

## Worship and Action Update, 3/21/03

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

*“We must be the change  
we wish to see in the world.”*

Voices of peace, like Mahatma Gandhi's, continue to call us to a different reality than the message coming from our government and echoed in the major media. We hear truth in words from fellow Friends, Quaker organizations, and other friends from the present and the past. Their words may help nourish our diligence.

Chuck Fager writes from Quaker House in Fayetteville, North Carolina about the meaning of commencement of war for Friends:

“The outbreak of war surely marks a setback for our months of marching, vigiling, writing and faxing to head it off. But it does not spell defeat, and much less a reason for withdrawal into depression, indifference or escape.

“There is still much To Do. And even more, there is still much To Be.... At bottom it is straightforward and simple, so much so that it can be easily overlooked: It is, in George Fox's phrase, to ‘keep to our meetings,’ that is, to maintain and deepen our life as a worshipping community.

“This cultivation of a deep center will not only help sustain us as individuals in a dark time (which it will). It also, and perhaps more importantly, has a public aspect: it can maintain our meetinghouses as places of refuge from the spirit of war.

“In those bloody weeks [after the start of the first Gulf War in 1991], our meetinghouse filled up with pilgrims. They were seeking a similar respite from the war-spirit, and somehow figured that among Friends they would find it; and they were not mistaken. By ‘simply’ being who we were, the meeting sustained a public witness, ministering to many who did not know where else to turn.”

A Statement Regarding the War in Iraq was issued yesterday, March 20<sup>th</sup>, by representatives of the American Friends Service Committee, Friends Committee on National Legislation, Friends General Conference, Friends United Meeting, Pendle Hill and Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. (The complete Statement is posted on the Quaker Response page of the New York Yearly Meeting Web site, at [www.nyym.org/qr/usorgs20mar03.html](http://www.nyym.org/qr/usorgs20mar03.html) .) They express both our pain and our abiding commitment to nonviolence:

“As servants of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), as citizens of the United States, and as members of the human family, we speak today to express our profound grief and sorrow over our government's decision to go to war against Iraq....

“The God we worship is a God of love (I John: 4). This Divine Spirit will always guide us into ‘paths of righteousness’ - into lives of caring for, service to, and reconciliation with our fellow human beings - if only we will open ourselves to Divine direction and follow where that leads. This God tells ‘what is good, and that is to do justice, and love mercy, and walk humbly with our God’ (Micah 6:8). The living Christ, our Teacher, tells us ‘to love our enemies’ (Mt. 6:44). We wonder where the justice, the mercy, or the love is to be found in our government’s decision to launch this preemptive attack, and begin a war where so many people will die.

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“On this day, in our sorrow and our hope for a better future, we recommit ourselves to work with all people of faith and goodwill to bring this conflict to an end, and to do whatever can be done to avoid more wars. We believe, as President Carter observed in accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, that ‘war is always an evil, never a good. We will not learn how to live together in peace by killing each other’s children.’ And we pray fervently for that time the prophet Isaiah predicted, when we ‘shall beat our swords into plowshares, and our spears into pruning hooks; and nation will not lift up sword against nation, and we shall not learn war anymore’ (Is. 2:4).”

Also yesterday, representatives of 15 Quaker service agencies based in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Belgium, New Zealand, Australia, Norway and Sweden issued a statement on the launching of war on Iraq. (This Statement, too, is posted on the Quaker Response page of the NYYM Web site at [www.nyyym.org/qr/intl20mar03.html](http://www.nyyym.org/qr/intl20mar03.html) .) They remind us of our grief, but also of accomplishments in the past months and opportunities in the coming time for international organizations and people of peace:

*“A good end cannot sanctify evil means;  
nor must we ever do evil that good may come of it.”*  
William Penn, 1693.

“We are appalled and deeply saddened by the decision of the United Kingdom, the United States of America and other countries, such as Australia, to launch a war against Iraq. We pray for all those affected - combatants and non-combatants alike. We pray for world leaders that God’s grace will lead them to bring a rapid cessation to the war.

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“The primary purpose of the United Nations to ‘save succeeding generations from the scourge of war’ through patient dialogue and disarmament has been cast aside by governments that claim to be world leaders in democracy and human rights. We are shamed, grieved and angered by the fact that a small minority of governments has chosen the

unconscionable act of war, going against the will of the international community and against the will of many of their own citizens.

“Despite our grief and shame, our spirits are heartened by the tens of millions of world citizens who are taking up the responsibility of citizenship - to learn about global issues, to affirm the role of the United Nations and the Security Council, and to challenge the actions of government when their actions contravene what is moral and just.

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“War is not the answer, not now and not ever. War does not bring about peace.... Peace between nations can only be won if the international community accepts a common responsibility for achieving disarmament and answering the vital needs of all. We implore world leaders to return to the tables of the United Nations with ever more resolve to solve international crises peacefully and to hold each other accountable for their actions in the global community.

“We pray for the day when ‘nations will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore’ (Isaiah 2:4). Quakers remain joined to the global effort to bring this day nearer. We renounce the use of violence, and affirm the power of non-violence and love, to bring about the cause of peace and justice for all.”

Lu Harper of Rochester Meeting writes of how the traditions of our meetings nourish us in our individual callings:

“Friends try to live ‘in the world but not of it.’ How we do so is a matter of individual leadings and conscience. Yet within the Society of Friends, individually and communally, we come together to learn how to live in peace. Our understanding that there is that of God in everyone helps us to accept great diversity in our individual understandings and expressions of God’s work in our lives. In meeting, we dedicate ourselves to living in the peaceable garden, and we create that garden together.

“I believe that the strength and variety of our individual witnesses comes from the strong traditions of the meeting community, from our experience living and working together in that garden. We try to keep our experience in the garden with us when we go out into the world, in hopes that we can live our testimonies consistently, and that our lives may be examples to others. We know we are still learning. Consistency is harder to achieve in the complexities of the wide world. We will make mistakes, and our small example may touch only a few. Yet those we touch reach out to others, and together we can make changes in our world. Our task is to keep learning together, and sharing ourselves in the world.”

As the war began, Friends in New York Yearly Meeting opened their meeting houses to worship at times throughout the week and to Friends, neighbors and strangers. Many, many, many gathered in worship Thursday evening and joined with others in vigils and rallies against the war. Meetings are completing plans to open for daily or frequent times of worship for peace as the war continues. Monthly Meetings that have sent word of their plans include Poughkeepsie (Thursdays at 7:30 PM), Cornwall (Thursdays at 7:00 PM), Rochester (weekdays from 12:15-12:45 PM). (A list appears on the NYYM Web site Events page.) Friends also continue to express their sorrow at war and hopes for peace through fasting, marching, vigiling, speaking out in advertisements and public forums, communicating with Congressional representatives, and other actions new and old.

Among special planned events:

- Purchase Quarterly Meeting is offering a three-session study series - "Nonviolent Civil Disobedience: What? Why? How? A toolkit for Our Times" - on Wednesday evenings on March 26<sup>th</sup>, April 9<sup>th</sup> and April 23<sup>rd</sup>, at Purchase Monthly Meeting. The sessions will be preceded by potluck suppers at 6:00 PM, with the programs running from 7:00 - 9:00 PM. For further information and to register, contact Nancy Hammond at 914-271-3290 or [nancyh@bestweb.net](mailto:nancyh@bestweb.net).

- Rochester Monthly Meeting will be holding a "Workshop on the Friends Peace Testimony" with Chuck Fager, from Friday evening through Sunday midmorning, April 11-13. The workshop will reexamine the original intent and context of the Peace Testimony and will look at how it has been lived and challenged by Quakers, particularly in the U.S. For more information, contact Kate Kressmann-Kehoe, 585-244-8629 or [ksk@netacc.net](mailto:ksk@netacc.net).

We, the Worship and Action working group, expect to share our understanding of the Yearly Meeting's call to shared worship and action for peace in a report that will be circulated next week, in advance of Representative Meeting in Albany (Saturday and Sunday, April 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>). We ask Friends to see Representative Meeting as a gathering of our whole body, with Sunday morning likely to become a time of deep seeking together. We look forward to settled, open worship with a concern for hearing and responding to a new call. We need to prepare to experience great inward power to act.

Peaceable Greetings,

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

*"What kind of peace do I mean? What kind of peace do we seek? Not a Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war. Not the peace of the grave or the security of the slave. I am talking about genuine peace, the kind of peace that makes life on earth worth living, the kind that enables men and nations to grow and to hope and to build a*

*better life for their children-not merely peace for Americans but peace for all men and women - not merely peace in our time but peace for all time.”*

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*“First: Let us examine our attitude toward peace itself. Too many of us think it is impossible. Too many think it unreal. But that is a dangerous, defeatist belief. It leads to the conclusion that war is inevitable - that mankind is doomed - that we are gripped by forces we cannot control.*

*“We need not accept that view. Our problems are manmade - therefore, they can be solved by man. And man can be as big as he wants. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings. Man's reason and spirit have often solved the seemingly unsolvable - and we believe they can do it again.”*

John F. Kennedy, Speech at American University, June 10, 1963  
(The complete speech is available at  
[www.usembassy.de/usa/etexts/speeches/rhetoric/jfkuniv.htm](http://www.usembassy.de/usa/etexts/speeches/rhetoric/jfkuniv.htm).)