

Peace Testimony of the Religious Society of Friends

Bible statements

“Thou shalt not kill.” (*Exodus 20:13, KJV*)

“As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; . . .” (*Ezekiel 33:11a, NRSV*)

“Treat others as you want them to treat you. This is what the Law and the Prophets are all about.” (*Matthew 7:12, CEV*)

“‘You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.’” (*Matthew 5:38-41 NRSV*)

“‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.’” (*John 14:27*)

“When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, ‘Lord, should we strike with the sword?’ Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, ‘No more of this!’ And he touched his ear and healed him.” (*Luke 22:49-51 NRSV*)

“. . . Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’” (*John 20:19b-21*)

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (*Romans 12:2, NRSV*)

“Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings [lust] that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it, so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it, so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. You do not ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.” (*James 4:1-3 NRSV*)

Friends' statements

George Fox's statement when offered release from prison if he would serve as an officer in Cromwell's New Model Army in 1651:

“I told them I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars, and I knew from whence all wars did rise, from the lust according to James's doctrine. . . . I told them I was come into the covenant of peace which was before wars and strifes were.” [see *James 4:1*]

Anne Gilman describes the harmony among Friends Meetings and discernment

We meet together as children of one birth and are refreshed in one banqueting and house of his loving-kindness: and here is no vain jangling, but all agree together, and can lie down in the counsel of the Lord; and as we are kept to this, there is no place for the Enemy to enter.
c. 1655

These are two Declarations by Friends to Charles II in 1660 embody the historical underpinning of the peace testimony:

“We . . . utterly deny . . . all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or any pretense 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.”

We are a people that follow after those things that make for peace, love and unity. It is our desire that others' feet may walk in the same. We do deny and bear our testimony against all strife, wars, and contentions that come from the lusts that war in the members, that war against the soul, which we wait for, and watch for in all people. We love and desire the good of all. For no other cause but love to the souls of all people have our sufferings been.

Our weapons are not carnal, but spiritual. . . Now you are come into the throne to be tried. We cannot but warn you in your day “to do justice, and to love kindness” (Micah 6:8), whereby the violence of the wicked might be stopped.

Treason, treachery, and false dealing we do utterly deny. We speak the truth in plainness and singleness of heart. All our desire is your good, peace, love and unity.

—Margaret Fell,
A declaration to Charles II in 1660

New Jersey Friend John Woolman in 1746 recognized the universality of the principle of peace when he wrote:

“There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath had different names. It is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion nor excluded from any, where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation whatsoever, they become brethren.”

Woolman also recognized and warned Friends about some of the causes, or “seeds” of war. The following is from his pamphlet, “A Plea for the Poor”:

May we look upon our treasures, the furniture of our houses, and the garments in which we array ourselves, and try [test] whether the seeds of war have any nourishment in these our possessions or not. Holding treasures in the self-pleasing spirit is a strong plant, the fruit whereof ripens fast. A day of outward distress is coming and divine love calls to prepare against it.”

Elise Boulding a sociologist, pacifist feminist and Quaker wrote and taught conflict resolution in both personal and global relations. She began the first academic programs known as peace studies. Much of her work was informed by raising her 5 children.

“Where is the love going to come from
To transform human violence into peaceful societies,
If not from a more developed human spirituality?

While there is a great deal written on providing love and security for children so they won’t grow into hostile adults, there is nothing very much on how you raise children to be sufficiently alienated from society so they won’t accept things “as they are,” and sufficiently identified with it so that they will contribute in creative ways to the building of a better social order... we still don’t know much about producing children who will irrepressibly dream about a better society than the one we have, and obstinately work for its realization.” E Boulding, 1961

Rom 15:13 May the god of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

“Are there any grounds for hope? George Fox, struggling with his own despair, spoke of coming into the “covenant of peace, which was before wars and strifes were.” That which was before wars and strifes—that was the love, which begot creation. We must never forget that “love was the first motion.” Every human being that comes into the world is capable of that love, but how to give expression to that love has to be learned...The grounds for hope lie in recovering our understanding of the human capacity for love, coupled with the realization we cannot take it for granted. That capacity needs to be nurtured.” 2000

...a peace culture is a culture that promotes peaceable diversity. Such a culture includes lifeways, patterns of belief, values, behavior, and accompanying institutional arrangements that promote mutual caring and well-being as well as an equality that includes appreciation of difference, stewardship, and equitable sharing of the earth’s resources among its members and with all living beings.
It offers mutual security for humankind in all its diversity ...There is no need for violence.
Peaceableness is an action concept, involving a constant shaping and reshaping of understandings, situations, and behaviors in a constantly changing lifeworld, to sustain well-being for all.”