

Remembrance

Should Friends take part?

As Remembrance Day approaches, you or your local meeting may find yourselves having to consider whether or not to attend parades or participate in wreath-laying or church services.

Our natural inclination is to stay away from events that seem to glorify our military past. But individual Friends who serve as town or parish councillors may well be expected to attend remembrance events. And local meetings may be invited to send representatives to take part in a Remembrance Sunday service or even to lay a wreath at a war memorial. How can we best uphold our peace testimony on such occasions? Could such events provide opportunities for outreach?

The purpose of this leaflet is to:

- help Friends decide whether or not to participate in remembrance events
- suggest ways in which Friends participating in remembrance events might also witness to peace
- direct Friends to useful resources.



Deciding whether or not to participate in remembrance events

Find out about the nature of the event in which you or your local meeting are asked to participate.

Does the event glorify warfare?

Or is the act of remembrance likely to motivate people to work to prevent war?

Remembrance events differ considerably from place to place. Some parades may indeed glorify militarism, and Friends would not wish to be associated with them. On the other hand, some church services and acts of remembrance carry a strong message that wars should no longer be allowed to happen. In recent years the Movement for the Abolition of War has been working closely with the Royal British Legion on remembrance. At least one vicar has been able to preach a pacifist sermon. A local meeting's representative in the local Churches Together should be able to ascertain the extent to which the vicar is in sympathy with peace church ethics.

When the nature of the event is known, the way forward should become clear.

Ideally, we would like Quakers to be seen as an integral part of our local communities. We are keen to take part in important events in the life of the community, especially when this brings people of different faiths together. At the same time, we would wish to be true to our peace testimony. Unless a particular event is irredeemably militaristic, it should be possible to take part in a way that enables us to uphold our peace testimony.

How can we witness to peace when taking part in remembrance?

Wear a white poppy as well as a red one.

The red poppy signifies remembrance of those who have died in past wars. The white poppy carries the message that wars

should no longer be allowed to happen. It is not advisable to wear only a white poppy, because this is likely to cause unnecessary offence.

Read an appropriate prayer if you are given the opportunity to do so.

Spontaneous prayer would be in keeping with our unprogrammed tradition of worship, but it is unlikely that there would be space for this. The next best thing would be to write your own prayer for the occasion. Failing that, you could choose a suitable prayer from one of the resources listed below.

Some events are interfaith rather than just Christian. Friends will wish to be sensitive to this.

Talk to your friends and people in other Churches about what you are doing.

This is probably the most effective form of witness.

Sell white poppies beforehand.

Write a letter to the local press explaining what you are doing and why.

If you write to the local press, your witness will be 'visible' to many more people. You will be able to make your message clear to those who may not understand the significance of a white poppy, for example.

Some useful resources

Remembrance for today: Remembering war, making peace. Ed. Christine Titmus. Published by Movement for the Abolition of War. Free download at www.abolishwar.net/for-download. An updated booklet, *We will remember them*, and a booklet of quotations, *From war to peace*, are available to order at www.abolishwar.net/shop or by calling 020 3397 3019.

Prayers for peacemakers: a handbook of worship resources. Ed. Valerie Flessati. Published in 1988 by Kevin Mayhew Ltd, Rattlesden, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP30 0SZ.

Called to be peacemakers. A pack for Christian peacemakers published by the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Peace House, 19 Paradise Street, Oxford OX1 1LD; tel. 01865 250781; email office@for.org.uk; www.for.org.uk

White poppies are available from the Peace Pledge Union, PeaceWorks, 1 Peace Passage, London N7 0BT; tel. 020 7424 9444; email mail@ppu.org.uk; www.ppu.org.uk

A suggested prayer

Let us remember before God the men and women of all nations who have died as a result of war – those whom we have known and whose memory we treasure; those we never knew, and those who died unknown. We will remember all who have lived in hope, but died in vain – the tortured, the innocent, the starving and the exiled, the imprisoned, the oppressed and the disappeared.

Living God, by whose love we are united with one another across the boundaries of time and space, bring us to a new remembrance of your love and life, reflected in earth and sky, and every person who ever lived. Teach us to be reconciled to one another and to you. Amen.

Adapted from a prayer by John Ansell

This leaflet was produced by the Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations (QCCIR).

QCCIR offers advice and support to Quakers and meetings wishing to broaden and deepen their encounters with other Churches and faiths. For more information, go to www.quaker.org.uk/qccir.

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