

Proposal for a Baltimore Yearly Meeting

Working Group on U.S. Militarism and War

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The Peace Testimony of Friends:

"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."

Declaration of Friends to Charles II, 1660

Historically, the Peace Testimony has taken many forms, including tax withholding, refusal to engage in military service, and requests of Congress to reallocate funds from military to peaceful purposes. Given the crises now confronting our nation (e.g., COVID-19, racism, climate change, and economic inequality) and the painful reminder of the damage caused by military campaigns abroad (e.g., in Afghanistan), we as Friends are called upon to renew and expand our Peace Testimony in a way that speaks to and confronts today's urgent challenges.

We therefore have requested that a *Working Group on U.S. Militarism and War* be formed within BYM, under the care of the Peace and Social Concerns Committee. The topic is huge, and it affects all Americans (e.g., through taxes and military service), as well as millions of people around the world, through multiple wars, threats of war, displacement of peoples, death from "kinetic" forms of violence and from war under other names (e.g., sanctions), environmental degradation due to military activities, and much more, including the risk of nuclear annihilation. Within BYM, several Meetings are coordinating with other faith and civic groups to help resettle Afghan refugees. The wide interest in the plight of the Afghan refugees presents one opportunity to call attention to the root causes of war and population displacement.

We believe that a Working Group can help BYM Meetings work more collaboratively on important issues of peace. We anticipate that better coordination will increase the likelihood of success for our activities.

Given the multiple crises overlapping in today's world, many of our Monthly Meeting peace committees may be somewhat fragmented, with people's passions dispersed among different issues. Thus, bringing together through a Working Group those people from Monthly Meetings who are led to work on world

peace and U.S. militarism and war could enhance the Quaker Peace Testimony in action in the BYM area.

The BYM Peace and Social Concerns Committee endorsed this proposal, and the decision was that the first step would be to have a Zoom meeting with all interested people from the Monthly Meetings. This Zoom meeting will help us determine the initial direction of the Working Group. We will schedule that Zoom meeting following Interim Meeting's formal approval of the Working Group.

Our proposal—to be further elaborated on the BYM-wide Zoom call—would be that the goals of the Working Group include study, action, and advocacy (for example, for policy initiatives), and collaborative work through coalitions with other faith, community and peace groups. The specific initial focus will be developed subsequently within the Working Group. For example, the focus might be on one of these topics: military spending, nuclear weapons, environmental issues related to militarism, peace education, high school military recruitment, conscientious objection to the draft, and war profiteering. To be most effective, we urge that any projects of the Working Group be decided upon with regard to the capacity and interests of its members.

One possible path is to relate the national and international, seemingly distant, dimensions of US militarism to local issues, and emphasize that the national budget is a moral document that should reflect the values of the people. There is ample evidence that war comes home: for example, we see that in the increased militarization of the police and in the way violence is destroying democratic civil discourse in this country. While we devote outlandish and forever increasing amounts of money to war and weapons, we never have enough resources to improve our infrastructure, adequately address climate change, or fund the educational and health care needs of our people. Can we move away from imperialism towards shared security? Can we connect the issues to our lives and make war and militarism local and specific?

Our discourse is important, but to paraphrase Parker Palmer, we must also let our lives speak and tell what truths we embody and what values we represent.

Allen Hester, FCNL's lead lobbyist for nuclear disarmament and Pentagon spending.