

Launching Peacemaker Prayer & Action in Your Community

for Focused Study, Prayer, Support, and Action

*A Word of Caution: We have known since this effort began that our actions might have little, if any impact on the outcome of this crisis. **That has not changed.** While we endorse intense study and prayer toward burnishing the collective witness for peace, we don't want to feed the prideful American habit and illusion that the right technique will solve any problem.*

The Priority of Continuing Witness

In a video released on December 7th, 2005, our friend Tom Fox plainly states that his life is tied to our efforts to free other detainees, and he pleads for our help in this matter: "... a plea for my release from captivity and also a plea for a release from captivity of all the people of Iraq. We are all suffering from the same fate ...". He asks not for legislative action, but for the people of America to take direct action on the behalf of all being held captive. While this message was uttered in urgency, we share Tom's abiding concern for all people being held without trial, or enduring humiliation, torture, or captivity in violation of international law. Tom himself has worked tirelessly with families of detainees in Iraq to bring more public attention to their plight. We too can take direct action on these concerns.

The readiness of these men to endure isolation, sacrifice, and suffering in the service of others, renouncing sanctions of death and violence even to save their own lives, escalates a theological and social challenge upon all Christians and Quakers, indeed all who seek to advance the Peaceable Kingdom. Addressing this challenge faithfully is an immediate and persistent priority.

To support the continuing witness of Tom Fox, Harmeet Singh Sooden, James Loney, and Norman Kember, and to inspire creative faith-driven response to their present captivity in Iraq, CPT affiliate Gene Stoltzfus has called upon congregations around the world to raise up peacemaker prayer groups to meet weekly for focused prayer and dialogue¹. Recognizing the value of such spiritual discipline in a time of crisis, and the need to shift from emergency mobilization to long-term commitment, we offer the contents below as a jumping-off point for anyone who might find them useful.

In order to develop a continuing witness on behalf of the Peacemaker captives, and on behalf of the communities they have served in their ministry at home and abroad, each Group must understand its own strengths and opportunities, as well as the weaknesses and threats with which it must contend. In order to foster this process of discernment, we recommend that Prayer Groups take on three specific practices, taking seriously the range of disciplines involved, and making time in their meetings for all three: Study, Prayer, and Support.

¹ <http://gstoltzfus.blogspot.com/2005/12/tell-us-what-to-do.html>

Study

... but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. [...]

I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds. [...]

I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways.

Psalms 1:2, 77:12, 119:15

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

Matthew 10:16

The scriptures charge us to study and meditate constantly on God's laws and words, both those written and those that can be discerned through experience and observation. Collective study will help a group focus its meditation on the issues at hand. Bible study may form an important part of this practice, helping us to anchor our understanding of the present challenges in a critical assessment of the prophetic lineage of Abraham. But it is also crucial for our study to address the commencing social, moral, and humanitarian crisis, to look beyond the parade of headlines and develop a broader, deeper perspective of the history and present reality of Christianity & Islam, Iraq, and CPT's work there.

- ❖ *Friendly Bible Study* is a well grounded method for illuminating study without authoritarian structure.
<<http://read-the-bible.org/FriendlyBibleStudy.htm>>
- ❖ *BibleTexts.com* is a vast, comprehensive, and free online Bible commentary for “all people who seek a thor-

oughly honest understanding of the Bible, of earliest Christianity, and of the unconditional love (agape) that is at the heart of Christian practice.”
<<http://www.bibletexts.com/>>

- ❖ *Islam Online* includes an extensive archive of introductory material to the faith and practice of Islam.
<<http://islam-online.net/english/introducingislam/index.shtml>>
- ❖ *Reuters* posts daily reports on the turmoil in Iraq.
<<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/mergency/571273.htm>>
- ❖ *Electronic Iraq* is an initiative to provide humanitarian perspective, supplementary news, and analysis during this uncertain time.
<<http://electroniciraq.net/news/>>
- ❖ *Christian Peacemaker Teams* initiated a long-term presence in Iraq in October 2002, six months before the beginning of the U.S. led invasion in March of 2003.
<<http://www.cpt.org/iraq/iraq.php>>

Help us by suggesting additional resources!

Prayer

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. [...]

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

Romans 8:26, 12:12

Gene Stoltzfus writes: "For the years that I was with CPT our teams tried to begin the day with common worship. I am sure our primitive attempts at worship must have looked wimpy to our Muslim friends whose ritual of five prayer periods every day always facing Mecca was so clear, and confident.

"I noticed over the years that when life got more dangerous and severe, Muslim prayer time become more disciplined. I also noticed that when we felt threatened, demeaned, or desperate to break through the silence with an act of love, our own worship which included scripture, songs and prayer became more focused. Sometimes in our confusion, laughter would lubricate our prayers. Other times a CPTer might jump up in the middle of our serious gathering seized by the Spirit with a message or a song. Some of us doubted the messenger but we knew we might just as well start listening to the Spirit."

According to Stoltzfus, four to eight people meeting one or more times per week may be enough to form a focused, Spirit-driven response to the challenges at hand.

Support

Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another.

Proverbs 27:17

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:1-3

The need for mutual support, both emotional and intellectual as well as spiritual, is readily apparent. Prayer Groups should be a safe place for friends to share their concerns, doubts, ideas, and insights without fear of a careless or hurtful remarks. Support also extends into strengthening each other intellectually. Care must be taken to winnow action ideas for clarity, coherence, and continuity within the present dialogue. Some basic guidelines that may be useful:

- ❖ Look for the good in others.
- ❖ Listen carefully and don't interrupt.
- ❖ Respect the privacy of other people.
- ❖ Allow everyone to participate fully.
- ❖ When brainstorming, ask divergent questions and hold off judging ideas until all ideas are on the table.

The discipline of worship sharing as defined by FGC's Quaker Toolbox² is a focused approach for group spiritual nurture, but it does not include guidelines for integrative

² http://www.fgcquaker.org/ao/toolbox/worship_sharing.htm

problem solving³, which may be instrumental in forming a basis for action.

Action

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. [...] Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.

Matthew 25:35-40

The Acts of Mercy described in the judgment parable of Matthew 25 establish a powerful foundation for action that is germane. The examples in this text by no means exhaust the possibilities, but they illustrate a single directive: to befriend the restless, outcast, and downtrodden, providing intimate service that meets human needs while humanizing the victim and the servant. This echoes the Jubilean mandate of Isaiah 61:1-2, forming the basis of the CPT's work in Iraq.

Too often peace activism is marked by bitter demands and political attacks that can erode the moral bonds of society. Waged in the moral sphere, peacemaking should not be aimed at bringing down the wicked as much as redeeming humans from the social pathology of moral paralysis:

I mean by "moral impoverishment" what the Bible often cites as "hardness of the heart" or as the impairment or loss of moral discernment; the incapacity to hear, though one has ears; or to see though one has eyes (e.g., Mark 8:14-21). I refer,

thus, not so much to an evil mind as to a paralyzed conscience; not so much to either personal or corporate immorality as to a social pathology possessing persons and institutions; not so much to malevolence, however incarnate, as to the literal demoralization of human life in society.

from *An Ethic for Christians & Other Aliens in a Strange Land* by William Stringfellow

Working in the field of human rights, Quaker Jim Corbett developed a comprehensive outline of concrete disciplines that aim at redeeming humans from this social pathology while ministering to human needs in the spirit of the Acts of Mercy:

Civil initiative is formed by this function; our responsibility for protecting the persecuted must be balanced by our accountability to the legal order.

As formed by accountability, civil initiative is non-violent, truthful, catholic, dialogical, germane, volunteer-based, and community-centered.

- ❖ ***Nonviolence** checks vigilantism. Civil initiative neither evades nor seizes police powers.*
- ❖ ***Truthfulness** is the foundation for accountability. Civil initiative must be open and subject to public examination.*
- ❖ *Civil initiative is **catholic** (in the sense of all-embracing) rather than factional, protecting those whose rights are being violated regardless of the victim's ideological position or political usefulness.*
- ❖ *Civil initiative is **dialogical**, addressing government officials as persons, not just as adversaries or functionaries. Any genuine reconciliation of civil*

³ http://www.beyondintractability.org/m/interest-based_bargaining.jsp

initiative with bureaucratic practice—the discovery of an accommodation that does not compromise human rights—is a joint achievement: civil initiative can never be based on non-negotiable demands.

- ❖ *Action that is **germane** to victims' needs for protection distinguishes civil initiative from reactions that are primarily symbolic or expressive. As a corollary, media coverage and public opinion are of secondary importance when our central concern is to do justice rather than to petition others to do it.*
- ❖ *Civil initiative's emergency exercise of governmental functions is **volunteer-based**. The community must never forfeit its duty to protect the victims of human rights violations, but no new bureaucracy should be formed that would oppose the return of governmental functions to those constitutionally designated to assume responsibility.*
- ❖ *Civil initiative is **community-centered**. To actualize the Nuremberg mandate, our exercise of civil initiative must be socially sustained and congregationally coherent; it must integrate, outlast and outreach individual acts of conscience.*

A Definition of Civil Initiative by Jim Corbett⁴

Sharing

Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

2 Corinthians 1:7

If you use this reference in any way, please let us know! We are interested in feedback toward a more fully developed resource, but we are even more interested in sharing ideas and highlighting actions that address the present ordeal in a creative, coherent, and sustainable way. Direct all correspondence to prayeraction@beardedbaby.net or visit us online at FreeTheCaptivesNow.org.

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DRAFT:

Updated 2005/01/10

Visit us online for the most current text and daily updates:

FreeTheCaptivesNow.org

⁴ <http://www.nomoredeaths.org/CivilInitiative.html>