

**CANADIAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE
SECOURS QUAKER CANADIEN**

60 Lowther Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5R 1C7
Telephone: (416) 920-5213. Facsimile: (416) 920-5214
E-mail: cfsc-office@quaker.ca

January 10, 2003

Dear Friends

Quakers who wish to make a public acknowledgement of their peace witness are sometimes reluctant to join in demonstrations and protests. Participants in such events may express themselves with a hostility and violence inimical to Friends, and demonise those with whom they are in disagreement. We cannot support this way of dealing with people.

Nevertheless we have traditionally been ready to stand up and be counted on matters of conscience. This is a matter both of maintaining personal integrity, and of fulfilling our responsibilities as citizens. We believe that our peace testimony is of value not only to ourselves but to the community in which we live. Therefore we must make it known.

The **Quaker vigil** has evolved as an excellent way to accomplish this goal, and effective use has been made of it in a number of situations, especially when it is necessary to oppose the use of violence. A silent vigil challenges a wrong idea without diminishing the human dignity of those who propound it; it condemns the sin and not the sinner. While making clear our own view of things, it simultaneously practises our principle of seeking that of God in everyone, however deep the disagreement between us.

We hope that the enclosed materials may encourage Friends to consider starting peace vigils in their own localities. They are suggestions only. Vigils are a marvelous opportunity for the exercise of a Meeting's own creativity, in itself a gift of God. Friends know their own communities and know best how to address them. You may find it appropriate to join with other groups in your community with a similar concern for peace. If we can be of further help, please contact the CFSC office.

In peace

Margaret Clare Ford
Clerk, Canadian Friends Service Committee

1) Where?

Generally speaking, people have the legal right to locate a vigil in a public space, provided we do not obstruct the traffic, pedestrian or otherwise. In some places local bylaws may restrict this right in order to prevent “loitering”. Enquire about this possibility at your municipal office. Even where such restrictive bylaws exist, they are rarely enforced unless someone brings a formal charge against you, and can prove that you are an obstruction. Usually the police don’t bother. In any case, it is wise and courteous to inform the local police of your intentions, and to be open to their advice.

If you consider that unreasonable obstacles are being put in your way, discuss the matter with your mayor, ask for it to be considered by council, and publicize it in the local press. Quakers in the past have played their part in winning and maintaining the right to public dissent. At present, due partly to the tensions following the attack on the World Trade Center, that right is under threat. It is, however, vital to a democracy and to our dignity as human beings, so should be gently but firmly insisted upon.

Malls are not public spaces, and permission to hold a vigil in them must be sought from the owners. They are often unwilling to grant it to any event that might be controversial, or might distract from shopping. (An opportunity here for outreach?)

2) When?

A repeated vigil, recurring in the same place at foreseeable times, is more effective than a single occasion. For it you need a group of people willing to make a long-term commitment to turn up regularly. Not everyone needs to be there all the time, but you should arrange it so that people can take turns, and the vigil site is *never* deserted when there should be someone there. The numbers do not have to be large - even one person can maintain the vigil for a while.

Obviously, for a recurrent vigil, it is best to choose a prominent location where there are plenty of passersby, and a time when the participants are free.

A single-occasion vigil, on the other hand, is usually timed to coincide with a significant date or event. The recent Quaker vigil on Parliament Hill to mark the anniversary of September 11, was one such.

3) How?

Silent vigils are perhaps the most effective, particularly when it is a prayerful silence. They raise the problem, however, of how to answer the questions of passersby. Posters and banners can provide immediate simple information, and the next few paragraphs offer suggestions. It is useful to have also a table or rack available on which to display informative material, and perhaps one person who stands aside from the silent group, ready to engage with interested passersby, explaining the group’s purpose and offering literature. (Such a person might also intervene to defuse aggressive hostility by someone

annoyed by the vigil's presence or theme, although this is a rare occurrence.) We enclose samples of a useful **leaflet**, a **fact sheet**, and a **resource list** that people can take away with them. Such literature might also include suggestions for further action, the future times of the vigil, and information about your local meeting - a peace vigil serves a secondary function as a form of Quaker outreach.

We also enclose copies of a simple **poster** that may be used in various ways. Its message is deliberately brief, clear, and hopeful. Too many people are paralysed by despair. You might copy to the original size, print information on the back of the sheet, and use it as a hand-out. It doesn't have to be black and white, you can use different colours for the background .

The design enlarges quite well, can be stuck onto a firmer backing, stapled to a pole or slat, and held as a banner. Or several banners. Repetition is a simple but effective device for getting a message across.

Many meetings have found that making peace-banners together is a good community-builder, either within the meeting or in conjunction with other peace-minded groups. It's also a suitable project for First Day School. Banners may be elaborate or simple, but should show evidence of care in their making. You want the message clearly visible from a distance of at least a road-width, so too much finicky detail is counter-productive. But make them as beautiful as possible - beauty engages the eye and the soul!

If you use a solid fabric for them, be careful to make holes in it, or in a high wind you'll find yourselves hanging on to an airborne kite. Practical and attractive banners can be made as follows (all dimensions approximate, and variable at will):

Fold a pad of three or four layers of netting or tulle, about three feet square or large. Make a framework of solid fabric, about 18 inches wide, folded over the edges of the net to make a 9 inch border for it. Stitch firmly in place. Cut your chosen design twice out of felt or other fabric, and stick it or applique it to the net, on both sides of the banner. Any written message is best applied to the solid fabric framework rather than the netting, so that the back of the lettering doesn't show through on the other side. Hang the banner from a dowelling rod, and attach it to a carrying pole.

These banners are light to carry, and the wind disperses harmlessly through the netting.

4) **Miscellaneous**

In winter, one obstacle to remaining at a vigil is literally cold feet. Somehow the freeze seeps up from the paving and takes its soul-depressing course upwards from the sole. Four pair of socks is not too many, preferably wool; and of course, adequate layering of the body, warm boots, a warm hat and gloves or mittens. A thermos of hot chocolate or cider is helpful, especially if it's big enough to share. In summer, a shady hat is advisable.

FACT SHEET ABOUT WAR IN IRAQ

Legality

Under International law a pre-emptive strike against Iraq is illegal. Article 2 (4) of the United Nations Charter states: "All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state." The right of self-defence does not include the right to make pre-emptive strikes.

(Source: "The Challenge of Iraq", Project Ploughshares)

Consequences of 1991 Gulf War

The 1991 Gulf War resulted in between 100,000 and 200,000 Iraqi casualties (Source: "KAIROS Opposes War Against Iraq's People", KAIROS). Since the ending of the war, the UN sanctions on Iraq are thought to have killed 1.5 million Iraqis, a large proportion of them children. (Source: UNICEF).

What People Think

Recent opinion polls show that there is scant public support for war with Iraq. Within Canada recent opinion polls show that 54% do not believe that military action is justified (Source: Toronto Star, 8/09/02). In the UK, polls state that 40% believe that the UK should not go to war with Iraq (20% no opinion, 39% for). (Source: The Guardian, 11/12/02). In the US, a Los Angeles Times poll recently found that 72% of respondents believed the Bush administration had failed to make a case that war against Iraq is justified. (Los Angeles Times.)

Projected Consequences of a New War

500,000 people, most of them civilians, could be killed in a new war against Iraq. (Source: "Collateral Damage: The Health and Environmental Costs of War on Iraq". Medact, 12 November 2002). Military intervention would greatly exacerbate the humanitarian crisis in Iraq, pushing a population already suffering from poverty and sanctions over the edge. (Source: Save the Children UK.)

Prospects for Democracy

The military subjugation of Afghanistan has not brought genuine democracy or respect for human rights (particularly women's rights) to that country. Instead, warlords continue to bicker and compete for power, while promised aid goes undelivered. A similar consequence is likely in Iraq. There, war and sanctions have already contributed to the devastation of civil society, the only credible source of alternatives to the present regime. (Source: "The Challenge of Iraq", Project Ploughshares)

RESOURCE SHEET: List of Websites

Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC)

<http://www.cfsc.quaker.ca>

KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiative

<http://www.kairoscanada.org/english/programme/iraq/index.htm>

Canadian Peace Alliance

<http://www.acp-cpa.ca>

Canadian Network to End Sanctions in Iraq

<http://www.canesi.org>

Lawyers Against the War

<http://www.lawyersagainsthewar.org>

Project Ploughshares

<http://www.ploughshares.ca>

Quaker Peace and Social Witness (British Quaker Agency)

<http://www.quaker.org.uk/peace>

Northern Friends Peace Board (British Quaker agency)

<http://www.nfpb.gn.apc.org/>

Friends Committee on National Legislation (American Quaker agency)

<http://www.fcnl.org>

American Friends Service Committee (American Quaker agency)

<http://www.afsc.org>

Voices in the Wilderness

<http://www.nonviolence.org/vitw>

Christian Peacemaker Teams

<http://www.cpt.org>

Move On

<http://www.moveon.org>

we

can

choose

