

## **"Reflections of a Struggling Pacifist: Peace is the Way, but How Do I Get There?"**

**Donna Hicks**

I want to thank the organizers of this event for inviting me to speak this evening. In setting down my thoughts on how I've been struggling as a pacifist, I have learned that I'm probably acting out of my beliefs in a more faithful way than I thought I was. Since before I retired from the Department of Social Services 4 years ago, I have been in discernment on how best to walk this Way of Peace. I've learned to say 'NO', to choose carefully where I put my energies. I let myself suffer again and again the tensions between inner action and outward action, between the choices I make in my lifestyle and what I see the lifestyle of the Way of Peace being. Kirkridge Retreat Center expresses a piece of this tension in its motto 'picket and pray', and points the way to a both/and choice and not the either/or in which I too frequently cast my choices.

I come to my pacifism through the Episcopal Peace Fellowship, the commitment for which read in 1939 "In loyalty to the Person, Spirit and teachings of Jesus Christ, my conscience commits me to His way of redemptive love and compels me to refuse to participate in or give moral support to any war." Around 1965, the commitment was expanded to include those who could not completely renounce war. By 1982, this is what the commitment read- and is what I read when I joined in 1985- "In loyalty to the person, teaching and Lordship of Jesus Christ, my conscience commits me to His way of redemptive love: to pray, study, and work for peace, and to renounce, so far as possible, participation in war, militarism, and all other forms of violence. In fellowship with others of like mind, I will work to discover and practice alternatives to violence in the resolution of conflicts. As a member of the Holy Catholic Church, I urge the Episcopal Church in accordance with our baptismal vows, 'to renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God' and to wage peace across all boundaries, calling upon people everywhere to repent, to forgive, and to love."

I was asked recently how as an Episcopalian I had come to consider doing violence reduction work and nonviolent direct action, the Episcopal Church not having a widely known reputation for doing that kind of work. After all, it's not one of the traditional peace churches like the Mennonites or the Church of the Brethren or the Quakers. And as a Quaker once said to a group of EPF'ers in his training group for a nonviolent direct action, "It was your ancestors who persecuted my ancestors." I came to nonviolent direct action out of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., when I ended up on the quad at Duke as part of the Vigil. I was going to church then but I ended up on the quad out of a sense of social justice and not directly out of my faith. I am a cradle Episcopalian. The Episcopal Pacifist Fellowship, now the Episcopal Peace Fellowship, was founded on 11 November 1939. I had never heard of it, at least not that I remembered, until 1985. And when I did and learned there was a chapter right here in Durham, I joined. And in these early years, I took the easy way and prayed and studied for peace. We read books and we crafted an action out of our learnings and discussions at each monthly gathering.

I used to see pacifism as it directly relates to war and to military service. It's easy to state opposition to war and to militarism. It's easy to make statements but more difficult to act. That's why I call myself a struggling pacifist.

In looking at the EPF commitment as it has evolved over the years, I see several things, one, the expansion beyond a refusal to participate in or give moral support to war to renunciation of all forms of violence; second, an invitation to people who could not renounce absolutely participation in war, militarism, and other forms of violence, to join, and to renounce as far as possible; third, a call to act and work to find alternatives to violence; fourth, a call to witness this to the Episcopal Church and to call it to act on our baptismal vows. For me, this is a shift to a more expansive way of living in the world than just an opposition to war and refusal to participate. And herein lies my struggle and my self-identification as a 'struggling pacifist'. How do I act on and witness to this commitment?

Since September 11th I have felt in turns numb, powerless, impotent, angry, disbelieving, overwhelmed, speechless, turned inward, paralyzed. I have slept more and turned to my comfort foods, and found solace in working in my new garden. I have been so overloaded with emails on Israel and Palestine and now the war in Afghanistan that my will to respond and act has been frozen.

The Christian Peacemaker Team in Hebron reissued their Statement of Conviction in August. One sentence has haunted me ever since: "We believe that until people committed to nonviolence are willing to take the same risks for peace that soldiers are willing to take for war, people will always choose violence as the most viable solution to their problems." What does this mean in light of September 11th? How am I as a (Christian) pacifist called to respond?

There's a part of me that says we are way past the time for vigils and marches and prayer services in our communities. What good does it do to email our members of Congress when they might delete before reading or don't have the capacity to respond electronically? Why write them if they're worried about anthrax contamination? Do op-eds and letters to the editor really do any good? When we organize a teach-in, why do I feel as if it's 'preaching to the choir'? A friend asked me what the planners of this event saw as actions coming out of it. Do we act as a group coming out of this evening, or is it enough that there was this opportunity to come together for talking and listening and witnessing and learning? Do we find common ground on which to stand and actions to take together? Is it possible to come together and lay aside concerns about who gets the funding for programs or activities done by THEIR group, who gets the recognition or the 'credit'?

What does my lifestyle say about my commitment as a pacifist? On what do I spend my money? What does it say about my commitment that I am unwilling to go the full route to war tax resistance? Whose peacemaking and justice work do I support? Is it linked to institutions coopted by our government or to those on the cutting edge such as CPT? Do I clean up my act so to speak in my local community before I go off out of the country again looking at some international issue? Am I willing to be arrested and spend time in jail, to risk being beaten up, to go on hunger strike or to fast for a period of time? To what sort of discipline am I willing to submit? Whose behavior and actions do I model? A person who espouses voluntary poverty? A person who lives off the electric grid or one who saves every bit of gray water to flush the toilet or water the plants? Is there A right way in which to model? Will whatever I do 'make a difference'? Why do I have to SEE that it makes a difference?

September 11th heightened the tension for me between living a spiritually safe life and stepping out to take the same risks for peace as soldiers take for war. It is clear to me that living and witnessing as a peacemaker/ pacifist is modelling a way of life and a discipline. I suspect I have the tools for doing so, and that I am doing something each day that models pacifist ways or states pacifist principles. How do I move out into the world and act on this discipline, join with others to take the message that there is no way to peace: peace is the way, to a world acting out of violence and fear and anger, vengeance and retribution?

Patrick [O'Neill] asked what might the destruction of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, icons of aspects of American life, mean to future generations in light of how we see the destruction of buildings in past wars. Coventry Cathedral comes to mind. Coventry was firebombed on 14 November 1940. The medieval cathedral was destroyed. The ruins were cleared and became an outdoor sanctuary. A new cathedral was built at right angles to the old and was consecrated in May 1962. Out of the ashes of the old came an international ministry of reconciliation beginning with Germany at the end of the war and expanding today throughout the world - Israel and Palestine, Nigeria, India, Iraq among the sites. Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh and Chapel of the Cross and St. Paul AME in Chapel Hill are both Cross of Nails centers. Here is a sign of hope to which I cling in these troubled times.