fear of ostracism. The group can help us be courageous and be an on-going support as some of us take risks in our peace actions. To be effective, we go where people are. Effective witness attracts people and sticks to the message."

The group concluded by deciding to organize another gathering for the last weekend in April, and to ask everyone wherever we are to pray for world peace at 7:00 A.M. each day for five minutes or longer. (Remember that a similar gathering is also scheduled for Friday evening and Saturday, February 7 and 8, 2003, at Perry City Meetinghouse, near Ithaca. Information and registration form for this event are available on the Events page of the NYYM Web site at <http://www.nyyym.org/events/perry7feb03.html>.)

We received a report of the demonstration last Friday (1/10/03) at the Immigration and Naturalization Service office in New York City to protest the new registration requirements for men from Arab and South Asian countries. Attendees state that 200 to 300 people participated, including members and attenders from at least two Quaker meetings. The demonstrators were kept separate from those lining up to enter the offices and were not permitted to give them flyers. Imam Talib spoke, and there was a formal Muslim prayer. Among the speakers, one spoke forcefully about the need to defend civil liberties, citing Martin Niemoeller's "When they came for the Jews...."

One Friend was led to these statements following the demonstration:

"I hope we can be more present, simply to support those families who are torn apart and left destitute in communities where many people are afraid to help them. It is my strong belief as a Friend that we did not make this world and that the barriers we have placed on it to defend our boundaries are frail and human things. I believe that it is God's will that every one of His creatures should have a place on earth to live safely and with dignity, to have enough to eat and a place to live. I hope more of us can begin to support this concern, keeping in mind that while we have legitimate concerns about our Constitution and civil liberties, as Friends, we have a deeper concern for that of God in people who are separated from loved ones, fearful, destitute, suffering poor mental and physical health. Our government will not reveal their names and faces, but we can know that they are souls like us."

"I speak as a citizen of the world, for the world as it stands aghast at the path we have taken. I speak as an American to the leaders of my own nation. The great initiative in this war is ours. The initiative to stop it must be ours."

—Martin Luther King Jr.

On January 16 the New York City Non-Violence Network held a demonstration at a military recruiting station on Times Square. Cheshire Frager's lively report of black coffins constructed at the AFSC office and arrests for civil disobedience is posted on the NYYM Web site at <http://www.nyyym.org/qr/nyympa/rpt-cf16jan03.html>.

"A non-violent army acts unlike armed men, as well in times of peace as in times of disturbances. Theirs will be the duty of bringing warring communities together, carrying peace propaganda, engaging in activities that would bring and keep them in touch with every single person in their parish or division. Such an army should be ready to cope with any emergency, and in order to still the frenzy of mobs should risk their lives in numbers sufficient for that purpose. ...Satragrapha (truth-force) brigades can be organized in every village and every block of buildings in the cities. In non-violent bodies the charger or soul force must mean everything and the physique must take second place. It is difficult to find such persons. That is why the non-violent force must be small if it is to be efficient."
—Mahatma Gandhi

A demonstrator in Great Britain recently tried to blockade the gates to a naval base to prevent a British warship from setting sail for the Gulf. At his appearance in Court for engaging in this act, he wore a shirt emblazoned: "Dissent without civil disobedience is consent." For some months, Friends within and beyond New York Yearly Meeting have been seeking discernment on the role of civil disobedience during these difficult days.

Rochester Friends Meeting has organized a Discernment Committee, consisting of three Friends experienced in both draft counseling and civil disobedience, to offer to the public a Quaker clearness committee process to help individuals work through and understand the consequences of decisions they might make to commit nonviolent civil disobedience. Ken Maher, a member of the Discernment Committee, has offered this description of Rochester's challenging ideas for reaching out with our Peace Testimony:

"The Discernment Committee grew out of an effort of our Peace and Social Action Committee to examine the resources of our Meeting and to determine how we might draw on those resources to make the Peace Testimony more evident in the community. Our guidelines will be *Faith and Practice*, as well as any draft counseling materials that may develop if the Selective Service is reactivated.

"Borrowing' from another meeting in the Farmington-Scipio Regional Meeting, we also have invited the local Mennonite community to share a potluck meal with us on 2/8. Other than getting to know each other better, the only agenda item that night is to decide if the Mennonites would like to join us in offering regular potluck meals to the peace community in general. As proposed, these potlucks would be open to all community peace workers and to anyone interested in becoming a peace worker. There would be no agendas, no speakers, just a sort of R&R and networking opportunity for those occupied with bringing a message of peace to the Rochester area.

"Clearness committees and potlucks are two things that Quakers do well. Now we hope to use them to help the Peace Testimony shine outside the Meeting House walls."

Hartford Monthly Meeting (New England Yearly Meeting) too has created an ad hoc committee to discern how the meeting can support members and attenders who are led to engage in acts of civil disobedience (CD). We received a report of the committee's initial plans:

"Among the roles discussed are:

1. Helping people achieve clearness about their leading to engage in CD or to support others;
2. Helping to ground this public action in and maintain its connection with the spiritual life of the Meeting;
3. Considering the community's role in providing material support (financial, legal, other);
4. Helping to insure that people receive adequate training and preparation (both for those who will participate in CD and those who will provide support).

"One likely outcome of these activities is that an Affinity Group will be established within the Meeting. But the committee will also provide support for folks in the Meeting who are part of other affinity groups.

"As a first step, we decided to sponsor at least two nonviolence training sessions. These will be open to other people who wish to participate, with particular emphasis on those who have signed the Iraq Pledge of Resistance and their support people."

Friends are gathering together and with their neighbors for worship and action in the coming days and weeks. In addition to the FWCC Peace Conference - Friends' Peace Witness in a Time of Crisis - this weekend at Guilford College, the peace march in Washington, DC, on Saturday and the many services and commemorations in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. are just a few of the planned events:

- A Silent Retreat ("An Extended Meeting for Worship") is being held at Powell House this long weekend, January 17th through 20th, under the facilitation of Linda Chidsey.

- Public television's *Point of View* is showing a film about a New York City Quaker, *Brother Outsider: the Life of Bayard Rustin*, in many places on Monday evening, January 20 (check local listings).

- New Brunswick Friends Meeting will hold a joint presentation with the Unitarian Society of New Brunswick on Saturday, February 1st from 10:00 A.M. until noon on War Issues, Registration & Conscription. The discussion will center on the current war climate, its implications for mandatory registration with the Selective Service System and a possible military draft and resources for additional counseling. Information or registration (free) is available at 732-246-3113 or usnb@eclipse.net; <http://www.nyym.org/events/newb1feb03.html>.

- Teach-ins At college campuses throughout New York State - a Week against War - is being planned for February 10-14, 2003, to take place simultaneously on college campuses through New York. The week will end with a rally in New York City on February 15th. If interested, contact Anke Wessels at Cornell University. akw7@cornell.edu; phone: 607-255-5027; fax: 607-255-9985.

- United for Peace is organizing a Stop the War March on Saturday, February 15th in New York City to coincide with anti-war demonstrations that are planned in 11 European cities on the same day.

- Friends in Pennsylvania are organizing a day of education about, and protest against, the war on Iraq, ("Friends School Day of Peace") for Sunday, February 23rd at Friends Select School and Friends Center, both in Philadelphia. From NYYM, Brooklyn Friends School and Oakwood Friends School already are planning on participating.

- Women against War and others are participating in a four-month rolling fast in Albany (which began on December 5th) culminating on March 8th, International Women's Day. For more information, or to join or assist, come by the Women's Building, 79 Central Avenue, Albany, N.Y., or contact Erin at womenagainstar@ureach.net ; 518 465-1597.

- Also on March 8th, a Women's Peace Vigil and March will be held in Washington, D.C. For information see Code Pink's Web site. www.codepink4peace.org.

Friends are reminded of the request for everyone to pray for peace every day at 7 A.M. We also ask that in NYYM we join in shared worship from a distance on Saturday, 1/18, at noon to hold in the Light the marchers in Washington, DC,

those at the FWCC Peace Conference, those engaged in silent retreat this weekend at Powell House, and the Middle East Peace delegations. In the spirit of faith in the power of nonviolence displayed by Martin Luther King, Jr., may all of us seekers find time to hold up our and sisters and brothers to restore and sustain ourselves.

Peaceable Greetings,

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