

Worship and Action Update, 2/21/03

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

Millions gathered around the world on Saturday and Sunday, February 15 & 16, 2003, in the cause of nonviolent resolution of disputes and to express their support for means other than war to address concerns about Iraq. Many Friends joined together, and with spiritual companions of other faiths, to participate in the New York City rally that drew probably in excess of 400,000 people.

Brooklyn Meeting welcomed many visitors for worship Saturday morning before the rally and was joined by 48 Friends who had traveled from Virginia for the gathering. Over 120 Friends and guests then merged with the swirl of people headed to mid Manhattan for the event. Tom Rothschild shares part of his experience:

“Saturday February 15, 2003 was a day of joy – a day when hundreds of thousands in New York City lived in a place where the occasion of war had been taken away. In Brooklyn, ... we left as a group for the demonstration, only to be carried along in a river of humanity that separated us one from another and blended us all into the whole. Everywhere we looked was peace and joy, reflected on a thousand faces of young and old. Near me, a man in a wheelchair was giving out symbolic strips of duct tape; my 14-year-old daughter took two, wrapped them around her fingers, and made a “V” sign with them. We felt the strength of this great, united presence, and our unity with the millions speaking for peace all over the world.

“In the evening, we gathered once more at Brooklyn meetinghouse. We joined in a circle of thanks, in silence and in song, and then we shared a meal of spaghetti with our Virginia guests before they bedded down on our carpet for the night. From morning to evening, this was a day in which worship and action were fully blended together, both necessary aspects of a whole witness to peace and to truth.”

15th Street Meeting began the day in a shared worship service with Mennonites, joined by a group of Earlham students, Friends from other Meetings and visitors. Over 200 Friends and Mennonites then proceeded by foot and bus and subway to the rally in small groupings. Friends encountered and joined with other Friends and found new friends along the way. One Friend came upon two lost Mennonite teenagers and shepherded them back to 15th Street Meeting at the conclusion of the rally.

Some never arrived at the site of the rally because of the flood of participants, but still found joy or growth in their experience. John Edminster offers these reflections:

“The police turned the Upper East Side into a labyrinth so that most of us couldn't get to the demonstration site where the press might count us. I ended

the day exhausted and embittered, although the company of [family and friends] sweetened it for me considerably. But in the days that have followed, it's grown on me that there was no need for us to have strength, as the world reckons strength; God is our strength. If decency, compassion and truth prevail in this struggle, it will no more be because of the Quakers than because of the oratorical powers of the high-profile people that have spoken against it - that no flesh should glory when the Lord arises to save his (her, its) people. Meanwhile we give our efforts to the struggle because it's our duty, counting ourselves unprofitable servants because we only did what was asked of us - because any other attitude will weaken us."

Many Friends traveled long distances to join in this gathering in New York City, as with the Friends from Virginia and students from Earlham. Vicki Cooley provides some closing impressions from a day of prayerful action with family and Friends encountered along the way:

"The nearly full moon rose over the Manhattan skyline as we left, where 30 or 40 mounted police were moving to new lines in response to the demonstrators who were not just going home. The horses are beautiful, and the moon is beautiful. The skyline is very high and very definite. The humans seemed small and preoccupied with agendas of that-which-is-not, both police and demonstrators. The police wore uniforms and riot gear. The demonstrators carried placards or joined to form dragon-like creatures. Onlookers looked straightforwardly human, by contrast, and awake and aware, interested, able to see the moon and skyline and horses, and even able to care about the people ... for reasons that did not have to do with moons or horses."

We may appreciate the overwhelmingly peaceful and tender spirit of the rallies, marches, vigils and other actions that have been organized over the past year and the remarkable diversity of the participants. Many Friends have felt empowered by this abiding dedication to nonviolence and inclusiveness to step into the seas of activism without the fear of being dragged under by unruly waves.

We may also appreciate the unity of faiths in resisting the call of the Powers to war. Most recently, on February 20th, the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, and the Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Murphy O'Connor, issued a joint statement on Iraq which called on those bearing "the huge burden of responsibility" to recognize "that doubts still persist about the moral legitimacy as well as the unpredictable humanitarian consequences of a war with Iraq." The statement concluded with a reflection on God's call as we come upon Lent and Easter times:

"The season of Lent is now approaching, a time when all Christian traditions encourage us to examine ourselves honestly, to acknowledge our shortcomings and to seek reconciliation with God. We must hope and pray that, with God's guidance, an outcome that brings peace with justice to Iraq and the Middle East may yet be found."

Many Friends today feel a harmony of religious voices that have been too often disparate in the past. Many Friends feel released by that harmony to seek opportunities for interfaith worship and action. Saturday's shared worship service of Friends and Mennonites was one such opening. Among many other such openings are Purchase Quarter's involvement in interfaith conscientious objector and military personnel counseling programs; Rochester Meeting's public offer of support to "those who wish to undergo the process of discernment regarding their actions in response to war"; the involvement of Saratoga and Easton Meetings in the formation of a local peace group, the Saratoga Peace Alliance (www.saratogapeacealliance.org); the many Meetings and Friends that organize and participate in multi-faith coalitions, vigils and events. And we may recall that this past Summer NYYM Peace Concerns Committee developed a list of actions meetings and individual could take for peace, which began with the suggestion to "Solicit the support of other churches, faith groups, and organizations in your efforts, or support theirs." (The list is available on the NYYM Web site at <http://www.nyym.org/qr/nyympa/pccsugg.html>.)

As Friends continue to explore possibilities for interfaith relationships and actions for peace, we increasingly feel concern and a need for caution to preserve our grounding in Friends' testimonies and experience. We cannot truly share our life and spirit with others without risking a part of ourselves. But we also lessen our life and spirit if we do not take that risk. How do we remain centered while on these journeys? How do we recognize the borders between being in this world and being of this world? And how do we remain in unity with our faith while affording entry of other faiths into our spirit?

Friends United Meeting and Shrewsbury Monthly Meeting recently approved minutes in support of nonviolent alternatives to war on Iraq, which are set out below. We hear, in these minutes, Friends gathered in corporate worship in order to be able to reach out to others while remaining grounded in Quaker tradition and experience.

Peaceable Greetings,

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

Friends United Meeting Minute on Proposed War on Iraq

"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."
Romans 12:21 KJV

"Let us then try what Love will do."
William Penn

The government of the United States proposes to protect democracy by means of preemptive violence against the people of Iraq. Friends United Meeting calls its members - and all who know the love of God - to deny the possibility of a "just," "necessary," or "holy" war.

We believe there is another way to address issues of injustice and oppression because the root causes of injustice and oppression, such as greed, thirst for power and lack of mercy, cannot be solved through violence. We must examine our own entanglements in these roots.

Jesus shows us the way of service, humility, and non-violent intervention - substituting courageous acts of compassion for domination. The teachings of Jesus are clear: Feed the hungry, heal the sick, take care of children, love each other, forgive each other, return good for evil. In His life, His death, and His resurrection, we can see a way through our fears which is not the world's way.

The citizens of the United States continue in turmoil, affected by messages of fear and terror from all directions; we pray that they do not succumb to the temptation of believing in the security promised by military might and action. Only a false security comes through armies or weapons or creating fear - thereby hatred - in others. We recognize that following Christ's way carries risk. Yet, our experience of life under God's power keeps us on this path of love and compassion. We know that there is not - and never has been in this world - any safety except the safety that is found in hearts that have been touched and tendered by the Holy Spirit.

Friends United Meeting says to the governments and peoples of the United States, Iraq, and all the world once again, "The spirit of Christ, by which we are guided, is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing as evil and again to move unto it; and we do certainly know, and so testify to the world, that the spirit of Christ, which leads us into all Truth, will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdoms of this world." (Declaration from Quakers to King Charles II, 1660)

Approved by Friends United Meeting General Board on February 16, 2003.

Shrewsbury Monthly Meeting
Minute in Support of Peace Rather than War with Iraq

As Quakers, it is our tradition to promote peace and shun all war. We believe war with Iraq is wrong, not only because of the death, suffering and destruction it will cause to the combatants and citizens of the nations involved, but in addition could lead to more war in other parts of the world. We believe unified action by the United Nations, including inspection of Iraq for compliance to UN resolutions and direct aid to the Iraqi people, will do more to protect the United States and the world from attack by weapons of mass destruction. We, the Friends of Shrewsbury Monthly Meeting, call on President George W. Bush and Congress, especially

Senators Jon S. Corzine and Frank Lautenberg, and Representatives Rush Holt, Frank Pallone Jr., Christopher H. Smith and H. James Saxton, to do the utmost to promote peace through dialog and prevent war with Iraq, a war that would be unjust and immoral.

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