

Pastoral Care *Newsletter*

*For Member Care Committees,
Ministry and Counsel, Overseers,
and others who provide pastoral care
in unprogrammed Friends meetings*

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How is Your Meeting Facing War and Militarism?

by Suzanne Day

Like it or not, military influences surround us and influence even our meeting life. The United States has enjoyed decades free of major wars but is now engaged in a long-term war on terrorism. Many Friends feel they are skating out onto new ice: some joined meeting as adults without deeply considering the implications of the peace testimony while others long took the peace testimony for granted feeling little need to test it in practice. Is your meeting engaging with the peace testimony? Is the meeting community ready and able to prepare its youth for the impacts of militarism?

Yours would be an unusual meeting indeed if you could say the peace testimony was already a lively topic of attention bringing together the convinced, the doubters, and the neophytes in a zone of safety. Though the pressures of militarism on both adults and youth are pervasive and unlikely to disappear soon, forces within our meetings may be preventing us from entering into a helpful dialogue.

Those new in recent years to Quaker religious community may hesitate to share their fears, doubts, and questions. Young or old, Friends doubtful about the power of nonviolent peacemaking are unlikely to initiate conversations which they fear will throw them into a bad light within the meeting. Even Friends who are solidly convinced of the peace testimony may keep quiet because they do not imagine that other Friends have doubts or because they cannot envision convincing the unconvinced. Few young

adults have been pushed to wrestle with questions of conscientious objection as they approach the requirement of registration for the draft at their eighteenth birthday.

Friends need to be sensitive to one another as we examine the relevance of the peace testimony for our time.

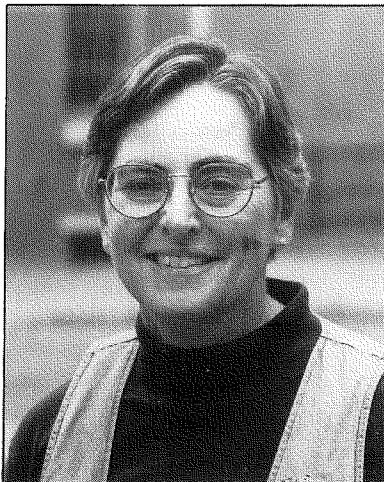
Leadership for Exploring the Peace Testimony

Who is going to initiate discussions that grapple with matters of war and peace? Where can we learn the power of nonviolent activism? Who can help us understand what we truly believe and how we can put faith into action?

The religious education committees for both children and adults have an ongoing responsibility to help us understand and grapple with the peace testimony and its biblical and Quaker heritage. In

most meetings a peace and social action committee is charged with providing leadership for taking action around concerns for peace and justice.

The pastoral care group has a particular role to sense how engaged the meeting is and how unified or divided it is over witness for peace. In times like these, when the world presses Friends to discern individually and corporately how we relate to government demands for our support, a meeting can discover that its members are not as well grounded nor as unified as the times require. As Friends struggle with



Suzanne Day

responding to calls for war, it is a significant pastoral function to create opportunities for dialogue which are safe enough to invite serious searching.

Getting War and Peace into Focus

We can begin by developing both practical and spiritual understanding of the peace witness expressed by Friends over the centuries and exploring its relevance for our times. Have you re-read lately the exquisite letter to King Charles in 1660 which sets out the connection between spiritual guidance and personal use of outward weapons? You

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might begin your next pastoral care meeting by reading it and responding to its resonance with your experience. The language is somewhat obscure to contemporary ears, but the consistency of meaning can move hearts and minds to further seeking.

If your meeting has a breadth of ages, perhaps you have older members whose experiences during war time provide stories to spark discussion. Did some enlist or get drafted into military service? Are there some in your meeting who protested a war or did alternative service as conscientious objectors? Did someone take a stand for conscience in another context such as war tax resistance or selection of a career path? The process of discovering these aspects of Friends' experience may stir memories and build associations for unexpected benefits. If you do not find sufficient resources within your meeting, you might find them within the quarterly or yearly meeting, on video, or in print.

The PBS video "The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It" provides role models who took the stand of conscientious objection. The short play "The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail" can be read aloud and discussed within an hour. Some meetings have brought a wide age group together to discern what the 17th century English authors meant in the letter to King Charles and to compose a 21st century declaration.

Learning about the power of nonviolence is tremendously important. Too often pacifism is viewed by those who don't understand it as "wimpy" passive-ism. Create opportunities for meeting members to learn about powerful examples of nonviolent direct action. The PBS film "A Force More Powerful" provides excellent historical footage

Declaration to Charles II 1660

Our principle is, and our practices have always been, to seek peace, and pursue 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. All bloody principles and practices we 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. That 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.

And as for the kingdoms of this world, we cannot covet them, much less can we fight for them, but 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 might rule and reign in men by his spirit and truth, that thereby all people, out of all different judgments and professions might be brought into love and unity with God and one with another, and that they might all come to witness the prophet's words, who said, 'Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more'. (Is 2:4; Mic 4:3)

of nonviolent noncooperation in wartime and can stir discussion across gaps of life experience and opinion.

Your meeting might hold a worship-sharing to explore individuals' beliefs and concerns. Perhaps young adults or those in their teens could work on questions around militarism which they would like to address with the meeting. Questions could go on a bulletin board where others could write responses. Or they might become the focus for a series of Friendly-Eight dinners. Or the questions might become a monthly feature in the meeting newsletter with short replies from a variety of meeting members.

Maybe a series of adult first day classes could focus on questions of militarism and nonviolent direct action.

When a broad age range gets together, the difficulty of some being inarticulate can be minimized by providing a structure that helps everyone to be comfortable. Those who have difficulty in speaking in a larger group are often helped by a period when participants are invited to share with one or two others and then come back to the total group. Some young people—and many older ones—may do more listening than talking, but if their presence is respected naturally, they will absorb both information and attitudes. Young Friends and others new to the peace testimony can gradually learn to talk about the moral and religious dilemmas involved in making war when they are exposed to people seriously engaged in such discussions.

As you consider your approach, you want to be certain that the atmosphere is conducive to serious sharing and respects the fact that seekers are at various stages of faith and understanding. We are most likely to ask the difficult questions when the setting seems cordial and safe for the non-conformist or the truly ignorant. Getting to know one another in a caring environment builds spiritual community. Exploring the peace testimony together is bound to stretch and empower your meeting, to enliven individuals in their spiritual growth. The supportive community has meaning when we see connections between decisions affecting people's lives and the religious faith and experience of our meeting family.

Helping Our Young People Deal with Militarism

Young people have been exposed to militarism from many directions by the time they become early teenagers. Huge expenditures are made by the Pentagon on selling its wares. A free aptitude test (ASVAB) is given in thousands of high schools providing the armed services a conduit to students with aptitudes desirable in volunteers. Movies and TV advertisements glorify military service, billboards declare seductive messages about enlistment; video games develop shoot-to-kill skills, schools invite recruiters to assemblies, and increasing numbers of schools have Junior R.O.T.C. with students in uniform attending classes and marching in formation on the parking lots. History classes in schools rarely teach the peaceful heroes young people need to spark their imaginations for peace; Quaker children must

learn of these at home or in meeting.

The "No Child Left Behind" Education Act passed by Congress in 2001 requires high schools to share with military recruiters the names and contact information of students, as they do with colleges (unless a student or parent makes a specific advance request to withhold such information.) And then

Exploring the peace testimony is bound to stretch and empower your meeting

there is the peer pressure to go along with the perceived dominant culture. Even Quaker students at Friends schools

know it is not easy to stand up for nonviolent solutions when the mass media vehemently call for all to fall in step with military objectives.

The meeting community can support its young people in reflecting on alternatives to the dominant culture of militarism. Young people and adults can join together in conversations seeking clarity, discerning where to place faith, knowing the stories of peaceful heroes, and choosing courses of action among many alternatives. If you hold a forum on the connections between affluent life styles and complicity in militarism, you may find students more informed than many adults.

Young teens, who may be inarticulate in groups of adults, can be quite talkative when with others their age. You might want to set up a session for boys and girls of that age to meet with just one or two adult resource people. Or set up mentoring relationships where a young person is paired with an older Friend to explore ways to respond to militarism they encounter. These relationships might begin in junior high and continue through facing draft registration at 18 and beyond.

Facing the Draft

There is no authorization for a military draft now, and many doubt there will be in the foreseeable future. But we have learned that the future is far from foreseeable. Even though there is no current draft, the law requires young men to register with Selective Service within a month either way of their 18th birthday. Many states automatically register a young man for the draft when he applies for a driver's license. No provision is made on the registration form for declaring reservations about military service. Classification as a conscientious objector is currently left to the call-up stage.

The meeting can support young people as they wrestle with whether to comply with or resist the requirement to register for the draft. If a young person chooses to register, but believes he might be conscientiously opposed to participating in war, the meeting can help him to prepare for the possibility of needing to make a conscientious objector claim under the severe time pressure a call-up would involve. Young women might also wish to develop a file, as any new draft may include women as well as men.

Of course, the meeting's involvement begins with including young people, both girls and boys, in discussions of war and peace well ahead of anyone's 18th birthday. The meeting can demonstrate to its youth that it understands and sympathizes with the fact that enormous pressure falls on the young when a nation is at war.

Since a teenager is unlikely to have a fully-developed response to the three questions asked by Selective Service (nature of beliefs about combatant and/or noncombatant service, origins of these beliefs, and how one's beliefs affect one's activities), the meeting can create occasions for young people to practice expressing themselves. Young people can be invited to write of personal feelings as part of First

Day School, or at an intergenerational forum, or with a mentor. Nobody needs to read these essays unless the young person wishes to share. They can be dated and mailed in a sealed envelope to the author or held in a file at the meeting-house to be reclaimed if at a later time the author wishes to establish a claim as a conscientious objector.

The meeting's involvement begins well before anyone's 18th birthday.

As a young Friend approaches eighteen, several months or a year before his birthday, the meeting can reach out and offer help in considering registration and conscientious objection. In some meetings the first step is to send a letter to the young person raising the question of draft registration and providing sources of information on the legal requirements of Selective Service and on conscientious objection. Remember to provide referral to on-line information which is sometimes more accessible for young seekers than print material. (see resources, page 6)

Direct personal contact is always better than a letter, so it is best to follow up with a phone call and an offer to meet and talk with the young person, perhaps together with his or her parents. Testing insights and questions with a seasoned Friend can open up a the young Friend's thinking and help to clarify his questions.

If a young person is struggling over the question of whether or not to register or whether or not to take a position as a conscientious objector, the meeting may offer to create a clearness committee. Such a group of concerned Friends which meets once or several times may provide the kind of sustained attention that can help bring clarity to the concerns that are struggling to crystallize. It is important that the clearness committee address the legal and practical implications of resisting the draft such as ineligibility for federal college loans or lifetime ineligibility for government employment. Clearness implies not only spiritual clarity, but a readiness to proceed in facing the risks. If no one on the committee is up to date on the consequences of draft refusal, someone must take responsibility for inviting an experienced draft counselor and/or for studying the material in the resource section of this article.

A key to establishing a claim for conscientious objector status is building a file for documentation of beliefs and actions. A person from meeting may

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Email: friendsbul@aol.com. Website: Westernquaker.net.

contribute a letter of support vouching for the young person's sincerity. The meeting should record the receipt of a C.O. claim in its minutes so that the date is recorded for posterity. If a clearness committee is appointed, its report to monthly meeting should be included in the minutes and in the young person's file. A safe and known place for the storage of letters pertaining to C.O. claims will help if the time comes for the individual to file a formal request for classification as a conscientious objector.

Not all the youth attending meeting will be considering a conscientious objector claim. Some, having gone through a clearness process, may not be clear to take such a stand. Some high school students may be tempted by the Delayed Entry Program offered by the military or other attractive offers by recruiters. Someone from meeting with appropriate background may offer to read the fine print with the student to be sure he or she is fully informed about the meaning of the contract. Too many young people have been let down by the promises made at enlistment offices such as choice of assignment, on-the-job-training, or funds for education, and find themselves unexpectedly in combat situations or find that the benefits are not what they expected. A young person tending toward military service needs to be heard and to feel the care of the meeting. Young people who enter the military can be

supported by correspondence from meeting members. Sometimes it is in active military service that the peace testimony begins to come into focus. If a young person wishes to establish a conscientious objector claim after they have entered the military, the meeting can provide support in that difficult situation. Quaker House near Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, North Carolina, helps active military personnel make conscientious objector claims.

Vibrancy at the Junction of Our Faith and Our Practice

When a meeting engages with the peace testimony of Friends it can experience the vibrancy of touching the junction of our faith and our practice. We are enlivened by exploring how Friends have and might in the future take personal responsibility within a society engaged in the business of war. If the meeting can provide opportunities for these discussions, there will likely be rippling effects through other aspects of meeting life that enormously strengthen the fabric of our spiritual community.

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Suzanne Day is a member of Westfield (NJ) Meeting. She is part-time staff on Conscience, Militarism, and War Tax Concerns for Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

Confronting Draft Registration: One Quaker's Story

I am a pacifist, dedicated to finding a higher process of conflict resolution than killing. As a Quaker my feelings have been nurtured by growing up in Friends meeting and attending Friends school. Although my belief in the biblical God is unsure, I have an ardent belief in the Human Spirit. Now such a part of my identity, I have come to these things over the past year in something of a trial by fire, beginning with September 11th, 2001, and culminating in my internal struggle about Selective Service registration.

I was unaware that I was required to register for Selective Service until halfway through my junior year in high school. At that point, I was still working at understanding my own beliefs on the subject of the military. So I pushed the issue aside and thought about it only rarely and abstractly. When my eighteenth birthday rolled around this past September, draft registration was staring me right in the face. I had one month to decide whether to register or not.

The process of deciding was not easy. By registering, I would be making a statement that a system which lets the government tell you what you are willing to die for is acceptable when it is not. By not registering, I would be forsaking financial aid for college, any future in a federal job, and the possibility of \$250,000 in fines and 5 years in prison. Very weighty stuff for a teen to be thinking about.

In the process, I made a point of talking to many people of differing viewpoints. These ranged from my ninth grade history teacher, not a pacifist but a highly intelligent and sympathetic man; to my uncle, who was a CO during Vietnam; to the head of the Religion Department at school (Moorestown Friends). I took what I talked to these people about and mulled the decision over in my head. I decided the night before the deadline to register, but to make note on the card that I oppose war. I waited until within an hour of the deadline before filling the card out. In addition to my

personal information, I wrote in a blank space: "I am a conscientious objector, opposed to war in all of its forms," photocopied it, and sent it to myself to have proof that I wrote it. With that I had finished and made my first concrete statement.

Since the decision I have alternately regretted and been grateful for the choice I made. I have tried to make my views known, and tried to bring out other voices that may be buried in the sometimes overwhelming mountain of violence and hate. My pact with myself when I chose to register was simple: I would work to make a statement another way. I will be a conscientious objector if a draft is reinstated. By playing along with the system in one respect, I kept myself open to change the system in other ways in the future.

Matthew Van Meter
Moorestown (NJ) Meeting

Questions for Reflection

1. How does our meeting provide opportunities for safe corporate seeking on our religious perspective toward militarism and war?
2. How does our meeting teach our younger members about our historic peace testimony and encourage them to study the lives of Quakers who have given it practical expression?
3. Does our meeting provide opportunities for our young people to explore and record their views and convictions about war, draft registration and conscientious objection?
4. Who in the meeting is prepared to discuss conscientious objection knowledgeably with our young people? How can we develop the resources to answer questions about these issues?
5. How can we arrange to collect, hold confidential, and keep safe written statements for possible later use in establishing a conscientious objector claim?

Resources on War and Militarism

Selected Readings

- Choosing Peace: A Handbook on War, Peace and Your Conscience* by Robert Seeley. Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors, 1994.*#
- A Guide for Friends on Conscientious Objection to War* by Ben Richmond. Friends United Press, 1991.*#
- The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail: A Play* by Jerome Lawrence and Robert Edwin Lee. Hill & Wang, 2001
- Peace and Taxes—God and Country: A Guide for Seeking Clearness on War Tax Concerns* by Chel Avery. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1990.*#
- Peace is the Way: Writings on Nonviolence from the Fellowship of Reconciliation*, Walter Wink, ed. Orbis, 2000.*#
- The Sword That Heals* by George Lakey. Training for Change, 2001.#
- Transforming Power for Peace* by Lawrence Apsey, James Bristol, Karen Eppler. FGC 2001.*#

Videotapes

- The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It*. Independent Television Service (ITVS), Paradigm Productions, 2002#
- A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict*. Written and produced by Steve York, a production of York Zimmerman and WETA, Washington, D.C. Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 2000.#

These websites offer a wealth of additional resources:

General

- <http://www.pym.org/library/>
<http://www.quakerbooks.org>

Peace and Nonviolence

- <http://www.forusa.org/>
<http://www.warresisters.org/>

Conscientious Objection

- <http://www.afsc.org/youthmil/200112/resource.htm>
<http://www.nisbco.org/>
<http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/3899/links.html>
<http://www.objector.org/>

War Tax Resistance

- <http://www.peacetax.org/welcome.htm>
<http://www.peacetaxfund.org/>

*Available from the FGC Bookstore, 800-966-4556.

#Available from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Library, 215-241-7220. Friends outside PYM can subscribe to the library.

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