

Worship and Action Update, 3/28/03

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

A mere week of war is demonstrating to us all that the organized infliction of lethal violence has consequences more hideous and unpredictable than the heart and mind can truly know in advance. The eyes of friends and strangers alike seem to reflect shock and sorrow with the realization of the harm that is being wrought.

Many of us have been grateful for open meetinghouses and other houses of worship this week. In stark contrast, Quaker worship groups in New York State prisons cannot meet at this time because "outside" volunteers are excluded under Department of Corrections Code Orange arrangements.

We grieve amid the shelters of our meetings or churches and our communities, or alone in prison cells. We pray that those caught up in the physical reality of war have faith and community to sustain them through times more trying than we have known personally or can fathom. And we pray that those exercising dominion over the fate of others may find within themselves God's strength to be tender and forgiving and merciful.

Britain Yearly Meeting Statement

Britain Yearly Meeting published a Statement on War over Iraq this month. The Statement expresses the pain shared by Friends in Great Britain and the United States over the conduct of their and our governments and invites us to join in prayer for renouncing all war.

"We are deeply saddened by the decision to launch a war. We pray for combatants and non-combatants alike. We pray that God's grace will bring a rapid cessation.

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"We deplore governments' disregard of the United Nations' constitutional objective to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war', an objective which U.N. weapons' inspection sought to pursue.

"War is not the Christian way.

"Pray with us for the renouncing of all war."

(The complete Britain Yearly Meeting Statement is posted at <http://www.quaker.org.uk/iraq/bymstate.html>.)

QUNO New York Epistle

On March 15th, the Committee of the Quaker United Nations Office in New York issued an Epistle to Friends everywhere on war against Iraq. The Epistle recalls the founding spirit of the United Nations and invites Friends today to hold up the UN and the principles of sanctity of life and personal dignity it embodies.

"We are writing this epistle at a time when war seems imminent. We are called to affirm our belief in the importance of the United Nations as a place where the world community of nations can seek resolution of major issues.

"In 1945, Friends enthusiastically supported the creation of the United Nations and affirmed the language of the Charter, which reflects the fundamental Quaker values and testimonies: respect for the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person; and the duty to promote peace, human rights and human development. Adherence to the Charter of the United Nations is today more essential than ever.

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"We invite Friends everywhere to unite in support of the United Nations and of the principles on which it was founded, and to join us in pursuit of our QUNO Committee's vision to realize a spirit-led world in which peace and justice grow in concert. This world is in our midst whenever our hearts long for it, our minds imagine it, our hands shape it, and love makes it so."

(The complete QUNO New York Epistle is posted at
<http://www.afsc.org/quno/Resources/quncEpistle20030315.htm>.)

Friends join in New York City demonstration

On Saturday, March 22nd, over 250,000 people came out into a day of glorious sunshine to march for peace through Manhattan. Many Friends worshiped at 15th Street Meeting in preparation. The event demonstrated again the broad diversity of persons devoted to peaceful resolution of disputes over Iraq and their faithfulness to principles of nonviolence while expressing their views.

Young Friends' "Silence Weekend" at Powell House

Last weekend, the Youth Program at Powell House offered a "Silence Weekend." The event included a guided meditation for the Spirit. Chris DeRoller, co-youth director, reports:

"Almost all of the youth attending are involved in peace work either through attendance at marches and vigils or by starting peace clubs in their school or by organizing walk outs or by talking to classmates and friends. Many of them were feeling overwhelmed and many of them face pretty strong opposition from friends and peers. This weekend was a chance to connect, to relax, to feel loved and awesome. I love this work!"

Some of the young Friends who participated in the spirited and spiritual weekend offer these reflections:

"Yoga is actually cool sometimes...The silence takes away the passing of judgment. Things are much clearer and speaking is truly unnecessary for many things. Also there is truly a 'sound of silence' like Paul Simon says. Silence has a music of its own...That I can still be connected to people without words. You don't have to feel angry or sad ...When you have peace within you can always return...That I am growing so much more comfortable with both myself and others.

"I became sidetracked but it ended up well...My plans changed with the sunshine...It was amazing, exactly what I needed. I am so much less stressed, scared, worried. After a while I forgot no one was talking and I felt so connected to everyone anyway. I didn't exactly do or learn quite what I had intended to, but I definitely had a constructive and meaningful experience."

Friends in New York Yearly Meeting continue to open their meeting houses for worship throughout the week. Some are sharing in worship from a distance at specific times of the day. Some are participating in a day of economic fasting on Fridays (See <http://www.FastForPeace.info>).

Some have found a leading to gathered civil disobedience, as in New York City on Thursday morning, March 27th. United for Peace and Justice invites persons and groups to join the "Iraq Pledge of Resistance", a campaign of civil disobedience based on principles of nonviolence, and calls on participants to be accountable for their actions as a means of furthering our witness to the injustice of this war. (Information is available on the UP & J Web site - www.unitedforpeace.org - or by going to www.peacepledge.org/resist/default.shtm.)

The Oversight Committee for the Purchase Quarter Peace Tax Escrow Account reminds us that it makes available clearness, assistance and an escrow account for Friends who cannot, for reasons of conscience, pay for war. A copy of their brochure and other information is available at http://w3.execnet.com/elkins/peace_tax.htm

The study series on "Nonviolent Civil Disobedience: What? Why? How? A toolkit for Our Times", organized by Purchase Quarterly Meeting, commenced this past Wednesday evening, March 26th. Additional sessions will be held at Purchase Monthly Meeting from 7:00 - 9:00 PM on Wednesdays, April 9th and April 23rd, preceded by potluck suppers at 6:00 PM. Anyone wishing to participate should contact Nancy Hammond at 914-271-3290 or nancyh@bestweb.net.

The "Workshop on the Friends Peace Testimony", with Chuck Fager, organized by Rochester Monthly Meeting, will be held from Friday evening through Sunday midmorning, April 11-13. For more information, contact Kate Kressmann-Kehoe, 585-244-8629 or ksk@netacc.net.

Next Saturday and Sunday, April 5th and 6th, Friends in NYYM will gather for Representative Meeting in Albany. The agenda includes consideration of the work of the Worship and Action working group. We are distributing today (in a separate email message) a report on our understanding of the Yearly Meeting's response to the call to shared worship and action for peace. We hope Friends will hear and respond anew to our call in these times.

Peaceable greetings,

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

"We are called by our faith to be peacemakers, a difficult choice in a time of war-making, but a choice of conscience informed by faith. Our opposition to war against Iraq is grounded in

a broader vision of national security - one that sees that the threats to America's security are economic, environmental, and social more than they are military. We call upon the United States to live up to its own principles and set an example for the rest of the world...."

(From the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Statement in Opposition to War Against Iraq, March 3, 2003.)

"In the midst of the anguish of today's events, and aware of the continuing unfolding and unknown consequences of war, we in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America share with all Christians the call to be peacemakers. This call is grounded in the belief that God in Christ reconciles the whole creation and sends us forth in a ministry of peace and reconciliation. In our liturgies we pray for the peace of the whole world,' uniting our faith in the Triune God with our world's suffering and hopes."

(From Statement of Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in response to U.S. pre-emptive military strike on Iraq, March 20, 2003.)

"When We Go To War . . . When we go to war, the first casualty - before the first bullet is fired or the first missile dispatched - is the human spirit, and the first tears to be shed are the tears of God. When we go to war, we presume to usurp the role of God, choosing who will live and who will die. When we go to war, we divide the human family into friends and enemies, when it is God's will that we live together as brothers and sisters, children, together, of the one God."

"We regret that our government has chosen war. We regret that we are asked to choose between the well being of our own children whom we have sent off into conflict, and the children of Iraqi parents, children who have already been caught between the horrible regime that now rules Iraq, and a world power whose imagination extends only to punishment and military force. We continue to believe that there is a better way to resolve human conflict, that the logic of war, to the contrary, leads only to more war and more suffering."

(From Statement of Collegium of Officers of the United Church of Christ, "When we go to war....", March 20, 2003.)