



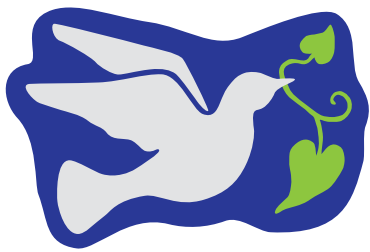
# SPARK

New York Yearly Meeting  
*The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)*

Volume 53, Number 5

15 Rutherford Place, New York, NY 10003

November 2023



## Perspectives on the Peace Testimony

### Making Peace with the Peace Testimony

Susan Weisfeld  
Scarsdale Meeting

*Susan Weisfeld served as the guest editor for this issue of Spark.*

I used to take the Peace Testimony literally and then get upset when I felt it was not happening according to how I thought it should work. Britain YM states, “We call for grass-roots action and political change towards a peaceful, just and sustainable global society.”

It took me 20 years to understand what that means. In practice it doesn’t mean focus on all injustice—we can’t do it all. And this disappointed me. Over the years I brought some issues to Quakers—Darfur, mines, child slavery in India and Pakistan—that did not get much support nor real interest. The Quaker responses to the horrors in Ukraine, as well as to the recent barbarous Hamas attacks in Southern Israel on a farm kibbutz which has been there for generations and the mass execution of young people at a music festival, seem to mainly consist of platitudes that “both sides need to find a way to peace.”

From early Quakers until today we say this is our testimony: “We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward

*continued on page 4*

### Peace is Possible

Nadine Hoover  
Buffalo Meeting

Through Friends Peace Teams, I have gotten to know people suffering from extreme violence from El Salvador to North Kivu to Ukraine to West Papua. We say peace is possible, because living in a state of war is intolerable and inhuman and we have alternatives. In my experience it’s people not in war who question whether peace is possible.

I witness miracles daily, making connections across generations of hate and distrust. Visitation is so critical because no one, anywhere, should feel discarded or forgotten. Trauma takes generations to heal, but we are learning so much about how to heal and to live in peace—both in our private and public lives. We need the faith that infuses the political will to stand up and call for justice and peace.

Today, endless violence persists in black and brown communities, mostly over land, mining, or oil interests. After the Vietnam War, weapons manufacturers realized people rise up to stop international wars, but domestic wars go unchallenged. So, governments send military aid to secure cheap access to resources. As John Woolman

*continued on page 4*



*Peaceable Kingdom* by Edward Hicks, c. 1834; this version is in the National Gallery of Art.

### My Personal View of the Peace Testimony

Chester Freeman  
Rochester Meeting

I’ve always been a peaceful person. Even as a child I never fought back when I was hit or bullied. Having been brought up in a fundamentalistic Black Baptist Church, I was taught to turn the other cheek. As a teenager that peaceful characteristic became a bit more difficult, but I held to it.

So even before accepting the Peace Testimony in the Quaker tradition, I was already practicing it in the Black Baptist Church. There were occasions when thoughts tested my belief system during the Vietnam War. However, during my four years at Hampton University, I took upon myself the responsibility

*continued on page 4*

**FALL SESSIONS**  
**DECEMBER 1-3**  
**ONLINE**



### An Invitation from the Clerk

Dear Friends, Greetings!

It’s that time of year again, when the weather changes, leaves brilliant hues garner our attention, farmers harvest their crops and we come together for Fall Sessions.

Again, this year Fall Session will be held virtually, December 1-3, 2023, Friday night through Sunday afternoon. We will meet for Corporate Worship with a concern for Business, social meals and fellowship. Our theme, “Rebuilding Faith in Changing Times” will provide spiritual sustenance during this period and beyond. Come, listen and let your voices be heard on practical strategies to help boost our Budget Development Committee (BDC) proposal for financially and

*continued on page 12*



**Peace Testimony:**

pp. 3-11



**Fall Sessions:**

p. 12

## Notices

### New Members

**Charlotte Holton**—Scarsdale  
**Scott Lockhart**—Poplar Ridge  
**Christopher Kontos**—  
Matinecock  
**Bronwyn Losey**—Poplar Ridge  
**Harriet Losey**—Poplar Ridge  
**Muriel Losey**—Poplar Ridge  
**Matt Sunderland**—Scarsdale  
**Jeff Turney**—Poplar Ridge

### Sojourning

**Bob Lohaus**—Sandy Spring  
Monthly Meeting  
**Anne Wright**—Sandy Spring  
Monthly Meeting

### Deaths

**Bowen Alpern**, member of  
Scarsdale, on October 4, 2023  
**Janet Carter**, member of Bulls  
Head-Oswego, on October  
13, 2023.  
**Lyn Pyle**, member of Brooklyn,  
on October 13, 2023.  
**Paul Simkin**, member of  
Poplar Ridge, on August 27,  
2023.

## NEWS

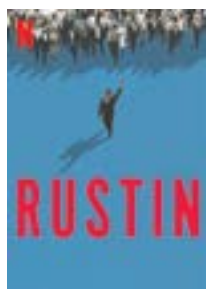
### Suggestions for State of Society

Friends! The State of Our Society Committee would like to thank all those monthly meetings and worship groups that participated in our report for 2022. Your contributions made the report possible. For our report for 2023, we are seeking suggestions from Friends, monthly meetings, and worship groups for this year's query. You may send your suggestions to Hans-Jurgen Lehmann at [hjljtp@gmail.com](mailto:hjljtp@gmail.com). (That's HJLJTP.)

Thank you for your help.  
—State of Our Society Committee

### Rustin — a new film streaming on Netflix soon

"Rustin," a Netflix film produced by Barack and Michelle Obama's company, Higher Ground, will open in select theaters nationwide on November 3 and will be available on Netflix November 17. "Rustin" is a docudrama about the organizing of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, starring Colman Domingo in an Oscar-worthy performance as Bayard Rustin, a Black, gay Quaker who was a



## Around Our Yearly Meeting

longtime member of Fifteenth Street Monthly Meeting.

### Participating in God's Power

**A School of the Spirit program Accepting applications through December 1st.** How do we go deeper in our spiritual lives and serve more profoundly in a world that is daily moving towards violence, division, and the unraveling of the web of life? *Participating in God's Power* welcomes Friends who seek to develop or deepen in spiritual practice, and to live that learning and growth out in every aspect of their lives. It is a year-long program consisting of five residencies involving spiritual practice, experiential learning, teaching, and learning through two different small groups. Find out more at [www.schoolofthespirit.org/participating-in-gods-power/](http://www.schoolofthespirit.org/participating-in-gods-power/)

### Faith and Practice Available

Copies of *Faith and Practice*, the NYYM book of discipline, are available to purchase from the NYYM office. \$10.00 per copy suggested. To order, contact [office@nyym.org](mailto:office@nyym.org) or write to New York Yearly Meeting, 15 Rutherford Place, New York, NY 10003.

### NYYM's Weekly Update Email

An email newsletter is sent to NYYM Friends each Friday. Past editions are available at [nyym.org/weekly-updates](http://nyym.org/weekly-updates). To subscribe, fill out the brief form at [nyym.org/subscribe](http://nyym.org/subscribe). If you've subscribed but haven't received any emails, please check your spam folder or email [communications@nyym.org](mailto:communications@nyym.org).

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Save the Date(s) for Sessions

The next gathering of New York Yearly Meeting will be **Fall Sessions**, held online **December 1-3, 2023. See page 12.**

**Spring Sessions 2024** will be held April 5-7, 2024, at Oakwood School and online.

**NEW DATES: Summer Sessions 2024** will be held at Oakwood School and online, **Friday, July 26 (dinnertime) to Wednesday, July 31 (lunchtime)**. Please contact [sessions-clerk@nyym.org](mailto:sessions-clerk@nyym.org) to help plan Summer 2024, especially if you're interested in working with children, or to join a working group researching alternate sites for Summer 2025.

### Save the Date for Winter Meeting for Discernment

**March 2, 2024**

Please mark your calendar! The Winter Meeting for Discernment will be held online on Saturday, March 2nd, 2024. As we begin to plan for the Winter 2024 Meeting for Discernment, we'd like to expand the Meeting for Discernment Steering Committee to include diverse Friends from across the yearly meeting who appreciate the opportunity the Meetings for Discernment offer for Friends to listen deeply together, sharing concerns individually and for their meetings. If you are interested or would like to visit a Steering Committee meeting, please contact Lu Harper, [luharper@gmail.com](mailto:luharper@gmail.com), (585) 732-4779; or Kaitlyn Pawluko, [kpawluko@gmail.com](mailto:kpawluko@gmail.com), (631) 662-7390.



### Powell House Workshops

Powell House is the retreat and conference center for NYYM. Visit [powellhouse.org/event-list/](http://powellhouse.org/event-list/) to register, or call 518-794-8811.

### Winter Solstice at Powell House December 21, 2023, 4-8 p.m., online or in person

Give yourself some space during this busy time to breathe—while also getting in touch with Spirit's and nature's rhythms. We'll get outside, with additional time spent in worship, a creative activity, hearing a story, sharing and listening within our group. Supper will be provided for those attending in person.

### New Year's Celebration

**December 30, 2023 to January 1, 2024**

At this annual event, we have activities for all ages—but what we plan is up to you. Previous years have included cookie making, energy work, enneagrams, musical collaborations, tai chi, Pilates, a clay workshop, and a walk to Dorson's Rock, among others. Right after our evening meal on the 31st, it's Cabaret! Bring your instruments, a song, story, poem and/or skit to share with everyone on New Year's Eve. Our cooks will have a "Quaker midnight" feast ready for us. We'll conclude the celebration with a brunch on January 1st.

### Friends' Decision-Making & Clerking: Participating in Meetings for Business with Joy and Confidence

**SAVE THE DATE: February 2-4, 2024, at Powell House.** This conference is invaluable for new clerks of committees and meetings and anyone who wants to know more about Quaker practice. Visit [poho.org](http://poho.org).

### Friends General Conference's 2024 Gathering

**SAVE THE DATE: June 30-July 6, 2024 in Haverford, PA**  
The theme is "Rooted in Story". Sign up at [www.tfaforms.com/451171](http://www.tfaforms.com/451171) to receive updates on the Gathering. Beginning with Haverford in 2024, FGC will host a traditional in-person Gathering in even-numbered years, and a smaller, age-focused in-person YAY (Young Adults and Youth) event in odd-numbered years. A virtual Gathering open to everyone will also occur in those same odd-numbered years. Visit [www.fgcquaker.org](http://www.fgcquaker.org).

### Friends World Committee on Consultation — World Plenary Meeting

**SAVE THE DATE: August 5-12, 2024**

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SPARK (ISSN 00240591)

New York Yearly Meeting News  
Published five times a year:  
January, March, May, September, and  
November by  
New York Yearly Meeting  
Religious Society of Friends  
15 Rutherford Place  
New York, NY 10003  
212-673-5750  
[info@nyym.org](mailto:info@nyym.org)  
[www.nyym.org](http://www.nyym.org)

*Editor:* Sarah Way  
[communications@nyym.org](mailto:communications@nyym.org)

*Editorial Board:*  
NYYM Communications Committee

*Spark* deadlines are the first week of the month preceding the publication month. Permission is granted to reprint any article, provided *Spark* is acknowledged as the source.

Periodicals Postage Paid  
at New York, New York

*Postmaster: Send address changes to:*

**SPARK**  
15 Rutherford Place  
New York, NY 10003

*NYYM Staff*  
Chad Giletta: [web@nyym.org](mailto:web@nyym.org)  
Beth Kelly: [bethk@nyym.org](mailto:bethk@nyym.org)  
Kevin Lovelady: [arch@nyym.org](mailto:arch@nyym.org)  
Steve Mohlke: [gensec@nyym.org](mailto:gensec@nyym.org)  
Walter Naegle: [walter@nyym.org](mailto:walter@nyym.org)  
Helen Garay Toppins:  
[office@nyym.org](mailto:office@nyym.org)  
Sarah Way:  
[communications@nyym.org](mailto:communications@nyym.org)

In 2024, the first Quaker World Plenary Meeting in almost a decade will take place in South Africa, hosted by Southern Africa Yearly Meeting. The theme is “Living the Spirit of Ubuntu: Responding with Hope to God’s Call to Cherish Creation and One Another,” which reflects the ways of expressing our faith used by our hosts. Visit [fwcc.world/wpm/](http://fwcc.world/wpm/)

## FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Children, Youth and Young Adult Community Director Beth Kelly maintains a list of upcoming YAF events at [nyym.org/yaf-events](http://nyym.org/yaf-events).

**SPICES: INTEGRITY for 11th-12th Grade and Young Adults**  
**December 1-3, 2023, at Powell House** — see full listing in next section.

## FOR CHILDREN & TEENS

**Powell House Youth Conferences**  
Visit [powellhouse.org/event-list/](http://powellhouse.org/event-list/) to register, or call 518-794-8811.

**DIY CABARET** for 6th-8th Grade  
November 17-19, 2023

On Saturday night of every youth conference at Powell House, we have Cabaret—a time to share creative acts that range from beautiful songs to laugh-out-loud improv games. At this conference, you will get to craft instruments and props yourself for a DIY (do-it-yourself) Cabaret. We will have lots of time for designing materials and have an extra creative (and potentially quite long) Cabaret! We will also sprinkle in games and discussions during the weekend to help us explore different aspects of crafting and performance.

**SPICES: INTEGRITY** for 11th-12th Grade and Young Adults  
December 1-3, 2023

Quaker testimonies are foundational for the Powell House Youth Program. These testimonies (Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Stewardship) represent core ideas within Quakerism and are often referred to as the Spices of Quakerism since they form the acronym SPICES. At this conference we want to focus on the I of SPICES: Integrity. What does it mean to be true to yourself? How does one breathe their Truth into the world? These are the kind of questions we will be exploring through deep discussion and fun-filled activities.

**WINTERSONG 2023** for 7th-12th Grade  
December 15-17, 2023  
Wintersong is a time for connection and care within our community. We will play games, participate in deep conversation, share talents at Cabaret, delight in a fancy dinner, and more. There is a special feeling of warmth and celebration that is created at Wintersong. We hope you will join us in creating that experience this year.

## OPPORTUNITIES

### Job Openings

These Quaker organizations often have job openings. Check their websites for current opportunities:

**Friends General Conference:**

[www.fgcquaker.org/work-at-fgc/](http://www.fgcquaker.org/work-at-fgc/)

**American Friends Service**

**Committee:** [afsc.org/careers](http://afsc.org/careers)

**Friends Committee on National**

**Legislation:** [www.fcnl.org/about/work-fcni](http://www.fcnl.org/about/work-fcni)

**Pendle Hill (PA):** [pendlehill.org/employment/](http://pendlehill.org/employment/)

**NYYM Grants for Earthcare and Climate Justice Projects**

NYYM Friends and meetings are invited to apply for grants of \$50 to \$500 from NYYM’s Earthcare Fund to support their projects related to Earthcare and Climate Justice. Visit [nyym.org/content/nyym-financial-resources-individuals-and-meetings#earthcare](http://nyym.org/content/nyym-financial-resources-individuals-and-meetings#earthcare) to find out more and to apply.



### World Quaker Day 2023 in India

World Quaker Day, the first Sunday of October 2023, was celebrated in Friends Girls School Sohagpur, India. The program started with silent worship followed by messages on Quaker faith and testimony from Manager Sheela Jacob and Principal Dr. Sanjeev Shukla. Students performed a beautiful action song based on the Quaker “SPICE”—Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Caring, and Equality—in the guidance of teacher Priyanshi Yadav. The program ended with the distribution of biscuits (cookies) to all who were present.

### Editor’s Note

Many thanks to **Susan Weisfeld** for guest editing this issue. She found Friends who wrote thoughtful, honest, and brave articles; thank you. Note: articles were written before the current conflict in Gaza and Israel.

As a cost-saving measure *Spark* will go from five to four issues a year in 2024. The new schedule will be **February, May, September, and November**, to align somewhat with our Sessions schedule (early April, late July, early December). **Please fill out the Communications Survey** on the last page of this issue (or online at [nyym.org/communications-survey](http://nyym.org/communications-survey)) and let us know what you think about this change and about receiving information from NYYM in general. It is brief and easy! We need to hear everyone’s voice on this. Thanks.

*Spark* accepts article submissions of **400-600 words**, artwork, photos, poetry, shorter news items and announcements, and letters to the editor.

### Upcoming *Spark* themes:

**February 2024: Youth and Young Adult Leadership.**

This issue will center the voices of youth and young adults in our yearly meeting as they share their passions and leadings. Older adults should expect to learn from, and be inspired by, these members of our community. Beth Kelly, NYYM’s Children, Youth and Young Adult Community Director, will be assisting with this issue. Submissions are due by Jan. 1 to [communications@nyym.org](mailto:communications@nyym.org).

Please also send your meeting’s news and upcoming events for the NYYM weekly email update or *Spark* to [communications@nyym.org](mailto:communications@nyym.org). Join NYYM’s weekly email list at [nyym.org/subscribe](http://nyym.org/subscribe).

NYYM is on **Facebook** (NewYorkYearlyMeeting), **X** (NYYMTweets), and **Instagram** (newyorkyearlymeeting).

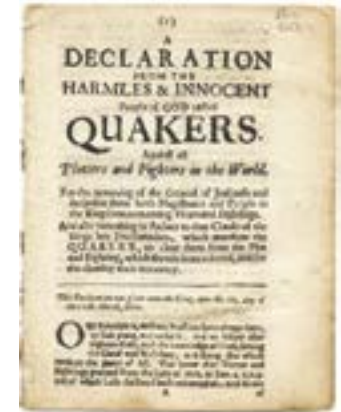
Peace to all,  
*Sarah Way, NYYM  
Communications Director  
communications@nyym.org*

[NYYM.org/donate](http://nyym.org/donate)



## The Declaration of 1660

George Fox, etc.



A  
**DECLARATION**  
FROM THE  
**HARMLESS & INNOCENT**  
People of GOD called  
**QUAKERS**  
Against all  
*Plotters and Fighters in the World.*

For the removing of the Ground of Jealousy and Suspicion from both Magistrates and People in the Kingdoms, concerning Wars and Fightings.

And also something in Answer to that Clause of the King’s late Proclamation, which mentions the QUAKERS, to clear them from the Plot and Fighting, which therein is mentioned, and for the clearing their innocency.

*This Declaration was given unto the King upon the 21st day of the 11th Month, 1660.*

Our Principle is, and our Practices have always been, to seek peace and ensue it, and to follow after righteousness and the knowledge of God, seeking the Good and Welfare, and doing that which tends to the peace of All. We know that Wars and Fightings proceed from the Lusts of men (as James 4: 1-3), out of which Lusts the Lord hath redeemed us....All bloody Principles & Practices we (as to our own particular) do utterly deny, with all outward Wars, and Strife, and Fightings with outward Weapons, for any end, or under any pretence whatsoever. And this is our Testimony to the whole World....

*Read an analysis by Paul Buckley and a link to the full text of the Declaration at [www.friendsjournal.org/2008066/](http://www.friendsjournal.org/2008066/)*



# Perspectives on the Peace Testimony

## Peace is Possible

Nadine Hoover  
Buffalo Meeting

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challenged us, “*May we look upon our treasure, the furniture of our houses, and our garments, and try to discover whether the seeds of war have nourishment in these our possessions.*” The level of violence today is no accident. It’s not natural – it’s planned and funded.

Friends in 1670 believed so deeply that they were willing to suffer for conscience sake:

**TO THE Supreme Authority OF ENGLAND, TOLLERATION** (for these ten years past) has not been more the Cry of some, then PERSECUTION hath been the *practice of others*,... those Freedoms, to which.. (*due to our*) ...*English Birthright*... (*have*) been often promised to us, and we as earnestly have expected the performance; but to this time we labour under the unspeakable pressure of *Nasty Prisons*, and daily *Confiscation of our Goods*, to the apparent ruin of *intire Families*.

What would restore such depth of faith to us?

I feel my generation lost the power of faith with the nuclear bombings and concept of nuclear winter—that human beings can destroy all life as we know it, and therefore human destructiveness is greater than the power of life. We wish Spirit, love, and conscience would prevail, but regrettably feel human violence and deceit win out.

If you feel this, get a photograph of Hiroshima today. Nothing diminishes the tragedy of the nuclear holocaust, but today the grass and trees are back. The birds are back. The people are back. The city is bustling. The Power of Life outstrips any human capacity for destructiveness or industry. Life goes on, with or without us. The balance of our decisions will determine if human beings go on or not.

To me, the Peace Testimony means I allow the love and truths laid before me to work within and change me, even when they’re inconvenient or not what I would have chosen for myself. Yielding to Spirit in every moment brings

We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretence whatsoever; and this is our testimony to the whole world. The spirit of Christ, by which we are guided, is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing as evil and again to move unto it; and we do certainly know, and so testify to the world, that the spirit of Christ, which leads us into all Truth, will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdoms of this world.

—*Excerpt from the Declaration of Friends to Charles II, 1660*

me into the Beloved Community. As William Penn reminds us, early Friends changed “*themselves before they went about to change others. Their hearts were rent as well as their garments, and they knew the power and work of God upon them.*” May we be so blessed.

## Making Peace with the Peace Testimony

Susan Weisfeld  
Scarsdale Meeting

*continued from page 1*

weapons, for any end, or under any pretence whatsoever; and this is our testimony to the whole world.”

After much contemplation my personal belief is that, if war is not the answer, prayer can be the answer. . . and prayer can result in amazing leadings. I have witnessed in awe the bravery and work being done in El Salvador, Kenya, Republic of Georgia, Timur and AVP work in the prisons of Bolivia.

People in war zones and those in danger from drug cartels or religious zealots are unable to have “peace.” So is peace only for those with material solvency? Or can people living in turmoil and fear find a way to be protected by the mantle of peace? Although limited in our ability, Quakers try not to stand by—we are a small group, but not powerless! The peace testimony gives us *corporate* power.

The power of the Peace Testimony is in the unique corporate witness shared by all who consider themselves Friends. When you meet a Quaker for the first time, you can assume they believe there is that of the Divine in each of us, and

that trying to change the reasons for conflict and violence is a goal that we seek together. This belief has inspired Quakers for centuries and continues to give us hope that peace is possible.

So when we look at the peace testimony as individuals, we first need to decide whether we are called, and if called, then how? What can I do, how much time can I give, and what sacrifices might be required?

We can try to work for peace in our families, in our communities, even with our social media contacts, and then in the wider world. Yes, the world is full of evil and violence—and yet there is much good. Being part of the “Ocean of Light flowing over the ocean of darkness” is our charge, our mission. . . and it is a challenge.

The peace testimony is perfect, but we are not. So if each of us tries to work individually and together, we can make a difference. We cannot stop a war, but we can try to kindle a spark of peace and that, perhaps, will bring Light to the darkness.

## My Personal View of the Peace Testimony

Chester Freeman  
Rochester Meeting

*continued from page 1*

ity of visiting wounded soldiers in the Veterans Hospital in Hampton, Virginia.

The young men that I visited were the same age as me, and we related to each other in a personal manner. I could see firsthand how difficult it was for them to cope

physically, spiritually, and psychologically. Most of the men I saw had lost an arm, a leg or both legs. They were devastated and lonely. They relied on the kindness of strangers. They were dealing with PTSD long before we had a name for it. I tried to support them by listening to their stories, encouraging them to express their feelings and emotions. This seemed to bring some comfort to them. For those who were religious, I rolled them in their wheelchairs into the Chapel. I spent time listening to the stories of those who were not religious. Later in life, I would become one of the Protestant hospital chaplains at Hartford Hospital (Hartford, Connecticut).

As a contemporary Quaker, I find it difficult to hold onto the Peace Testimony. With the war in Ukraine, I feel torn. On the one hand, I would like to see mediation and diplomacy be the key, but with the killing of innocent children, elderly, and adults, it seems that fighting back is the only way to keep democracy alive for all of us. So I ask myself, what can I do to uphold the Peace Testimony? For me to keep the Peace Testimony means supporting efforts to assist the government of Ukraine by supporting medical and humanitarian efforts.

Just because we do not support the war, does not mean we can’t support efforts of aid. We may not be on the front line, but we can be in the background lending medical assistance such as supporting “Doctors Without Borders,” sending clothing, food, blankets...whatever we can do as individuals in our own communities.


Practicing the Peace Testimony is not easy today, but it is important and has its place. We need more Quakers in government positions to bring a new way of looking at issues to the Congress. We need the Quaker practice of discernment to be utilized in our policy making decisions. We as a community need to be the example as George Fox talked about in his writings.

We have to follow the example of activist Stacy Abrams who wrote the book *Lead from the Outside: how to build your future and make change*. She is an example of the Peace Testimony at work, even though she is not a Quaker. She has

*continued on next page*



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demonstrated that one person can make a difference. She has shown that if you let your light shine others will see “that of God in you.” So I feel hopeful that the Peace Testimony can survive the turmoil in our world. I feel that the little boy who would not fight others, can now stand in the Light and proclaim his testimony of peace! 

## Just Peace


**Don Campbell**  
Brooklyn Meeting

In wartime, conscientious objectors often serve in the chain of medical care. The hospital orderly in England who cared for my dad after he was wounded in the winter 1945 was a conscientious objector.

By that time in World War II, knowledge of the full extent of the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis was inescapable, and the orderly told my father that had he known what was truly at stake, he would have chosen to serve in the military and not as a conscientious objector.

My dad, who'd been shot through the neck and shoulder, told the orderly that had he known what war truly was, he would have chosen to be a conscientious objector.

As a teenager, my dad enjoyed hunting. After the war, he never hunted again. He said he knew what it felt like to be stalked by someone trying to take his life, and what it felt like to hunt and kill other men.

I think of his hospital encounter now, as I wrestle with my conviction that the people of Ukraine are waging a just fight against Russia in an unjust war and an unjust world. 

## A Minute on Peace

**Paul Rehm**  
Albany Meeting

The Quaker Peace Testimony—as I understand it—grew from the life and teachings of Jesus, was expressed clearly by George Fox and other Quakers in 1660, and was restated emphatically by New York Yearly Meeting in the current edition of *Faith and Practice*. Those seeds are among the most important foundational principles of

Quakerism and are bedrock reasons for my membership in Albany Friends Meeting.

Our Peace Testimony has been a light by which we illuminate the pathway to peace, guiding our steps and—hopefully—the steps of others.

The minutes our meetings write help clarify our thinking, offer others food for thought and, perhaps, a flicker of light. So it was that Albany Friends created and shared this minute in July:

“Resistance to the war system is vital.” These words from NYYM’s book of *Faith and Practice* testify to Albany Friends Meeting’s steadfast belief in nonviolence formed from the life and teaching of Jesus and given voice by George Fox and other Quakers in their 1660 Declaration of Friends written to King Charles II, in which the founding Quakers stated, “We utterly deny all wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretense whatsoever; and this is our testimony to the whole world.”


Affirming our core principles of supporting life, love and the nonviolent gospel of Jesus, we strive to resist the death and destruction of all war. Therefore, Albany Friends Meeting calls on our government to stop providing weapons of murder and destruction to the Ukrainian government...weapons that assure the shedding of more blood and the loss of more innocent lives. Furthermore, we call on our elected officials to demand an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine and to provide the energy and resources needed for bringing the Russian and Ukrainian governments to the negotiating table.

I believe this minute reflects the Quaker Peace Testimony and could encourage other meetings to consider steps for peace in Ukraine they might feel moved to take.

As you can probably guess, I’ve not “been disturbed” by the Quaker Peace Testimony (QPT)’s “lack of flexibility” but by the recent writings of a few American Quakers who would apparently modify the QPT to include some contemporary version of the Roman Catholic Just

War Theory.

Those who seek flexibility can look to the many and varied ways the QPT’s anti-war principles can be put into practice. Creating, sharing and acting upon minutes is but one approach. (I’ve been heartened recently by Friends Peace Teams’ plan to conduct AVP training for Ukrainians.)

Other Peace Testimony perspectives shared in this issue of *Spark* should help us all gain a broader understanding of how New York Yearly Meeting Quakers view this cornerstone of Quakerism. 

## Peace Witness Fatigue

**Joseph Olejak**  
Old Chatham Meeting

I am a convinced Quaker. I joined Old Chatham Quakers in 2009. What attracted me to the Quakers was the peace testimony. I withheld paying income tax from the Federal government since 1998 due to the concerns I had over how that money was used; by some estimates 50% is used to fund wars.

In 2013 I was prosecuted for my act of civil disobedience; that story has been printed in *Friends Journal* and there is an interview on the YouTube site Quaker Speaks, pioneered by John Watts. This is not that story but rather a reflection backward.


It has been nearly 10 years from the date I was ordered to the county jail. Looking back, I’ve noticed a few things that might be worth sharing in terms of how my experience relates to how my peace witness was corporate or personal, comfortable or difficult and how flexible it can be in its applicability.

I chose “Peace Witness Fatigue” as the title of this article because no part of what I did was comfortable. I pulled out of the federal income tax system in one fell swoop because I did not have the benefit of a clearness committee in 1998. As a chiropractor, I was what the IRS called a “high profile target.” Namely, that prosecution of a professional person would send a strong message to others in the community to avoid stepping out of line. The IRS publicized my case in

the Albany Times Union which had many undesirable knock on effects. For example, that story led the NYS Office of the Professions to revoke my chiropractic license. A felony tax conviction also places many restrictions on the kinds of employment one can perform.

Are there flexible ways to apply the peace witness? Yes. Be a barnacle. One barnacle on a ship is no big deal, but if there are 10,000 barnacles it creates enough drag to reduce efficiency by 60% and increase fuel consumption by 40% on a vessel. We need more peace barnacles on the ship of state. Each act of non-compliance creates drag. Many small acts add up. Complaints are one way to create drag, but lots of folks don’t think their words to elected representatives matter. They do. Even if the funding for campaigns is bought and paid for by big biz they still have to appear to be un-bought. Each person has to decide how much drag to exert. Coming up with creative ways to exert that drag will be important.

Since biblical times Christians have been faced with hard choices. Ignatius of Antioch was thrown to the lions. These days it’s less dramatic but still a deeply personal choice fraught with ramifications. In the case of money it is never easy. We need money to live. If you end up dealing with the legal system all you have are tough choices. If you choose a very simple life pared down to the basics (about \$16,500) you’re faced with a lot of sacrifice. If you keep the lifestyle you currently enjoy and donate that tax money to charitable organizations you will be chronically harassed and eventually prosecuted. The stress takes a toll either way.

In a way, I was quite lucky as I had a lot of support from my Quaker meeting, but let me be clear about one thing—one person takes on the direct consequences of the peace testimony. If you have young children or a life partner they’ll be collateral damage. There is a corporate aspect of the peace testimony (in the sense that the meeting provides support and that might be financial, emotional and/or spiritual) but taking action on one’s beliefs is a deeply personal undertaking. 



# Perspectives on the Peace Testimony

## Peace and the Opposing of Evil

Anonymous

*Trigger Warning: This article discusses the author's personal experiences of sexual assault.*

Peace is the will of God, but evil needs to be stopped by any means possible. The first time at age 15, I used peaceful means to deliver the consequences. The second time at age 26, I used violence to end violence. I believe I upheld my Quaker principles both times.

As a teen, it happened on the way to school. I ran to the doorbell of the first house I saw, which turned out to be a judge's home. He took me in and encouraged me to go to court. I knew it was right to testify. I went and successfully identified my attacker. I spoke for all the other girls who couldn't speak for themselves. My testimony put him in jail. He faced the legal consequences.

As a young woman, it happened at a music session. Jamming went late into the night causing me to fall asleep. Suddenly, I had to decide in a split second if it was more of a sin to be violated or to fight back. I chose to fight back. I looked up and saw his nose bloody and flattened where I had struck him with my fist. I was able to flee. I had delivered the only consequence he ever got.

Thirty years later I walked into a pub, and he was the jam master. He extended his hand for me to shake. I forgave him, bringing the situation full circle. I finally let the anger go and made peace.

Why does the peace testimony need be so absolute? Why is violence unjustified for any purpose? Surely rape is an evil act. Surely it is not the will of God. In one instance retribution came in the form of a legal trial. In the other instance there was no room for peaceful negotiations because the situation was lethal. The path of action should depend on the circumstances and the severity of the outcome. Both of my actions, albeit different, prevented further violence. I fought to end evil by any means possible. I still believe I did not betray my Quaker values.

*For sexual assault resources, please visit [www.rainn.org/resources](http://www.rainn.org/resources)*

or call the National Sexual Assault Hotline, 1-800-656-4673.



## The Peace Testimony and Alternatives to Violence

Mary Eagleson  
Scarsdale Meeting

The "George Fox" song includes words that capture the essence of Fox's peace testimony: "If we give you a pistol will you fight for the Lord? But you can't kill the Devil with a gun or a sword."

Fox's refusal to fight with what he called "outward weapons" was based on his understanding that Jesus' command to love our enemies was valid for all times and places. Fox spoke of the "Inward Christ" who is available to everyone who can quiet their own mind to become aware of the guidance this "Inward Christ" offers on how to confront our adversaries while still loving them.

Some three centuries later, the founders of the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) came up with a non-religious term for a similar concept: Transforming Power. There is no simple definition for Transforming Power, just as there is no definition of the "Inward Christ," or "Light Within," or any of the other words we use to refer to an ineffable inner guide to our actions. AVP facilitators speak of using, or being used by, Transforming Power because, subjectively, people may experience an impulse to counter a threat nonviolently which seems to come from outside themselves.

Even though an inspired nonviolent response to an aggressive act may seem to come from a power greater than the individual, there are habits of mind and behavior which make it more likely that a person will respond peacefully to a provocation. The first of these is to avoid reflexive use of a violent verbal, psychological or physical reaction, and to think of alternatives before reacting.

When we Quakers talk about "The Peace Testimony," we are often thinking about political, international peace and how to achieve it. We think about people who have

refused conscription and have been jailed in consequence, about others who have refused to pay that portion of their income taxes which supports the military expenditures of their country. These heroes, though, have so far had little influence on our society. If our country were ever to become truly peaceful, it would be essential for most or all individuals to understand how to resolve conflicts nonviolently. We would need to stop the cycle of violence leading to more violence in our everyday lives, as well as internationally. We would need to rise above that ocean of darkness into the ocean of light that Fox saw in his vision centuries ago.

When people adopt the concepts presented in AVP workshops as tools, they can be more effective in resolving conflicts peacefully, and this is clearly a benefit. However, AVP as a secular organization cannot overtly communicate the spiritual basis of peace, which is an inward condition. I submit that our true peace testimony is to develop an inward relationship with that mysterious Light and allow It to guide all our interactions with others, including our adversaries.

## On (NOT) Living into the Peace Testimony; Personal Reflections

Anonymous

I was the oldest child in a Quaker family. My sister was born when I was not yet one and a half, and I remember being very excited to have someone to play with. Alas, as a baby she slept a lot—22 hours a day if my parents remember correctly. Every day I woke her up, looking forward to having a playmate. Every day my mother hit me. Usually she hit me with a hairbrush. I was pretty clear that I wasn't a bad person, but she assured me that I was. By the time I stopped waking up my sister, I could do nothing right, and the hitting continued for seven years. My Quaker father ignored the situation. His Quaker mother tried to reason with my mother, and her visits were reduced to once a year. My dad still claims not to remember my mother hitting me, and not to

have ever been able to figure out why my grandmother only visited at Christmas.

Where was my Friends Meeting during all this? Oblivious? Scared to ask what was going on?

My parents were seriously into the Peace Testimony, in a big and public way. My mom organized demonstrations against bomb testing. Our whole family went. During the war in Vietnam, we organized a weekly peace vigil and were subjected to rotten tomatoes and eggs. Our whole family went every Sunday. Every Saturday my mother yelled at all of us. And yelled. And yelled. My dad got so mad at our meeting for not supporting his anti-war work that he stopped attending. Years later, he got so mad at my sister for voting for a Democrat instead of a green party candidate that he stopped speaking to her for several years.

I'm aware that I am often not at all peaceful inside. It took an enormous effort on my part not to pass down the physical violence to my children. I get angry and yell, and shockingly sound a lot like both of my parents.

My failures in living into the Peace Testimony are mixed with personal pain. I've noticed that there are conversations with other Friends about war and peace that I would prefer to avoid. In spite of my beliefs, I have paid my war taxes my entire adult life. I wish I could become someone who feels and acts in peaceful ways.

## Peace Be With You

Don Badgley  
Poughkeepsie Meeting

We Friends, when asked to define Quakerism, will often cite the "peace testimony" as a central tenet of our religion. We are a "peace church." We are pacifists and conscientious objectors to military service. We work in the world to create conditions that lead to peace. Some say that this is because "there is that of God in everyone" and so we will not commit violence against another. Though true in part, these constructs and beliefs are at best incomplete and may actually serve to distort the essential and founda-

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tional Truths of Quaker peace and peacemaking.

Peace is profoundly more than the absence of war and violence. Peace is also a state of being, a condition of human Spirit. Genuine peace arises within the person who is in communion with the Divine Light, the living root of the spiritual Experience. That reality is far more than some creedal shorthand construct intended to simplify, define and validate “Quakerism.”

The foundational premise of the radical 17th Century “Religious Society of Friends” was that the Eternal Divine Spirit was present to lead and teach humanity directly, without need of priests, creeds or hierarchy. This unchangeable and eternal “Spirit of Christ” as George Fox always named it, altered and then forever re-ordered one’s life.

That is as true today as it was then, and also as when Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed it through his transcendent and prophetic ministry. A Friends peace testimony that does not arise in these Truths and that Experience is no more than “lip service”, and is not only misleading, it is no longer even a testimony. It is diminished to a worldly notion, and on that shaky ground countless Quakers have abandoned their “peace testimony” to serve the “urgency” of some conflict of the moment.


A living testimony also assumes that we are willing to testify, to speak, to offer ministry and to order our lives in ways that also testify, not just through words but also through our leadings, arising in worship and manifested in our behaviors. A living testimony directs us to live under the care of the Divine Light, even as it compels us to courageously publish the Truth in every medium available.

A living and Spirit-driven Quaker testimony of peace does not take sides in worldly partisan politics that will inevitably alienate us from those with whom we disagree. A living, Spirit-driven testimony of peace unites all who may hear it and feel it, through the power and Experience of Divine Love that is its Source. It excludes no one.

As Quakers, as humans and as citizens of nations, we are endlessly diverted and divided by forces

that seduce us with the affairs and conflicts of the world and the politics of narrow worldly notions. We are persuaded by mass media to first take sides and then to criticize or condemn the other. Though always well-meaning, some Quaker partisan/political statements and works may also close ears, eyes and heart and, such efforts inevitably undermine our call to share the Truth of eternal infinite Divine Love—with everyone.

The Truth of that Love is the living heart of our faith, and the only right path to promoting and achieving the peace we so often claim. Direct communion with the Eternal Spirit of Divine Love is the “way open” to achieve genuine and transcendent peace. That cleansing and inward Experience also engenders grace, forgiveness, justice, mercy, goodness, righteousness, forgiveness, healing and unity.

May it be so, and may peace be with you. 

## Perspective on the Peace Testimony

Marvia Lindsay  
Scarsdale Meeting

There is a song by Jill Jackson Miller and Sy Miller entitled, “Let There Be Peace On Earth,” and it continues, “and let it begin with me.” This I would say is the true requirement for peace in our world. We may want to bring peace to our world but if we are not expressing peace in our lives we are contributing to the conflict in the world. As One Creation, we are interconnected, and our behaviors affect each other. Therefore when peace is expressed in our hearts it flows to our family and changes the atmosphere within our homes, and through our interactions, it flows to others outside of the home and within the community.

As Quakers we believe that there is “That of God” present in all people, but as we live our lives we tend to forget that there is a Divine Creative Power dwelling within us at all times. We tend to look outwards for our salvation and peace. We look to others for material gains, happiness, solutions to our problems and for our


well-being. In putting these things before our relationship with God, we have created “idols”. Eventually this misplaced focus brings us pain and suffering.

The prophet said, in Isaiah 32:17, “The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.” True peace beyond our understanding comes only from God; any peace we get from the world is not lasting. We will not experience true peace until we have developed a working relationship with God. We develop this relationship through daily prayer, meditation and reading spiritual literature.

In order to bring more peace into our lives and in the world, we cannot just mouth the belief that there is “that of God in each of us,” we must genuinely believe it and act accordingly. If we genuinely believed and acted on that belief, we would, according to *A Course in Miracles*, “acknowledge Christ in all our brothers and sisters, and recognize His Presence in ourselves.” If we believed and acted on this belief, we would treat each other as we wished to be treated and peace would flow freely in our world.

Another practice that brings us peace is forgiveness. Jesus Christ taught the importance of forgiveness throughout his teachings. He included it in The Lord’s Prayer, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,” and with his last breath he forgave those who participated in his crucifixion, with, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do”. He displayed his understanding of how difficult the process could be when he told Peter that he may have to forgive the other 70x7 times. Forgiveness releases us from the negative restrictions (hate, vengeance, fear, resentment, spite) we have placed on ourselves and the other because of the wrong we believe he/she inflicted on us. It does not mean we agree with what the person did, but it frees us of the psychic burden we’ve been carrying around, which limits our own potential and blocks our recognition and acceptance of God’s Love and Inspiration. It opens our hearts to God’s Love.

Another wonderful tool which brings us peace is gratitude. In

1Thessalonians 5:18 it says, “In all things give thanks.” It is the crises of the dark times which bring us closer to God, and there is good which will be revealed eventually. Let gratitude lift our mood by Grace to a sweeter, calmer level of consciousness. When done daily, it brings peace. 

## The Urgent Call: Finding Common Ground

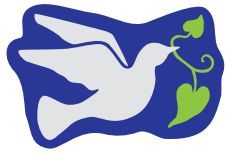
Sheree Cammer  
Albany Meeting

I was fortunate to be able to participate on September 28 in the first national Zoom on the July 2023 revision of the Urgent Call to Quakers everywhere (available at quakercall.net). Parker Palmer spoke to us of how to respond with profound love, while acknowledging the lesser angels of our nature. He quoted Mary Tempest Williams, “Democracy began in the human heart. The heart is where we wrestle with how to preserve democracy.” In the days following the national Zoom, focused by the *Spark* Peace Testimony theme, some after-thoughts have crystallized. I offer them in attempted service to the Peace Testimony.

The Urgent Call could be revised to align more closely with the Quaker Peace Testimony. To quote what is considered the seminal statement of the Quaker peace testimony, A Declaration to King Charles II 1660: “...we do earnestly desire and wait, that by the Word of God’s power and its effectual operation in the hearts of men, the kingdoms of this world may become the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Christ, that he may rule and reign in men by his spirit and truth, that thereby all people, out of all different judgements and professions may be brought into love and unity with God, and one with another...”

Might we revisit the language of the Urgent Call to welcome all people, rather than appealing only to allies? Our use of the language of prejudice is not conducive to all people being brought to the love and unity of God, and one with another.


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# Perspectives on the Peace Testimony

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Rather than addressing Quakers, only, we could address the Urgent Call to “all people, out of all different judgements.” We could refrain from polarizing language so that those holding very different world views could engage with a Call that seeks common ground. Seeking common ground might begin to be possible with a query such as: What constitutes a fair election? Without consensus in this regard, the United States of America are not United.

We could extend our profound love beyond those who we recognize as victims of oppression. We could extend our profound love to all, no exceptions. 

## Peacemaking: A Difficult History

Buffy Curtis

Mohawk Valley Meeting

Friends have been notably known for their commitment and testimony of Peace throughout their history. It has taken many forms throughout these times, but probably the most familiar in WWII, post war reconstruction and onward.

I was a young adult of the 60's and 70's. I learned of AFSC and its post-war works, but it was the Vietnam War that engaged me in active opposition. An episode of the TV show MASH featured a Quaker pacifist trying to bring supplies to both sides of that conflict. That and numerous encounters with other Friends in Washington rallies left a deep impression. Yet a decade later, when I finally became a member of New England Yearly Meeting Friends, there was yet another conflict followed by endless “Military Actions” even unto today. There has been plenty of work for Friends to do all over the world!

However, for over 300 years in this country, there was a war (or wars) against the Original Peoples of these lands. The Indian Wars, as they were known, were most often defensive or retaliatory actions, by tribes and nations subjected to the ongoing practices of displacement by settlement and government laws and policies. Removal of “the Savages” was the goal. As each tribal

nation successively tried negotiations and treaties, upon the failure of most of them, they defensively fought back to retain their lands and livelihood. The US government negotiated and broke over 400 treaties and agreements with the original nations of this land.

What does that have to do with Peace(making) and Quakers? Well, like many Friends, I was familiar with the “Good Works” of members and organizations during the 20th Century and now. However, I was nearly 60 years old before I learned about Quaker involvement with the Indian Wars and government policies, primarily in the 1800's. Why had it taken this long for me to learn this? And why, after 10 years of researching and teaching, is it still a surprise to so many Friends?


I personally don't have an answer to that question, but it's an important one to keep asking, if only to motivate work towards an answer. For at least the last decade, several Friends from meetings around the country have been researching, learning and coming to terms with our history and involvement with “the Indians.” There were many notable Quakers along the East Coast meetings that were involved in creating national policy, advising President Grant as well as encouraging Friends to support and engage with the “Indians” who they understood to be under siege. They came to believe that “civilization of the savages” was the only course of survival. This included supporting first, reservations, then land allotments, Christian education and training in colonial agricultural skills and practices. Grant's Peace Policy, The Dawes Act and over 30 Quaker day and boarding schools were engaged and supported by Friends, concerned and intent on peacemaking with the “Indians.” Many thousands (millions in today's value) of dollars were raised annually by New England, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore yearly meetings for food, clothing, tools, books and salary payments. Many Friends were called to become teachers or Indian Agents during this time.

So what? Friends have always stepped up in person or financially to help others in need.

The answer to that is this...

history has traveled on enough so we can now begin to look back and discover and acknowledge the outcomes and effects of what we thought were “right” and bringing about Peace. In spite of our deep discernment then, we are finally realizing it was nearly all flawed from the start. In the name of good intent, Quakers collaborated in a full-on policy of assimilation and cultural genocide. The oldest yearly meetings have the longest stories and the most engagement. The Quaker schools were started in 1796, 50 years before the federal policy in 1869! It is a complex and multifaceted story.

This year at Summer Sessions, following Paula Palmer's plenary on the boarding schools, there was a call for NYM meetings and quarters to undertake examining their own histories and relationships to Native Peoples. The Friends engaged in this work are reminding us to continue to examine our histories, what truths need to be revealed, and how we can collectively undertake what Peace(making) can sustainably look like for all.

How will you answer this call? 

## Making Peace with Peace

Ted Bongiovanni  
Brooklyn Meeting

As Friends, “we utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fighting with outward weapons for any end or under any pretense whatever; this is our testimony to the whole world.”—George Fox and others c. 1660.

I've served as a US Peace Corps volunteer, marched in countless protests against wars at home and abroad. That said, our peace testimony is one of the most difficult for me to embrace. How do we deal with those who would use violent ends to achieve an outcome? Is our testimony a moral absolute?

I am a child of the Cold War—memorialized in pop culture in films like *The Day After* which imagined our world in the wake of nuclear armageddon. Then, I preferred films like *Top Gun* which put brave men (always men in the 80s) in the cockpit. In films like *Top*

*Gun*, the violence was somewhat abstracted. Defend against an enemy to preserve freedom. Queue effusive, heart-stirring electric guitar riffs. These films are part of the mythology of war, bravery, and masculinity. *Top Gun's* post pandemic sequel carries the same message: we need the strong, with arms, to stand up to the bad, who would do us harm.

My favorite pop culture summary was immortalized forever by Jack Nicholson playing Nathan Jessup in *A Few Good Men*, where he explained to a naive Daniel Kaffee: “we live in a world that has walls, and those walls have to be guarded by men with guns...”

Is it that simple? Take the case of the unjust, illegal, and violent Russian invasion of Ukraine. How should we respond as Friends?

These brutal actions put our peace testimony to the test.

Perhaps the most basic tenet of Quakerism is the belief that there is a spark of the divine in everyone—and that is our responsibility to let that light shine in ourselves and seek it in others. If we commit violence against another we commit it against ourselves.

John Donne's words have always helped me make the connection of our shared humanity:

No man is an island,  
Entire of itself;  
Every man is a piece of the  
continent,  
A part of the main.

If a clod be washed away by the  
sea,  
Europe is the less,  
As well as if a promontory were:  
As well as if a manor of thy  
friend's  
Or of thine own were.

Any man's death diminishes me,  
Because I am involved in  
mankind.  
And therefore never send to  
know for whom the bell tolls;  
It tolls for thee.

Violence is expedient—draw the sword, get your gun, roll the tanks, launch the missiles. Do as I say or harm will come to you. Violence is predicated on fear and control. Do

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as I say because I am stronger than you.

How free are we if this is the belief system to which we subscribe?

Fox denounced fighting with outward weapons. Instead we need to use our hearts and minds. Renounce our swords and our obsession with fighting. Because when we all take up arms we all lose. Violence begets more violence. Our peace testimony offers a way out of fear and oppression. Not only from weighty global examples but in our every day lives. When we feel anger rising how can we acknowledge that feeling and then seek a non-violent or peaceful path?

How might we better understand our starting principles and the privilege that comes with them? Are those principles absolutes? How might we understand and connect with those who see things differently than us? Together, we must work to find the paths that recognize the inherent dignity of every person. That, Friends, is our work. 

## We Must Rise Up Against Guns

Nancy Dodson  
Scarsdale Meeting


The Peace Testimony is the impulse that drove me to Quakerism, and keeps me engaged still. It stays with me during silent worship. No matter where my thoughts begin at 11:00 a.m. on a Sunday, my mind comes back time and again to the main destroyer of peace in our country: the guns that litter our landscape. 300 million guns, in fact—in homes, in cars, strapped to people's belts. Being picked up by angry aggrieved men, by desperately lonely people, by stressed and scared teenagers, and by curious little children.

I once heard an activist say that a gun is a nuclear weapon. This is true. In an instant, a gun can destroy a human life in a mushroom cloud of violence, and then destruction radiates out in waves around that life. When I was in my pediatrics residency, two little boys were orphaned when their

parents died in a gun murder-suicide. The little boys waited in the emergency room overnight while awaiting a foster home. The school-age boy drew with crayons while the social worker tried to explain “your mother is dead.” The infant, exclusively breastfed until that moment, fussed while the weeping nurses encouraged him to drink from a bottle. In the early morning they were carried out of the hospital to meet their strange new caregivers. What is this scene, if not a scene of nuclear destruction?

Several members of NYYM have begun to gather around this issue: to teach each other the science of the issue; formulate a vision statement; and carry out public actions such as a gun buyback. In this setting, I feel free to speak in a way that is more raw and emotional than when I am in medical or scientific circles. I treasure this opportunity, because to me, guns are more than a public health problem. They are the moral failing of our time; the destroyer of childhoods, a social poison—their very existence is an insult to my sense of a human life. I hope that the Peace Testimony calls Friends everywhere in a similar way. Just as our faith's “heroes” such as John Woolman and Benjamin Lay spoke irreverently and urgently about the threats to peace in their time, we must do the same in our time.

We cannot be held back by a false sense of sanctity about the Second Amendment. We must be loyal, first and foremost, to the Peace Testimony and the sanctity of human life. We should call out, through direct public action, the industry that produces increasingly lethal weapons and floods our streets with them—an industry that has rejected any and all regulations or safety measures. We should learn from other successful social movements in order to think creatively: for example, advocating for divestment and litigation—two powerful tools to weaken the billion-dollar gun industry and bring economic justice to its victims.

My prayer is that Quakers everywhere will join this movement and thus honor the Peace Testimony. 

## Peace Queries

Anne Pomeroy  
New Paltz Meeting

This issue of *Spark* is devoted to our understanding of the peace testimony. We might ask ourselves what does a peace church look like today?

The following queries about living in accordance with the peace testimony may provide places for reflection about how we manifest peace in all we do. The queries are varied in the hope that some will speak to you.


### For Individual Reflection

- How do you tend your inner peace? How is this guided by the ‘still small voice’? How do you tend your inner life, your relationship with Spirit, so you hear the guidance toward peace?
- What supports you to manifest this inner peace in the upsets a day may hold, in your relationships with others?
- How is an inner stance of peace reflected in how you navigate difference with another person or persons?
- Do you, or might you, examine the impact of your power and privilege on the peace of others?
- Do you, or might you, reflect on your patterns of communication, on your expression of needs/wants/feelings, and on your manifestation of patterns of oppression as a reflection of the peace testimony?
- When do you listen for the still small voice in others? How does the quality of your listening impact your ability to hear how Spirit is moving in others?

### For Reflection as a Community

- How do we embody peace within our faith community? How do we live into the peace testimony in the life of our meeting and in Meeting for Business?
- How we trust Spirit, our community, and others impacts our sense of peace and acting peacefully. How does deepening our connection to Spirit help us be faithful and let go of an attachment to outcome?
- Do our business and or worship practices further peace or do they unintentionally foster separation or marginalization?
- How does the meeting tend the spiritual life of the entire community such that it promotes a sense of belonging and peace? When an individual's behavior is creating challenges in the meeting, how is the meeting led to lovingly set boundaries for the health of the meeting community?
- As we listen for Spirit's guidance, how are we addressing injustice in our meeting communities to deepen the peace?
- What are the attributes of a culture of peace? How does our meeting community embody aspects of the culture of peace?

### Peace in the Wider World

- Quakers are considered a historic peace church. Do our actions merit this designation today? How do we live our collective life as a historic peace church? What does a peace church look like today?
- Does your meeting have a visible peace witness? Is this witness under the care of the Meeting?
- How does our collective voice impact peace around us? How does our collective silence make us a complicit with injustice?
- How might our meeting be called to manifest a culture of peace?
- What queries are on your heart? What do we need to tend to live in to being a peace church today? How are we being called? 



# Perspectives on the Peace Testimony

## Peace Witness: A Look Forward

Joseph Olejak  
Old Chatham Meeting

The world is changing and so too must the peace witness. Many Quakers over our history have refused to fight and refused to have their money conscripted for war. But all of that may be changing.

**MONEY:** A time honored tradition among Quakers is to refuse to pay for war either by living below the line where they are taxed or just not paying some portion of federal income tax. Quite soon all of this may be moot as money becomes a purely electronic transaction and bills and coins disappear. CBDC (Central Bank Digital Currency) is on the way. In the CBDC scenario there will be very few ways to avoid the system. The autonomy over money we currently enjoy will be replaced by a digital wallet that someone else controls—namely, a central bank. That loss of control over one's money and finances has already been used by the heavy hand of government. The Canadians used it to punish striking truckers by freezing their bank accounts. Even supporters of the Canadian truckers experienced economic pressure on their resources by the government-banking complex.

Gold and silver was the first currency because its value was stable and the holder of the currency had control. As we moved away from real money to Federal Reserve Notes and now CBDC manipulation of the money system is far easier. It can be inflated or deflated at will.

Looking forward, it seems to me that Quakers and young Quakers in particular are going to have to find new and innovative ways to exercise their peace witness. Finding ways to starve the military industrial complex that doesn't involve donating your body or your money will get harder.

**FIGHTING:** One way war is changing that greatly affects Quaker peace witness is the Pentagon's move to unmanned autonomous weapons. These are weapons that can independently search for and engage targets based on programmed constraints and

descriptions. What that means for Quakers is that refusing to go to war will shortly be irrelevant. These weapons (such as aerial drones already in use) can be programmed to choose targets—and there may or may not be humans choosing who will die when the bombs are dropped. The ethical considerations of these weapons for Quakers is enormous and real. They violate every single tenet of what we believe.

During the war in Iraq and Afghanistan we were sold a bill of goods about so-called "smart" weapons; how they had pinpoint accuracy and only the bad guys were killed. But even with "pilots" in a room in Nevada getting a visual feed in real time, those "smart weapons" killed children, wedding parties, and members of the press corps. Now imagine no human being in the loop to parse whether a camel is carrying a wedding party or a mujaheddin fighter. Now further consider that private companies have the data that runs the drones and provides the intel. Ukraine and Musk's Starlink satellite network come to mind. If war was profitable in the old system imagine how much more profitable it becomes under A.I.

Minds greater than my own have warned that A.I. making lethal decisions is terrifying. We don't know if it can be contained once trained on killing humans. This is an existential threat to human life. The *Terminator* movies come to mind or the episode of *Black Mirror* called "Metalhead."

War is changing and so too must the peace witness. Finding ways to pull out of financial systems that support killing will be harder and harder. Doing an internet search or posting on social media and giving away your data will fund the next war.

Convening a Quaker Think Tank on these issues would be very important. I'd be quite interested in connecting with other Quakers in this way; exploring methods of war tax resistance in the brave new world of A.I. Younger Quakers need to take up these questions as A.I. is going to get more insidious in our lives with every passing day.

## My Thoughts About Conscientious Objection

Anne Barschall  
Scarsdale Meeting

I was first inspired to pacifism when my father's laboratory was bombed by student radicals opposed to the Vietnam War. A student was killed. Another student was seriously injured. The records of 25 years of my father's research were destroyed. Moreover, bombers essentially missed their target — an Army Math Research Center that was situated above my father's laboratory.

I was opposed to the Vietnam War as well, but I saw how the violence in search of peace had been very wrong.

I do not feel that I can say, as some early Friends did, that I would never be violent. I have a bad temper. I get afraid. I cannot say for certain how I would react to a high stress, emergency situation.

I believe, though, in what I learned from AVP, namely that if one prepares oneself to respond to an emergency situation with violence, one is more likely to become violent. On the other hand, if one prepares to respond with the transformative power of God's love, one is more likely to be able to respond that way. I hope that I will find a way to go with the transformative power of God's love, rather than with violence.

I also believe that the decision of when or whether I am going to become violent is not one that I can delegate to someone else. I certainly cannot delegate that decision to a member of the US government. During my lifetime, every direct action of war that we have undertaken has been outright wrong. Many of the sneaky intelligence interventions that we have undertaken have also been wrong. We have done more harm than good. This has been especially true in Muslim countries, where our interventions have typically resulted in violent anarchy—which enables the rise of terrorist organizations.

This business of not delegating is a bit like marriage. Most people would not delegate the responsibility for having sex with their

spouse to someone else. For me, the decision of whether or not I will become violent is not to be delegated.



## Thoughts on the Peace Testimony

Cary Andrews  
Scarsdale Meeting

When I think of the Peace Testimony, what comes to mind is the phrase—"Let there be Peace on Earth and let it begin with me." It was a song written in 1955 by Jill Jackson Miller and Sy Miller. It was originally written for and sung by the International Children's Choir. To me, it exemplifies how I approach my life and how I try to live the Peace Testimony. Another rendition of this sentiment is, "First, keep peace within yourself, then you can also bring peace to others," by Thomas A. Kempis. He was a German-Dutch canon of the late medieval period and wrote devotional books. I have a plaque with these words in beautiful script with floral embellishments that I keep in my kitchen.

The Peace Testimony is complicated, and open to many interpretations.

I have taught First Day School for at least 35 years, and an important part of our curriculum is the SPICE acronym for the testimonies—Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality. So many lessons over the years to teach/learn about Peace with our young friends. So many songs and poems with peace as their message, the knowledge of those refusing to go to war, the conscientious objectors (my husband served at Mass General Hospital as part of his service during Vietnam), early Friends and their objection to war. I love the A.J. Muste phrase, "There is no Way to Peace, Peace is the Way." But it became quite sticky for me when our eldest son joined the Marines.

I seriously considered leaving our meeting because I felt that this had challenged our beliefs somehow. But at Scarsdale Friends Meeting there was support and concern for his decision, and to me

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this was such a show of community, and it was almost overwhelming to find such acceptance and love and peace. I find there are many ways to peace, and many ways to follow the testimonies. I believe the military even has 'Quaker' as a choice for religion on their dog tags, and have known of a number of Quakers that served in the military. I am proud of him and his service. And both of my sons have been married under the care of their Quaker Meeting. Being a Quaker is an important part of our lives.

We are a community of seekers after all, and this is certainly a testimony that we all try to live and understand. We strive for a way to live our peace. It is a process, a journey, and a joy.

## Mining and Peace, Including Peace with Earth

Barbara Sinacore  
Albany Meeting

Mining at the present time is done in neither a peaceful nor an earth friendly manner. This is especially problematic as the mining of minerals, particularly rare earth minerals, are needed for electronic devices such as cell phones, and for green energy such as wind and solar.

Typical mining operations are environmentally devastating, and employ impoverished people working in inhuman conditions for low pay in their now devastated countryside. As if this were not enough, armed paramilitary groups terrorize the inhabitants as corrupt governments and others seek to gain control over the lucrative mining. While there are well-intended measures in place to prohibit these conflicts, enforcement is not necessarily possible.

Recycling of these minerals is generally not feasible, as there are typically many minerals, each in minuscule quantities. There is promising research on replacing rare earth minerals with other minerals in electronics and green energy. However, several questions remain. How can we greatly lessen our use of mined minerals? How can the now smaller amount of

minerals we want be mined in an earth- and people-friendly way?

In order to encourage peace in the world, it is necessary to speak truth to power in the case of violation of human rights and safety. If one's basic rights and needs are not honored, it is very difficult for him/her to relate peacefully to others. Then those people form groups, not always peaceful, out of desperation. This is one of the seeds of rebellions, conflicts, wars. Healing that desperation with positive action is one of a peacemaker's jobs.

As part of our Quaker peace testimony, how might we seek to remove our complicity with the occasion for armed conflict? Could we work to encourage a new mindset query: do I personally NEED a new cell phone every time my cell phone company tells me I have an upgrade available? Could I wait until I get a notice that they will no longer be servicing my current phone? Could I put the earth's health and my fellow humans' needs before my own preference for the fastest, most efficient, entertaining phone?

Could we share these queries with neighbors, friends, and fellow Quakers to encourage people that small acts are not useless? If our small act is combined with those of countless others, we are not powerless.

How can we negotiate mutual security with countries, such as China, who have these crucial minerals? How can we address situations that could lead to armed conflicts?

No, the peace testimony is not unrealistic if I only bite off chunks I can chew and band together with others as they also do so. I define how I personally respond to this testimony and that makes it manageable and doesn't lead me to despair at the immensity of world conflicts. Also I remember that some projects, such as civil rights, take generations, and even small moves forward can be honestly celebrated. I am inspired and guided by my personal lived peace testimony as it uses my own divinely given talents and energies, my own contribution as a part of the Quaker family. I am also inspired by others' creative definitions and their commitment to them. These fill me with strength

when I am weary and provide arm-in-arm courage to keep on keepin' on.

To me Quakerism is, in part, a call to be "useful" in the repair of this world. And to follow the peace testimony as fully as I can, reminding myself that my little efforts CAN and DO add to the compassionate acts being done on a minute by minute basis...RIGHT NOW and IN THE FUTURE.

## What I Believe

Fred Dettmer  
Purchase Meeting

Civilization in general, and the United States in particular, worships at the alter of holy violence. At the heart of that devotion is the belief that lethal force wielded for proper purposes can deliver peace and justice. This faith in redemptive violence insinuates itself into every facet of our culture; from the consensus view of our political class to our standard history curriculum; and from the major themes in our popular entertainment to the talking heads and editorial pens of our major news and informational media; even in our sports and games and toys. In the words of theologian John Dominic Crossan: "*Since we first invented culture (or it us), violence has been our drug of choice. . . .*"

Every war brings the temptation to find saints and sinners, to deem some virtuous and others malicious, to identify victims and aggressors. Society demands that we take sides. Taking sides invites justifying the use of lethal force in defense of great principles. And the invocation of great causes takes attention away from the annihilative realities of warfare.

This is the challenge faced by the Peace Testimony. How do we convey our truths to communities devoted to principles of holy violence?

This is some of what I believe:

We are told that each war is justified by great principles: freedom or liberation, the homeland, my people and our way of life; fending off predators and throwing off oppressors; even for God; especially for God. It follows, then, that war fought for a great

cause must be moral. The sanctity of the goal, of our goal, cleanses the means used to reach the goal. Hence, the choice to eradicate evil through lethal force is a moral choice.

The invocation of great causes, however, obscures the reality of warfare. The wages of war are life, property and resources; the killing and maiming of human beings and the destruction of property and communal wealth. The wages of causes are the intellect and debate. War employs weapons to prove one's superior destructive power. Causes employ thoughts and words to prove one's superior constructive ideas. Adoption of a just cause doesn't and can't change the essential truth that warfare vindicates force, not principle.

The evil in violence is the violence, not the character or motive of those employing the violence. "*The spirit of Christ... is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing as evil and again to move unto it. . . .*"

Three of the Gospels tell a story about Jesus being offered power to rule the world. **IMAGINE THE GOOD HE COULD HAVE DONE!** The stories report that Jesus turned down the opportunity with the retort "worship the Lord, your God, and serve him only." The Gospel According to John makes the point more directly:

"After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and **make him king by force**, withdrew again to a mountain by himself."

When we pray that God shall "lead us not into temptation," I believe the temptation is the belief that lethal violence can be used to bring justice when, in fact, it only brings dominance. When we ask God to "deliver us from evil," that evil is that temptation to believe in redemptive violence. Jesus invited his followers and us into the Kingdom of God and modeled what that means with his life. That Kingdom demands justice and, rather than peace through victory, it promises peace through justice. And that is what I believe.



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spiritually uplifting our yearly meeting.

As this will be my first meeting as New York Yearly Meeting's clerk, I know the plans the God/Jehovah/Creator/Almighty/Divine Spirit that I serve has for me. However, I am asking for your prayerful and in person support as I venture into this new role. Please consider attending and inviting other members, attenders and seekers in your meeting/church to participate.

In faith,

*Gloria*

*Gloria Thompson*

*Clerk, New York Yearly Meeting*

### Saturday Evening Climate Action Panel Discussion

#### Globally Friends have been called to climate action—but what to do?

The panelists have dedicated significant amounts of time to grass roots organizing, state federal and local legislative lobbying and civil disobedience. After an initial period of sharing of experience and strategies for future efforts by the panelists the discussion will open up to attendees for questions and discussion.

#### Featuring:

- Jim Ralston, Saratoga Meeting, discussing Citizens Climate Lobby's work on Carbon Fee and Dividend and NYYM's Climate Justice Working Group

- Yana Landowne, Brooklyn Meeting, discussing Extinction Rebellion
- Katherine Alford, Morningside Meeting, discussing Third Act

This is not a debate but rather a time to listen for the stirrings of the spirit in new and renewed witness out of love for the natural world and humanity. How best can we contribute to the change we want to see in the world when it is beyond our personal lifestyle choices?

### Registration

Visit [nyym.org/Fall-Sessions-2023](http://nyym.org/Fall-Sessions-2023) to find out more details and to register. If registration is not open yet, it will begin soon, and will be announced via the NYYM email list; visit [nyym.org/subscribe](http://nyym.org/subscribe) to join. Note that **you must register in advance to receive the Zoom links** for Fall Sessions. Zoom connection information will be emailed to registrants a day or two before Fall Sessions begins.

Though the costs associated with online sessions are lower than in-person sessions, there are still direct costs and a great deal of staff time spent preparing. When you register, you will be asked to consider making a registration contribution. Registration contributions are "pay as led." That means you choose the amount, if any, that is appropriate for you. Please know that your presence is more important than your dollars.

[nyym.org/Fall-Sessions-2023](http://nyym.org/Fall-Sessions-2023)

## Fall Sessions Schedule

**December 1-3, 2023 • Online**

### Friday evening, December 1

7:00-9:00 p.m. Possible workshop or discussion – to be announced

### Saturday, December 2

8:30-9:30 a.m. Meeting for Worship

9:30-11:45 a.m. Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business

1:30-2:30 p.m. Meeting for Worship

2:30-4:30 p.m. Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business

7:00-9:00 p.m. Climate Action Panel Discussion

### Sunday December 3

*Morning off so that folks can join the worship of their choice.*

1:30-2:30 p.m. Meeting for Worship

2:30-4:30 p.m. Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business

## Please Take the NYYM Communications Survey

### We need your help!

NYYM's Communications Committee is asking Friends to share how they receive information from and stay connected to the yearly meeting. Your answers will help allocate money, time, and energy toward the forms of communication that are most useful to you.

**Background:** The *Spark* newsletter has been printed and mailed to about 2400 addresses, including NYYM members and meetings, five times a year since 1970. *Spark* is also available on the [nyym.org](http://nyym.org) website. Since 2021 NYYM has been emailing a weekly update newsletter to a list of over 1700 email addresses with much of the news and information that appears in *Spark*. The registration forms for NYYM Sessions that used to appear in *Spark* are now entirely online. We will try switching *Spark* to a quarterly schedule next year (instead of five times a year), and further changes are being considered.

To fill out this survey please use the online form at [nyym.org/communications-survey](http://nyym.org/communications-survey) or fill out this printed form and mail it to **NYYM Office, Attn: Communications Survey, 15 Rutherford Place, New York, NY 10003.**

1. What is your main source of information about NYYM events and news?
  - Weekly Update or other NYYM emails
  - Print version of *Spark*
  - Online version of *Spark*
  - NYYM website ([nyym.org](http://nyym.org))
  - Social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X)
  - Local meeting or other groups's newsletter or email
  - Announcements at meeting or word-of-mouth
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
2. What sections of *Spark* do you value most? (you can select more than one)
  - Themed content — articles, essays, and artwork on aspects of Quaker belief and witness
  - "Around Our Yearly Meeting" — upcoming events, news from meetings and other Quaker groups, and meeting notices
  - News from recent NYYM Sessions, including epistles and highlights from the minutes
  - Information about upcoming Spring, Fall, or Summer Sessions
3. Is the printed version of *Spark* your main source of information from or about NYYM?
  - Yes
  - No
4. What is your main source of information about upcoming NYYM Sessions?
  - Weekly Update or other NYYM emails
  - Print version of *Spark*
  - Online version of *Spark*
  - The NYYM website
  - Social media posts
  - Meeting announcements/word of mouth
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
5. What form of communication helps you feel most connected to the yearly meeting?
  - Weekly Update or other NYYM emails
  - Print version of *Spark*
  - Online version of *Spark*
  - The NYYM website
  - Social media posts
  - Meeting announcements/word of mouth
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Is there anything else you'd like to share about communications from NYYM? \_\_\_\_\_