



Quaker Peace
& Social Witness

Advice for Friends in times of war – guidance from Quaker Peace & Social Witness

This was produced by Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) staff with experience of supporting British Friends through war situations. It seeks to bring together some of the learning from previous wars and is an attempt to help Friends to cope with a challenging context for a peace church.

As individuals

Many Quakers are particularly sensitised to the folly of war and are immediately roused to action when violence begins. Take care not to dwell overlong on distressing images and news reports of atrocities. You may find it helpful to remind yourselves that we are called to live out our faith through our understanding of the Light as revealed to us, and take courage. You are encouraged to take your concerns, your ideas for action, and your distress, to your faith community – your Quaker meeting.



Your Quaker meeting

The first place at which to raise your concern about war being conducted by UK forces on your behalf is your local Quaker meeting. You may wish to request a meeting for worship from which may emerge some leadings as to what the meeting may wish to say and do. It may be that Friends need help with thinking about the issue which has caused the war in the first place, and you all may need to do some personal research and return with your findings. You may wish to refer to religious text for guidance. Please be sensitive to those Friends in your meeting who may have different ideas from you about ways forward. Be aware that some Friends will wish to sit with grief and sadness about war in worship and uphold all those affected, but may not wish to do more than be part of the meeting. War raises passions which need guidance and direction from grounded Quaker practice. If you speak out against war in a context where your community is accepting of war as necessary, you may face some hostility. You may need the support of your local meeting in facing this challenge.

There will be a number of Friends in your meeting who are part of our faith community, Quakers in Britain, because it supports and upholds them through their difficult work or personal life. We all have times in our lives when we are called to public outward action and times when we are not. Remember, there is room for everyone, with all their sorrows and joys, in a Quaker meeting.

Resources in your Quaker meeting

The primary resources in your Quaker meeting are Friends themselves. Through gentle listening and discernment remarkable strengths can be discovered. New ways to challenge what is going on around can be discussed. Collective plans can be made.

Our religious understanding is that war is failure. Modern warfare is failure on a colossal scale. It is failure in the following ways: failure to love our neighbours as ourselves; failure to love our enemies and to do good to those who hate us; failure to seek peace and pursue it; failure to leave no stone unturned in the search for a peaceful solution; failure even to imagine the limitless possibilities of peace that are before us; failure of governments to protect us through dialogue and diplomacy; failure of parliaments to uphold the basic principles of international law and ethical norms which call for utmost restraint in the spilling of blood; failure of military strategies and policies of 'deterrence' which are supposedly offered to us as a means to prevent such wars.

As a faith community with these crucial understandings we need to equip ourselves carefully to face those who disagree with us.

- Does your Quaker meeting have a library well stocked with publications which describe the experiences of Friends in previous wars?
- Does your Quaker meeting have [peace education materials](#) for use in local schools – if Friends feel that that is their calling?
- Does your Quaker meeting have a set of peace posters or blank posters (such as those available from [QPSW](#)) for use in vigils and local protests? Are those posters placed in a public place outside the meeting house?
- Do members of your meeting have experience of running silent vigils as public protest against war?
- Are members of your meeting related to personnel serving in the armed forces who are directly affected by hostilities – how can the meeting uphold them?
- Do you have former conscientious objectors in membership of your meeting and are they willing to speak about their views outside the meeting?
- Are there members of your meeting who would be willing to serve as a support group for those individuals called to take more public action?
- Do you have members who have lived in or visited the region now affected by military action? Can they talk about their experience of the people who live there?

Working with your children and young people in times of war

It is very important to be able to have an honest discussion about war with your children and young people in meeting. They will have seen the images of war at school and through social media in addition to television and newspapers. Consider carefully what processes you wish to use with your children to explore the issue. Use stories from Quaker history which describe how Friends dealt with war and violence in their midst. Check with Children and Young People's Staff Team for direct advice via www.quaker.org.uk/cyp.



If you have members of the local Quaker meeting or area Quaker meeting who have taken a public stance in opposition to previous wars, or have directly-related stories to tell about why they did what they did, invite them to tell their stories to your young people. Always allow time for questions and answers.

It is important to acknowledge that family members will have been involved with war in the past, and that we value them but that Quakers are working towards a world without war. You could use the World War I [white feather diaries](#) and the resource packs [Conscience](#) and [Conviction](#) to help to explore the moral dilemmas faced by our predecessors.

See www.quaker.org.uk/news/white-feather-diaries and www.quaker.org.uk/conscience-and-conviction

Useful editions of *Journeys in the Spirit* for children's meeting:

[2.8: Peace](#)

[7.64: The story of David and Goliath](#)

[3.19: Stopping Hatred](#)

[9.71: What about violence?](#)

[5.50: Dealing with Conflict](#)

See www.quaker.org.uk/journeys/archive-children

Statements made nationally by Quakers in Britain

Pieces of text which have been agreed through national committee structures in the Yearly Meeting may be of use to your local meeting. They have been carefully drafted to relate to the current context but also to draw on Quaker history. Statements and public letters ideally also identify a potential positive way forward other than war. It may be that Friends need help with thinking about the issue which has caused the war in the first place and forms of words can help to start discussion groups. The text might help Friends to draw up their own statement. Keep an eye on the [Quakers in Britain website](#) for such information.

Read the recent open letter to David Cameron online at <http://bit.ly/1vGSRmA>

How to make your views known outside the Quaker meeting

Text made public at a national level can be used by local meetings in their local press and radio. Friends may feel called to write a letter to local newspapers to encourage wider thinking about the moral issues raised by war.

Friends may feel confident enough to offer to speak to local TV or radio about their views. Mostly, local press prefer to cover a local event, so if you are offering a vigil or a protest, have a Friend ready to speak on behalf of the meeting about what they are doing and why they are doing it.

For help with media work, see [Speaking out as Quakers: advice for meetings](#), or contact [Britain Yearly Meeting's press officer](#) Anne van Staveren: email annev@quaker.org.uk or telephone 020 7663 1048.

Opportunities for action

Other churches and faiths in your community will also be addressing the issues of going to war. You can ask for the subject to be placed on the agenda of your local Churches

Together meeting. You can set up a public meeting on the subject of war with invited speakers and deliberately invite members of local churches and faiths to it. You can have a multifaith vigil against war in a public place. You can book coaches to provide opportunities for the community to attend a national demonstration against the war. Try to link up with other Quakers for a pre-demonstration meeting for worship and walk in a Quaker group on the demonstration.

Are there local non-faith-based peace groups that Friends can work with? Could Friends offer them a space to plan their work in relation to the war? Could Friends offer assistance to those groups with facilitation and planning?

There are a large number of national campaigns which will have their own activities, guidance and action which the meeting can join and or work with.

Some organisations working for peace

- War Resisters International wri-irg.org
- Veterans for Peace veteransforpeace.org.uk
- Religions for peace www.religionsforpeace.org
- Network of Christian Peace Organisations (NCPO) ncpo.org.uk
- Conscience: Taxes for Peace not war www.conscienceonline.org.uk
- Pax Christi paxchristi.org.uk
- Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) www.caat.org.uk
- Stop The War Coalition www.stopwar.org.uk
- Forces Watch www.forceswatch.net
- Peace Pledge Union www.ppu.org.uk
- Fellowship of Reconciliation www.FoR.org.uk

Points to remember

- The experience of Quaker peace work through the centuries is that there are allies everywhere. In the most unexpected places there is room for positive dialogue and progress towards the peace we long for.
- Grounded Quaker practice reminds us that we can find strengths in ourselves when we are faced with a big challenge – war is such a challenge.
- Collective Quaker action outwardly from the meeting on a peace or justice subject can strengthen the meeting internally.
- You may not see the results you want within a short time frame. Don't lose heart. As Friends we are tasked with engaging with the world as it is, with all its failings. Quakers are in this for the long haul.
- "Peace is a process to engage in, not a goal to be reached" *Quaker faith & practice* 24.57.

Marigold Bentley, October 2014

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