

Worship and Action Update, 2/28/03

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

Visions of the Peaceable Kingdom appear to us in the innocence infused with inquisitiveness, the unbounded energy and potential, the openness to unreserved commitment and the processes of growth and maturation of children. The spirit and joy in meeting for worship swells with the participation of our young ones. From the gurgling or crying of the infants to the fresh insights of the young teens, and from the insouciance of the toddlers to the deep searching and doubts of the young adults, we reconfirm God's presence and care and guidance through the sounds and souls and minds of young ones growing in the spirit.

During times when troubles in the world threaten to upset our balance, the simple presence of children can strengthen frayed connections to our faith. Their laughter or tears can restore harmony amid the din of our worries and fears. Their fertile dedication can reseed our exhausted resolve. Their flowing optimism can replenish the well of our hopefulness.

Friends School Day of Peace

This past Sunday, February 23rd, over 400 young and old Friends gathered at Friends Select School in Philadelphia for the Friends School Day of Peace. New York Yearly Meeting Friends from as distant as Farmington-Scipio Regional Meeting made the journey to join in the "day of education about and protest against the war in Iraq". Here is an amalgamation of reports on their experiences prepared by Matt Clausen and Alex Dettmer, teenagers in Purchase Monthly Meeting:

"We arrived at Friends Select School at around 10 am and attended two interesting one hour discussions about the United Nations Charter and the history of the conflict in Iraq. We learned that the UN charter (a charter we helped design) states that the UN would decide whether or not any form of action is to be taken at any particular time in response to an international conflict and that the United States could break many of the international laws by invading Iraq. We also learned that the seeds of conflict with Iraq were sewn in the 1920's and that we have actually caused more damage to Iraqis than they ever did to us.

"After a quick lunch, everyone involved in the Day of Peace marched about twenty blocks from Race Street Meeting House to Arch Street Meeting House. After arriving at Arch Street and a quick session of singing, everyone gathered for a meeting for worship. There were many messages given during meeting. The messages made us feel as though we were part of something that would make a difference. By going to the workshops and participating in the march, we hope to be able to educate others and open the eyes of many people to peaceful ways."

The Friends School Day of Peace was not for children only. A parent from Purchase Meeting, Nancy Kraus, offers these reflections:

“Driving through pea-soup fog for two hours, early on a Sunday morning, with two sleeping 14 year-old Quaker boys in tow, I wondered why I had committed myself to this venture! But then I also had 60 Family Hygiene Kits for Iraq from Purchase Quarter that needed to get to Philadelphia so God sent me on this trip. I get lost every time I go to Philadelphia and this was no exception, but although we missed the welcome meeting, we made it in time for the workshops.

“The gathering was equally divided between adults and kids. More than twenty Quaker schools were represented. I love seeing funky Quaker teens! I went to both sessions of the workshop of singing protest songs with Peter Blood and Annie Patterson. After the workshops, we ate a very quick brown bag lunch, lugged our health kits from the car to AFSC headquarters, and lined up for the march.

“God finally smiled on this parade as the rain had stopped. About 500 of us marched right down Market Street, from Race Street Meeting to Arch Street Meeting. Downtown was fairly quiet on a grey Sunday afternoon, but we were spirited. The schools had made cloth banners to carry; other folks were carrying signs made that morning at one of the workshops. At Arch Street Meeting, we held meeting for worship after Peter and Annie settled everyone with song. Many teens spoke in worship. It was my first visit to Arch Street and it was lovely to be gathered in such a historic building.”

FCNL Young Adult Spring Lobby Weekend

Each year, Friends Committee on National Legislation conducts a Young Adult Spring Lobby Weekend in Washington DC. The event offers young adults from around the country an opportunity to join together and voice their concerns for peace, justice, and civil liberties.

Last year, Anna Staab of Purchase Meeting (and now an intern at FCNL) participated in the Lobby Weekend. She shares these memories of her experience:

“I have been thinking about that weekend since we put out the notice this week, and how it's one of the reasons I am here now.

“When I visited FCNL for the first time during the Spring 2001 Young Adult Lobby Weekend, talk of a full-scale American invasion of Iraq was only a rumor. None of our allies supported it, and none of Iraq's neighbors were offering us use of their bases -- and as Congressional staffer Beth Tritter pointed out in my conversation with her, we couldn't launch a war if we

didn't have any places to put our tanks or planes. Talk about this war troubled me, though, and visiting Washington to talk to policymakers about it seemed like a great opportunity. September 11th was still fresh in everyone's minds, and for me this was the first time I felt ready to offer a political, rather than just an emotional, response to that day and everything that was taking place in its aftermath. I wanted to know more, however, and to be able to back up my arguments with facts.

“At FCNL we learned a tremendous amount in a short period of time. We spent the entire weekend in workshops learning about recent Iraq and Middle East history, as well as civil liberties and budget priority issues. We had workshops with legislative secretaries Ned Stowe and David Culp, who gave us tips on lobbying and took us through some role-playing exercises. We spent hours researching our issues online, writing out our arguments and practicing with each other. When I had my meeting with the legislative director for my Congresswoman, Nita Lowey, I felt well-informed and able both to understand her point of view and to explain my own. We talked for forty minutes, and I have contacted her numerous times since then on the issue of war with Iraq.

“I also loved getting to meet a group of young people who were actively interested in political participation and making their voices heard effectively. We explored the city together and got to see DC at the height of cherry blossom season. Many of us have kept in touch; in fact two of my best friends here in DC met each other that weekend and are now house mates.

“I came away from the weekend with a stronger sense of the difference one person can make in policy making. Since then I applied for and became a legislative intern at FCNL, and my conviction is even firmer: a single individual can affect the laws that are written by communicating a truth to those in power until it gets heard. Meeting someone face to face is one of the most powerful ways to make that truth heard because it provides the opportunity to connect with someone on a human level. Grassroots lobbying has proven to be a crucial part of the peace movement as it has developed during the past year, and I hope plenty more young people get the chance to learn more about it at FCNL in March.”

This year's Young Adult Spring Lobby Weekend will be held Saturday, March 29, through Tuesday, April 1. Lobbying will focus on civil liberties, opposing the expansion of the war on Iraq, and the federal budget and spending priorities; and the program is expected to highlight questions about security, national priorities, and commitments to peace and the fulfillment of human needs. Costs for participating are modest, but even so may be beyond the reach of some young Friends. We commend this program as an opportunity for Meetings and Friends to sponsor their Young Adults. (Additional information is available on FCNL's web site at http://www.fcnl.org/young_dc.htm, or by

contacting FCNL's Young Adult Program Coordinator, Jennifer Chapin Harris, at jennifer@fcnl.org or (202) 547-6000, ext.140.)

* * * * *

Thinking of children carries our thoughts to these most innocent sacrificed to war and violence. We have learned that 50% of the people of Iraq are children, and they most of all will suffer in the event of war. When some ask "what kind of God would permit this?"; can we respond "what child of God cannot act in the Light to respond to the horrors we see?"

We are invited by Reverend Bob Edger, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, to join in a prayer for peace this Sunday, March 2nd, at 6:00 PM. He asks us to "lift our voices to the source of all of our strength in the hope that human folly will not lead us to war."

In the coming weeks, Friends will continue to worship and witness. A few of these activities involving NYYM Friends include:

- This coming week, the Worship & Action working group will distribute a report to Friends of New York Yearly Meeting. The report will offer questions about the call or leadings of the Yearly Meeting. We hope Friends will consider the report and share responses at Representative Meeting on April 5-6 (at Albany Academy for Girls), where there will be an opportunity to speak out of the silence.

- Tomorrow, March 1st, from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM, a draft counseling workshop with Bill Galvin (comparable to the programs offered by Summit Meeting in October and Purchase Meeting in January) will be conducted at Poplar Ridge Meeting (near Auburn and Ithaca).

- A training session with Bill Galvin on Counseling Soldiers On Military Discharges And GI Rights, co-sponsored by Purchase Quarter, will be held in Westport, Connecticut on March 8. See the Calendar page of NYYM Web site at <http://www.nyyym.org/events/pq8mar03.html>.

- Rochester Meeting is offering a workshop on the Quaker Peace Testimony with Chuck Fager on April 11-13.

- Friends from Farmington-Scipio Region will hold their Spring Gathering on May 16 - 18, on the theme "Quaker Roots of Peace" Attending Friends plan to explore personal leadings, participation in the religious community and corporate actions that come out of those leadings.

Peaceable Greetings,

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

*A child said, What is the grass? fetching it to me with full
hands;
How could I answer the child?...I do not know what it is any
more than he.*

*I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful
green stuff woven.*

*Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropped,
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we may see
and remark, and say Whose?*

*Or I guess the grass is itself a child...the produced babe of
the vegetation.*

From verse 6 of "Song of Myself" (from "Leaves of Grass")
by Walt Whitman

*God bless the grass that grows through the crack.
They roll the concrete over it to try and keep it back.
The concrete gets tired of what it has to do,
It breaks and it buckles and the grass grows thru,
And God bless the grass.*

From "God Bless the Grass"
Lyrics by Malvina Reynolds