

## Worship and Action Update, 8/18/03

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

Now what?

Sweet corn and blueberries, surprising overnights with stars in New York City, end-of-summer beginnings; daily news of wrongful deaths and maimings, in Rochester (NY), in Iraq, in Piscataway (N.J.), in Indonesia, in Israel/Palestine.

We are grateful for sweet corn and blueberries. We cry, "No!" to killing and cruelty.

Good summer reading, the Bread & Puppet circus, Shakespeare, music festivals - our hearts are warmed by vision and connection. For prisoners of New York State calling home the rates are high; MCI is the sole carrier allowed and charges as much as \$20 for a 15-minute call.

Summer visiting brings delight, and most of us in New York Yearly Meeting come home to comfort. Families in the United States are the fastest growing group among the homeless. School begins, and Head Start programs end. The U.S. Census Bureau reported in 1999 that 39% of persons living in poverty are children, a rate almost twice as high as the poverty rate for any other age group.

We humans cherish friends and family; we Quakers in the United States tolerate - pay for - degradation, neglect, and exploitation in dealings with children, prisoners, the unemployed. The people who suffer are disproportionately African American. Our nation pursues ruthlessly selfish trade relations, defies international law, and undermines international cooperation in caring for the earth.

At home and abroad we Quakers recognize powerful forces of domination and destruction.

With difficulty, we face the temptation to denial, the complications of complicity.

The planning committee for the sixth National Conference of Friends on Race Relations (July 1967) "observed that many Friends suffered from 'middle class bias,' which it defined as willingness to work for change in individuals but not in societal structures, fear of conflict, and distrust of power.... Its concluding message said, 'future action must be based on a willingness to work for social changes much more far-reaching than we had supposed.... We must be prepared to discover how much we ourselves ... are contributing to the power which maintains the very practices we are fighting against.'" (From Gordon Browne's "And Your Neighbor as Yourself," *Quaker Life*, March 1999)

Must we not say the same today? What next, dear Friends?

We turn to that great Power, fiercely beautiful, which transforms us. We acknowledge guides from Jesus which call us to joy in our blessings, simple (undistracted) attention to Truth, sharing what we have, caring for others.

At last August's Worship and Action gathering at Oakwood School a Friend said, "Courage is Fear that has said its prayers." A Friend remembering that wrote last week, "That is the kind of prayer that I wish to join you in."

Peaceable greetings,

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

*There is no one but us.  
There is no one to send,  
nor a clean hand nor a pure heart  
on the face of the earth, nor in the earth,  
but only us,  
a generation comforting ourselves  
with the notion that we have come at an awkward time,  
that our innocent fathers are all dead  
– as if innocence had ever been -  
and our children busy and troubled,  
and we ourselves unfit, not yet ready,  
having each of us chosen wrongly,  
made a false start, failed,  
yielded to impulse and the tangled comfort of pleasures,  
and grown exhausted, unable to seek the thread, weak, and involved.  
But there is no one but us.  
There never has been.*

Annie Dillard, from *Holy the Firm* (1977, 1999).