

## Summary of Mary Lord's Plenary Address: "Finding Peace – Healing the Brokenness"

Mary Lord, who has been described as "the quintessential peace activist" and a "contemplative in action," gave the Plenary Address to Lake Erie Yearly Meeting on Friday evening, June 15, 2007. Her topic was "Finding Peace – Healing the Brokenness."

Mary served as Associate General Secretary for Peace and Conflict Resolution for the American Friends Service Committee from 2002 until April 2007. Prior to that, she coordinated AFSC's response to September 11 and the emerging war while on loan from her regular position at Friends Committee on National Legislation. She has been released by Baltimore Yearly Meeting to work on Quaker volunteer service and Friends Peace Teams, and has retired from AFSC to devote herself more fully to speaking and educating on peace.

Mary began her address by recounting an experience when she had been invited to co-facilitate a weekend workshop on conflict resolution held in the Friends Meeting House at Carlisle, PA. The first session had just begun when an angry neighbor marched into the meeting house and complained vociferously about someone's car having been parked in his driveway – *again*. Although the owner of the car agreed to move it, the angry man's words and manner frightened many of the workshop participants, who had trouble processing this all-too-real conflict. Mary concluded, "While Friends are committed to peace, we often do conflict *avoidance*." We believe in peace but too often are ineffective because we become paralyzed by violence, including verbal violence.

*Pacifism*, Mary reminded us, means actively making peace; it is not the same as *passivism*. We need to go deeper in our peace witness and learn to face conflict. She quoted Elise Boulding's observation that conflict is natural; it arises from the tension between our individual needs and our desire to be part of a community. Our peace testimony needs to be about *how* we deal with conflict.

Mary used a diagram of a bell-shaped curve to illustrate the "life cycle of conflict." The horizontal dimension represents time; the vertical, deaths resulting from a war. Each stage in the rise of the curve from "durable peace" to "war" is marked by a certain kind of effort. "Stable" (as opposed to "durable") peace is handled with

*routine diplomacy*; “unstable peace” with *preventive diplomacy*; “crisis” with *crisis diplomacy*; and “war” with *peacemaking* – but at that stage the number of deaths has escalated in a sharp upswing of the curve. Clearly, more options exist at the bottom of the curve – but peacemakers tend to come in at the “crisis” stage. We should work on early action to prevent conflict so that the curve never rises to war. At every stage, measures can be taken: for example, listening, peer counseling, reconciliation, community building. Unfortunately, the current national administration seems to believe that the way to peace is to threaten war, ignoring the earlier options.

The good news of recent history is that some potential wars did not happen. The Soviet Union was dissolved peacefully and the Cold War ended without nuclear weapons. Old colonial empires ceased to exist, and the European Union was created. International law upholds standards that did not exist 50 years ago. The last half-century has seen a steady decline in the number of wars and of deaths in wars – but we don’t hear much about this because it’s not newsworthy. “The path to the Peaceable Kingdom is before us,” Mary said, if only we could help to bring this about by being a nation dedicated to rebuilding.

What does the Quaker community bring to peacemaking? Our belief in a spiritual foundation and in the power of peacemaking as the power of God’s transforming love. What can we as individuals bring to peacemaking? Mary used another diagram to illustrate four kinds of people represented by four animals at four compass points: *beavers* (builders, organizers) at the north, *eagles* (visionaries who tend to “leap off cliffs”) at the east, *moles* (who worry about community and become paralyzed by conflict) at the south, and *bears* (traditionalists steeped in history) at the west. American culture tends to be a bit “beaver-ish,” she said. The ideal, of course, is to balance all of these types and tendencies.

Mary Lord concluded her address by referring to the story in the Gospel of John, Chapter 5. At the pool of Bethesda, a man who had been ill for 38 years waited to step into the healing waters when they were “troubled” by an angel – but other people always got there ahead of him. Jesus asked the man if he wanted to be healed – and without waiting for his answer, healed him. Later, the man told the authorities that Jesus had healed him illegally on the Sabbath. Mary said that the man did not really want to be healed; he was attached to

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his infirmity. Similarly, forgiveness sometimes comes down to wanting to be healed, but reconciliation is not achieved without pain. As a Thai Buddhist monk said, “Forgiveness comes with practice.”

An appropriate sequel to Mary Lord’s address was the vigil that followed, organized by teens and young adults as their version of *Eyes Wide Open*. In lieu of the army boots that make up the AFSC exhibit, the young Friends had used chalk to inscribe on the cement walks the names of U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq from three LEYM states – Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. As Friends left the meeting room after the Plenary, they received slips of paper printed with the names and ages of Iraqi casualties. The silent procession moved slowly up the trail of names from the lower exit of Marbeck Center to the lawn of Ramseyer Hall, where an arc of worshipers gradually joined in a ring. Out of the silence came songs and the spoken names of the Iraqis. Friends remained, hands clasped, in this circle of peace as the dusk deepened.

*Summarized by Nancy E. James (Pittsburgh)*