

## HISTORIC PEACE CHURCHES MEET IN FLORIDA

About 60 participants from the three Historic Peace Churches in Florida (Mennonite, Friends/Quakers, Church of the Brethren), including 15 peace-people from other groups, gathered on January 29th at the Ashton Christian Fellowship (Mennonite) in Sarasota, enjoying their gracious and efficient hospitality. This was a 2<sup>nd</sup> such meeting in 13 months. Bob Gross from On Earth Peace facilitated the first "Consultation" in January, 2010, guiding the group in prioritizing 6 areas of concern and mission.

By this year 6 Subgroup Chairs had been selected by the Coordinating Committee, allowing attendees to choose which of these areas of service to join as active participants (listed here in order of their priority; with the names of the Subgroup leaders on that day):

- 1) Witnessing to Lawmakers (Karen Putney - Friends)
- 2) Peace Education in Schools (Kathy Hersh - Friends)
- 3) Kids As Peacemakers (Susan Smith - COB)
- 4) Praying For Peace (Steve Horrell - COB)
- 5) Building Relationships with Muslims (Glenn Hasbrouck - Methodist)
- 6) Community Outreach for Peace (Tom Geuelcher - E-PEC)

Each Subgroup Chair gave a short presentation describing their particular area of concern and mission. By mid-afternoon folks had opportunity to attend the Subgroup of their choice for further planning, followed by each group highlighting for everyone some of the key projects their Subgroup will be attempting in the months ahead. An email network has been developed to keep attendees informed of progress and encourage their involvement.

The day began with a Keynote Presentation, entitled "From Conflict to Community," by Dr. Cecilia Yocum (Quaker), a licensed psychologist from Tampa. She shared from her 28 years of experiences working in Rwanda, Burundi, and Colombia with Friends Peace Teams, as well as facilitating the Alternatives to Violence Project in prisons in Florida. She involved several from the audience in demonstrating applications of each topic. Four literature tables, filled with materials from several peace groups, added to the day's value. Included was information about miniature desk-top Peace Poles (8 inches high, including a square base for greater stability), which are available from the Church of the Brethren AFPT (Action For Peace Team) in Florida - for a \$10 donation. Contact for information.

Peace-related songs sung throughout the day were: This Is My Song, It Came Upon A Midnight Clear, Let There Be Peace On Earth, Dona Nobis Pacem, and Go Now In Peace.

Phil Lersch, Facilitator,  
Coordinating Committee of the  
Historic Peace Churches in Florida

## **IMYM Minute on Recent Immigration Legislation and Comprehensive Immigration Reform**

As a faith community committed to welcoming the stranger, we are dismayed and saddened by the failure to find a way forward to craft an immigration system that respects the fundamental rights and dignity of all. We recognize that inaction at the national level has created a vacuum into which states have stepped to create their own immigration laws.

As Friends, we believe that there is that of God in everyone, regardless of citizenship or legal status. Our testimony of community challenges us to live with all of our neighbors in a way that encourages trust, love, and security. Our testimony of equality leads us to value each person as an individual and to respect the human rights and dignity of all persons. Our testimony of peace guides us to take nonviolent action to resolve conflicts in a way that brings us together and promotes justice.

Arizona Senate Bill 1070 and similar proposed legislation in other states divides our communities and criminalizes immigrants. These kinds of unjust laws create a climate of fear for those whose area of residence, line of work, complexion, spoken language or accent is deemed suspicious, even if they are citizens or legal foreign residents or visitors. When state legislation is passed that compels people to hide their identity from authorities, they must live in fear that they will be separated from their families, that they will become victims of crime, that they and their children will not receive an education, and that they will lose their livelihoods and their homes.

We bear witness to our friends and neighbors in our community who suffer division of their families, exploitation in the workplace, and the daily fear of deportation. We bear witness to the thousands of deaths on the border and the destruction of border communities and the environment. The estimated twelve million persons living and working in the United States without papers are essential parts of our communities and economy, yet the system for regularizing their status is woefully insufficient. Criminalizing immigrants and those who care for them, as in Arizona Senate Bill 1070, does not address the real challenges our country faces with immigration reform and resolution of the humanitarian crisis that results from the broken system.

We, as people of faith, are called not only to resist unjust laws and to work to change them, but to take the initiative to act in accordance with higher laws. We call upon Friends everywhere to urge our elected representatives to immediate action on humane immigration reform. We call upon ourselves to act with integrity in response to these challenges and we rededicate ourselves to loving our neighbors, to doing justice, and to walking humbly in the spirit of love.

## WE PRAY FOR YOU

From the casualties of the War on the Addicted, the War on the Poor, The War on the Uneducated, and the War on the Mentally Ill, thank you for remembering us. We are the Children Left Behind and swept away into America's darkest places. We continue to hold in the Light. Thank you for hearing us.

We who may have once preyed upon you now pray for you. We pray that you will not some day suffer judgement as we have been judged. We pray that you can find forbearance for us in your heart and that some day you might find forgiveness in the heart of our common Maker. We pray that your tolerance of our shortcomings brings you the reward of acceptance in the eyes of the Lord. We pray that the cheek you turned is comforted by the hand of God.

A hundred years from today our great-grandchildren will read in history books of the Great Incarceration the same as we have read about the Great Depression or the Great Dust Bowl Migration. They will wonder that such a thing ever happened. Over three million women, children and men are in jail or prison in this, the Land of the Free. One in every one hundred of our relatives, friends, and neighbors is in a cage topped with razor wire. If she or he tries to leave one hour before the expiration of the sentence imposed that person will be shot dead. We pray for the soul of the person who, when she or he passed the Civil Service exam was granted license to commit this terrible act. Or worse, slowly poison, strangle, or electricute in the death chamber, a prisoner who may or may not be guilty of anything more

than bad legal representation. One in one hundred. If your child attends a school of 1200 children a dozen children hide the shame of convict parents. The children of these convict parents stand such a high probability of going to prison themselves that one can safely consider them doomed. Sentences are now so draconian that a prisoner might share a cell with her or his adult child who was an infant when the parent's sentence was handed down. It is not unheard-of now for three generations of one family to molder in the same prison block. Life sentences are no longer reserved for the most heinous offenses. Hundreds of thousands will live, grow old, and die forgotten in our prisons. A twenty-one year old offender will take fifty years to die of death by incarceration.

Where are these prisons that hold all these millions? Do you know where your local penitentiary is? There's no shame if you don't, they are kept hidden and isolated. Within three counties of where this is being written there are twenty-three state, federal, and private (for profit) prisons and few know, or care to know, where they are. Prisons, especially privately owned profit-making prisons, are popping up like toadstools after a warm rain. One state contracts with a private prison corporation that uses inflatable (yes, inflatable) prisons. As the crime rate has steadily FALLEN over the last two decades incarceration has RISEN due to over sentencing, mandatory minimum sentencing, erosion of avenues of appeal, and creation of incredible new laws for crimes that never before existed. The criminal justice system opens its great maw and gobbles up thousands of Americans

a day. Most will some day be released: dispirited, poor, disenfranchised, unemployed, unwanted, stigmatized, and afraid. Three million and counting.

What will Friends do? Quakerism knew its infancy in the jails and prisons of England and America. Have Quakers today forgotten the likes of Margaret Fell who went into Lancaster Jail to comfort the mad women and condemned children? Did not George Fox, himself often a prisoner, petition authorities on behalf of Friends languishing in prison? Do we remember the young Quaker woman, Mary Dyer, was the victim of the kind of arbitrary death penalty young women (and not so young men) still face today? Will you take ten minutes, right now, to write your representative to plead for some sanity, a step back, a few deep breaths? Will you take an hour to go to court, as a Quaker, on behalf of a young offender? Will you spend an evening meeting with Friends to try to find some small service you can do to stop this madness? Will you take a day, just one, to carry a sign, to march, to hold a candle so another's conscience might be touched? Many Friends do all of these things and more. I know some. May God give them strength and patience.

Without justice, the justice of restoration-not retribution, there can be no peace in the hearts of a people who are a beacon unto the world. The Religious Society of Friends and the other Peace Testimony Faiths must be the conscience of our country. The Children of the Light and Truth must illuminate the dark and forgotten places of our land and shame our friends, neighbors, and elected officials into joining us in a just cause.

Until the Great Liberation we will continue to pray for all  
of you yet to be swept up.

Yours in the Light,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Scott Breeze", followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Scott Breeze  
Quaker  
Federal Correctional Institution  
Marianna, Florida