

## **Worship and Action Update, 12/27/02**

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

During this snowy and quiet season of hope and celebration, we offer some Christmas messages from other faiths and statements on peace from Friends and friends.

**Excerpt from:  
Urbi et Orbi Message  
Pope John Paul II  
Christmas 2002**

Christmas is a mystery of peace!

From the cave of Bethlehem there rises today an urgent appeal to the world not to yield to mistrust, suspicion and discouragement, even though the tragic reality of terrorism feeds uncertainties and fears. Believers of all religions, together with men and women of good will, by outlawing all forms of intolerance and discrimination, are called to build peace: in the Holy Land, above all, to put an end once and for all to the senseless spiral of blind violence, and in the Middle East, to extinguish the ominous smouldering of a conflict which, with the joint efforts of all, can be avoided; in Africa too, where devastating famines and tragic internal conflicts are aggravating the already precarious conditions of entire peoples, although here and there signs of hope are present; in Latin America, in Asia, in other parts of the world, where political, economic and social crises disturb the serenity of many families and nations. May humanity accept the Christmas message of peace!

**Excerpt from:  
Making Room for the Unexpected  
The Deep Yearning of the Advent Season**

The Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold  
Presiding Bishop and Primate  
The Episcopal Church, USA  
(*Episcopal Life*, December 2002)  
December 2, 2002

Advent is a season of powerlessness in which we are invited to set aside the various ways we seek to reassure ourselves that we are in control of our lives and are, therefore, invulnerable to all the uncertainties which constitute life as it is actually lived. Advent is a season in which we get in touch with the deep yearning, the heartache, the soul hunger that emerges when we are stripped of our defenses and obliged to admit that the permanencies upon which we had erected our security are shifting sand rather than rock. Unless one confronts the deep yearning within, the Christmas feast is null and void because the answers it provides are not

fitted to the storybook nostalgia which characterizes so much of the season and creates expectations of a "perfect Christmas" that are seldom realized. The plaintive cry of "O come, O come Emmanuel" and the solemn melody that accompanies it bear witness to that deep yearning which spans the centuries of battle murder and sudden death. And the cry, "bind in one the hearts of all man-kind; bid thou our sad divisions cease, and be thy-self our King of Peace," is that much more urgent and reflective of our own inner reality.

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Advent, therefore, is more than a season: it is a stance, a way of being. It has to do with entering into the deep yearnings of the human heart for mercy and peace, for justice and love. It has to do with making the hunger of the hungry, the nakedness of the naked, the disease of the diseased our own. And having made them our own, we bring them before the heart of God whose compassion embraces the universe. In so doing, we place ourselves at risk, and open ourselves to the possibility that we will be caught up into our prayer and become part of its fulfillment.

**Excerpt from:  
Christmas message for the Anglican Communion  
from Archbishop Rowan Williams  
6 December 2002**

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And here, in the "little space" of Mary's body, divine fullness is alive. . . . God's way with us is not to overwhelm us with majesty but to live his life 'in little space' and to speak there the quiet words that summon us to faith.

Only when we are very quiet can we hear. Only when we stand still can we give him room. Faced with the fullness of God in the embryo, the baby, the tired wanderer in Galilee, the body on the cross, we have to look at ourselves hard, and ask what it is that makes us too massive and clumsy to go into the 'little space' where we meet God in Jesus Christ.

It may be our wealth and security; it may be our ambition; it may be our images of ourselves as powerful or virtuous or godly. The world—and the Church—are still fairly full of people (like you and me) who walk around surrounded by inflated ideas and pictures of ourselves that crowd out others and push away God. We need at Christmas above all to remember what Christ says again and again—that there is no way in to his little space without shedding our great load of arrogant self-reliance, bluster, noisy fear and fantasy.

And when we have set this aside, we find that it is only in the little space that there is room enough for all of us - forgiven, welcomed, made inheritors of the divine fullness of life and joy that God longs to share with us. Behind the low door of the stable is infinity - and more,

an infinity of mercy and love. No straining our eyes to see a distant God; but a God whose fullness dwells in that space we are not small and simple enough to enter.

**Methodists are called to witness for peace**  
**Bishop C. Dale White (Retired)**  
**19 December 2002**

Once again we are a nation bedeviled by the ancient curse of war hysteria. Once again in this holy season, the followers of the Prince of Peace are called to a courageous witness for a just peace. We are stewards of the cosmic dream of the Creator God for shalom on planet earth.

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For the first four centuries of Christendom, Christians were mainly pacifists. They refused to participate in all killing, military service and warfare. A strain of pacifism has continued in Methodism.

The founder of the Methodist movement, John Wesley condemned all war as the prime example of human depravity. For decades, the moral witness of the General Conference, the denomination's highest legislative body and the only entity authorized to speak for the church, has been clear and concise: "We believe war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ. We therefore reject war as an instrument of national foreign policy and insist that the first moral duty of all nations is to resolve by peaceful means every dispute that arises between or among them." Now some are saying that pacifism is unrealistic, and that the just war theory must be the norm for Christians. The General Conference of 2000 for the first time confessed: "We also acknowledge that most Christians regretfully realize that, when peaceful alternatives have failed, the force of arms may be preferable to unchecked aggression, tyranny and genocide."

Remembering how Jesus said, "He who takes up the sword will perish by the sword," the Methodist witness is to be profoundly skeptical that any war is just. Once the beast of war is uncaged, it becomes very difficult to restrain. Wars in the past century have spawned an excess of barbarism. Moral restraints have been overwhelmed. Nations have used poison gas, fire raids, nuclear weapons, and napalm against civilians and military personnel alike. For five decades the world has lived under the nuclear threat of "mutually assured destruction."

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In the pastoral letter "In Defense of Creation," the Council of Bishops asked United Methodists "to become evangelists of shalom, making the ways of Jesus the model of

discipleship, embracing all neighbors near and far, all friends and enemies, and becoming defenders of God's good creation, and to pray without ceasing for peace in our time."

**From a speech by Mary Ellen McNish, AFSC general secretary  
the Third World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates  
October 19–20, 2002, Campidoglio, Roma**

Shall war and societal injustice be the defining principles of the 21st century?  
Shall hatred and divisiveness be our badge as humans?  
Shall raw inhumanity be our legacy?

Even as we resist the demonization of Saddam Hussein, we must also resist the demonization of President Bush and other U.S. government officials. The Way of Truth requires us to recognize our own complicity in the policies carried out in our name if we do not speak and act boldly to oppose them.

If there was ever a time for people of faith and conscience to work and witness together—that time is now. . . .

Peaceable Greetings,

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