

## Choose a theme:

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WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF WAR

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WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF WAR

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TERRORISM

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PROCESS EXPLORATION - CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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OTHER ISSUES

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## Preparing for Peace Initiative - Background to the concern

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Date: 2nd August 2005

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*(This marked a milestone in the life of the project, or concern as it is expressed in Quaker terms; a milestone because it was the occasion of the launch of the book within the Society, and because it was the first opportunity to make a full report of the project at a national gathering. The planning group was asked to frame the presentation in terms of its spiritual witness to our peace testimony.)*

**F**riends, Westmorland General Meeting have been longing to have the opportunity to tell you about our concern, Preparing for Peace. We thank Agenda Committee for offering us this opportunity to tell you about our work.

Westmorland General Meeting is in the heart of 1652 country. When George Fox stood on Pendle Hill looking out over Morecambe Bay (though he called it the Lancaster Sea) he had a vision of 'a great people to be gathered.' The scene he saw in 1652 would have been busy but rural although there was a hint of its future role as he might have seen workshops making cannons, pistols and gunpowder . Today it is still farming land but also much more. We see shipyards where nuclear submarines are built and maintained and factories making fighter planes - in fact one might hurtle past in the valley below us with locally made night sights on board for pinpoint bombing accuracy. Up the road are our neighbours, Sellafield and the Thorpe Reprocessing plant - likely terrorist targets. Now 1652 country is where large scale armaments are manufactured.

In 2000 that is before 9/11, the war on terrorism, Afghanistan and of course Iraq, Sir Joseph Rotblat, the Nobel Peace Prize winner came to the historic meeting house of Rookhow, and spoke to a packed room on 'The Prevention of War in the Nuclear Age'. His message was clear - since we entered the nuclear age we have acquired the means to destroy humankind and is up to us to prevent this It was frightening and

challenging but also inspiring and illuminating. Remember your humanity he urged us.

This was my first meeting as General Meeting clerk and afterwards I was contacted by many Friends who asked if our General Meeting could build on and carry forward his message. But how? We are not nuclear physicists but as Quakers care deeply about peace and we have our peace testimony against all wars and strife. Finally I after consulting Robert Straughton, the retiring clerk, I decided to ask Brian Walker, former DG of Oxfam who in turn suggested Joseph Hill, a retired surgeon with links to World Health Organisation, to a brain-storming session. What could GM do that was not already being done by others? We met in a prayerful way trusting in the guidance of the Spirit.

The ideas flowed but one idea kept resurfacing; is war the way to settle conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Is it really effective or does it cause more problems and misery than it solves? Could war be declared redundant and another way of solving problems be found? Like a burr that sticks to one's coat this idea would not go away. We agreed to focus on it and see if we could bring a proposal to the next GM.

The way forward became surprisingly clear. The Planning Group recommended to GM that we could sponsor a series of lectures by experts in their field, not necessarily Quakers (as we know Quakers are very good at talking to each other) We needed a different perspective. We would devise a series of questions each one leading to the next and this might lead us to new insights which we could take to international decision makers. At the next General Meeting we outlined our proposal, it was thoughtfully considered and finally the assistant clerk (I stood down from the table for this item) minuted that our proposal had 'the whole-hearted support of the meeting'. Preparing for Peace was launched.

We quickly were convinced that we were acting under concern and, as this was a corporate not an individual project, asked all our constituent meetings, every single one, to test it out as we were anxious that it would be rooted and approved by all Friends on the Preparative Meeting benches under the insightful guidance of the spirit. I had never been involved in testing a

concern and, as Clerk, I needed help. I was very fortunate that Geoffrey Bowes, retired Recording Clerk had moved into our area and he became my mentor. His death was a personal loss for me.

This was a very busy time. The Planning Group responded to any meeting or individual who wanted to discuss the project with us. Many did. The greatest anxieties were firstly that this intention to show war does not work and is redundant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century was too ambitious and secondly that we were duplicating peace work already being done. We looked at all comments but these two particularly carefully. .

When we looked at others' peace work we could not find any similar projects to Preparing for Peace. I contacted Linda Craig (now Fielding) (Quaker Peace and Social Witness) who was very encouraging but made it clear that it would be our endeavour as QPSW had decided not take on any extra work at that time. Likewise some Friends reminded us that Northern Friends Peace Board is the channel for peace work in the North of England. Again when we looked at their valuable work it was different from ours, we would be partners rather than rivals; there would and should be room for us both.

I think it would be fair to say that we felt impelled to try even if we failed and reminded ourselves constantly that ideas have legs - who knows whose lives would be touched by our efforts.

Eventually every Preparative Meeting and Monthly Meeting sent in a minute supporting this concern. It had been tested and approved.

Alongside this was our need to raise funds - in 2000 we had £37 in the bank! A letter to The Friend produced not only much needed resources but also many messages of encouragement. In the end over 100 meetings supported us as well as individuals. We could not have reached this point without your help and it is good to have the opportunity today to say thank you. We also applied to trusts and, after a rigorous examination, the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust gave us a grant. We were also generously supported by the Southern Trust and small family trusts. We were on our way!

The Planning Group over the years has changed slightly. Brian Walker and I are founder members and Robert Straughton has been replaced by Eleanor Straughton, his daughter, an academic researcher. Joseph Hill having served 3 years had other calls on his time. I found the sheer work overwhelming (incidentally Foot & Mouth was ravaging Cumbria at the same time) and the Meeting appointed Daphne Sanders as co-clerk and this has been a great help and support. We will be sharing the presentation of this report to you today. But alongside us are many Friends. This concern belongs to all in Westmorland General Meeting and Friends on the bench have been an integral part. They have encouraged, supported the lectures, helped set up the website, written reports, taken photos, raised money, been welcoming doorkeepers, helped with mailing and much more. We are needing even more help now our book is published.

So the spirit has led us to where we are today. We have had difficult times and times of great joy. One of our biggest challenges was to look at our peace testimony, has the 21<sup>st</sup> century influenced our interpretation of it in the light of the hugely different circumstances of the new century? Each member of the group was confronted with the need to establish their own personal position.

In our briefing for today we were asked to tell you what we have personally learnt. For me it was that trusting in God has always produced solutions to apparently insoluble problems. Patient waiting reveals ways forward often from totally unexpected sources and we are given the strength to work through difficult times. God never asks more of us than we can give.

We were asked to spend some time filling you in on the background of this concern. It is unusual for a GM to take up a concern especially one which could challenge accepted custom. We have worked for 5 years and are launching our book at this Yearly Meeting. Already our website is being visited by people from all over the world. The texts are being used for academic research. We will soon publish a teachers aid for older school students called 'The Anatomy of War' and we hope this will be

taken up particularly by Quaker schools. Our current project is to have a section encouraging a multi-faith response to peace building. What unites us rather than divides us? Already we have a Jain, Quaker, Muslim, and Hindu contributions and the Dalai Lama and a leading catholic theologian will be adding to it shortly. Please visit our website for details of the work which is expanding.

I will now hand over to Brian Walker who will tell you about how we planned the project [[" \*Preparing for Peace Initiative - The process of the enquiry and its results\*"](#)], the questions we set our experts and how we followed our vision through our many contributors. Finally Daphne Sanders will take up the themes in our book [[" \*Preparing for peace Initiative - Eliciting coherence and promoting the message\*"](#)] and how we hope decision makers will find new ways of thinking using the insights we have found as the result of listening to so many and varied people.

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