

Worship and Action Update, August 29, 2003

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges. But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.

We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.

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With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

Martin Luther King Jr. on the steps at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., on August 28, 1963.

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In both our political and our spiritual society, how do we handle disagreements, differences, divisions, disunity as we all seek for the peaceable kingdom? How do we find and nourish the faith that will enable us "to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope"?

On June 15, Ruth Kinsey, pastor of Farmington Friends Meeting, spoke to the meeting about the challenge of the Peace Testimony and of embracing those who may not disavow all wars. Here is part of her message:

We need one another. I sometimes hear people say, 'I can worship just fine by myself alone in the woods.' And it is absolutely true that one can have a deeply spiritual experience all alone.... But if all of our spiritual experiences occur by ourselves, it is easy to lose the true focus. We need the encouragement, the strength, the presence, the example of other Christians/Quakers to help support us, to teach us, to share with us.

If we don't have others around us who encourage us and support us and share

our beliefs and give us examples of how to live our faith, it is so easy to fall away. We need one another. We need one another deeply. Hebrews 3:13 says encourage one another every day. Every day! So long as it is called 'today'.

In a lot of ways, Farmington Friends do pretty well at this 'community' business.... But there are other ways in which we don't do community so well. One of the ways has been making itself known lately in regards to the Peace Testimony. We have such a wide variety of views on the Peace Testimony - No, maybe it's not the Peace Testimony. I don't believe there is a single person who would say he or she is not for peace. We all believe in and want peace. It is how the Peace Testimony is lived out that causes disagreements.

There are some Friends who don't understand why we, as a Quaker Meeting, can't make a statement against war. Yet, there are others who feel that there is such a thing as a 'just war' and, therefore, cannot make a statement against war.

And do you know what? It is fine for us to disagree. It is fine for us to have different understandings. But we don't handle disagreement well. When we try to talk about this we end up with some people saying, 'I guess I'm not a Quaker. I guess I don't belong here.' And others saying, 'The Peace Testimony is key to Quakerism. How can we be Quaker if we can't get behind the Peace Testimony?'

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But Friends, one of the things Quakers are known for is our willingness to accept people where they are and not demand that someone must believe a certain thing in order to be Quaker. That is why we don't have a creed.

Friends may have a wide variety of theological views and still be Friends. You see we know that faith is not stagnant. Faith is something that grows and changes.

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In Friends community, we need to remember that we may disagree, that we may talk about those disagreements, and that in our disagreements we can still love one another, still feel connected to one another, still have an openness for people to be who they are, and allow room for people to change and grow.

Encourage one another! Encourage one another every day.

Are you able to disagree and still love the other? Are you able to disagree and still encourage the other? I know it's hard. We feel passionate about our beliefs. And I want us to be passionate about our beliefs. I also want us to feel compassion toward those with different beliefs.

Friends, may we encourage one another! And may we allow room for growth.

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Worship and Action Retreat: Where Does Peace Lead Us?

Plans are proceeding for a gathering of Friends at Powell House on the weekend of October 31 through November 2 for worship and reflection on the query Where does our Peace Testimony lead us now? Preparatory queries will be sent to monthly meetings in advance. Monthly meetings will be invited to share and reflect upon these queries, and participants encouraged to write out their individual responses in preparation for the weekend. Meetings are encouraged to send at least two people to the gathering and to ask them to share their experience when they return home. The Peace Initiatives Fund will help pay for the weekend. An announcement with registration forms and additional information will be sent to monthly meetings and posted on the NYYM Web site in mid-September.

Friends are also involved in many other activities for peace in the coming weeks. These include:

Remembering those lost on September 11, 2001:

- Alternatives to War, a coalition including NYYM Friends in northern New York advocating nonviolent conflict resolution, will sponsor an event - "September Eleventh Families for Peace Tomorrows" - on Friday, September 5 at 7:30 P.M. at the Unitarian-Universalist Church, Main Street, Canton, NY. Speakers will be persons who lost a loved one in the World Trade Center, including a member of Peaceful Tomorrows. The event is free, and childcare will be provided. More information is available by calling 315-265-1295 or visiting Alternatives to War's website at www.alternativestowar.org.

- Flushing Friends will open the meetinghouse (137-16 Northern Blvd.) from 10:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. on Thursday, September 11, to all who wish to come in, sit down, and be still. From 7:00 - 8:30 P.M., a candlelight vigil will be held in front of the meetinghouse. For more information, contact Naomi Paz Greenberg, naomipaz@nyc.rr.com; or leave a message on the meeting's answering machine at 718-358-9636.

- The 9/11 Camino de Paz (multidenominational) Prayer Circle will be held at the Peace in the Community Labyrinth, 136th St. between Willis Ave. and Brown Pl. in the Mott Haven section of the Bronx, on September 11th from 11: 00 A.M. to noon. For more information, call 718-292-3964 or 718-601-6685. Katherine Levine of Purchase Monthly Meeting offers this background:

The Camino de Paz Project began when I walked the Labyrinth at the Purchase meeting. I realized walking a labyrinth was a useful self-soothing tool and would be an aid in our efforts to help the troubled children I work

with in Mott Haven. I had a labyrinth built to use in our Recreation program. Out of that came the Camino de Paz Project.

The project seeks to help transform the Mott Haven Section of the South Bronx from one of violence to one of peace. We do this by building involving community residents in building labyrinths and holding various community events including conflict resolution workshops at the labyrinths and other places throughout the community. The PRAYER CIRCLE is one of those projects.

The Prayer Circle will follow the custom of Quaker meetings in which all seeking God gather in silence and then speak or pray when the spirit moves. The Peace in the Community Labyrinth will be open for silent meditation at 8:49 the time the first plane crashed into the tower. At 11:00 A.M. the prayer circle will begin. A light lunch will be provided when the Prayer Circle 3nds. The Prayer Circle will be followed by a Peace Fair. The Peace Fair will provide multiple peace-oriented activities for children and adults. Terri Brock from the rock group Kansas will sing and lead group singing focused on peace.

In care,

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

*I heard an owl call last night
Homeless and confused
And I stood naked and bewildered
At the evil people do
And up upon a hill there is a terrible sign
That tells the story of what darkness waits
When we leave the light behind*

*So don't tell me that hate is ever right or God's will
These are the wheels we put in motion ourselves
And the whole world weeps and is weeping still
Though shaken I still believe the best of what we all can be
And the only peace this world will know
Can only come from love*

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*Light every candle that you can
For we need some light to see
In the days of deepest loss,*

*Treat each other tenderly
And the arms of God will gather in
Each sparrow that falls
But makes no separation
Just fiercely loves us all.*

From "I Heard an Owl," by Carrie Newcomer (included on her *The Gathering of Spirits* CD on Philo/Rounder) (For more info: www.carrienewcomer.com) Copyright © 2002 Carrie Newcomer. All rights reserved.