

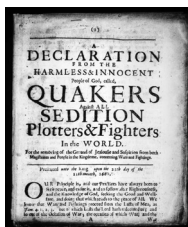
# the Facing Bench

An NYC Quakers Zine March/April 2026

The "facing bench" is where the person who begins and ends Quaker meeting for worship sits.

## NYC Quakers on War

Quakers are, famously and stubbornly, pacifists. In 1660, George Fox and other early Friends wrote a Declaration to King Charles II that has become known as the Quaker Peace Testimony:



"We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretense whatsoever; and this is our testimony to the whole world."

The Quaker belief that there is "that of God" in everyone — that every person has a spark of divinity or inherent worth — leads Friends to work to end and prevent wars, violence, and suffering.

Something to remember is that

## PACIFISM ISN'T PASSIVE.



Quaker Witness for Peace protest at the Armed Forces recruiting station\* in Times Square, NY, March 31, 1961.



\* it's still there, 65 years later

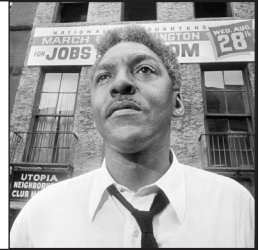
Here's how Brooklyn Meeting Friends put it in a statement approved in December 2023, in response to the conflict in Gaza:

Quakers have a history of mediating conflict, often between warring parties, and we recommit ourselves to do so during this strife through such organizations as Friends Committee on National Legislation, American Friends Service Committee, and the Quaker United Nations Office. We see that of God in all people and in all conflicts throughout the world.

**Peace-making is the work of a lifetime.** Quakers have been at it for more than 350 years. This is no time to be discouraged by this and other worldly conflicts. Rather, we must continue to speak truth to power on behalf of all earth's people and living creatures.

The primary social function of a religious society is to **'speak the truth to power.'** The truth is that war is wrong.

— Bayard Rustin, 1942, civil rights activist,  
member of Fifteenth Street Meeting



## Quaker Responses to War

### Silent Vigils

I am 90 years old. I have been a member of Fifteenth Street Friends Meeting in New York City for 60 years. I was drawn to our simple form of silent worship because, even though I have lived in and loved New York for all these years for its arts and liberal views, I was raised in the Midwest among people who had little use for self promotion and flamboyance and strong admiration for hard work and committed responsibility. As a young Friend I found my time in silence could be used to feel the pain and need of my fellow living creatures, and to ask for the strength to address it.

I came to Friends in the 1960's which provided much opportunity for me to participate in nonviolent and persistent action against war, inequity and prejudice. One of these actions was participating in silent



NYC Quakers hold a monthly Peace Vigil at the arch in Washington Square Park. All are welcome to join them at 1:00 pm on the 1st Sunday of every month.

vigils—throughout the night, in the sun, with frozen toes, in Washington, in Times Square, in Mississippi, with many, with few.

Silent vigils are such a common form of protest now that it seems they have always been around as a nonviolent expression of concern. However this action was indeed a contribution of Friends as a new form of public group protest which had previously involved noise, chants and speeches.

The Quaker Silent Vigil for Peace which takes place one Sunday afternoon each month in Washington Square Park in New York started during the protests against the Vietnam War. It has had many permutations in time and space, sometimes being continued by one individual, and sometimes being carried by many. Its message of peace is always simple and clear. Often those who pass by say, "Oh, there are Quakers in New York." Yes, indeed, there are. They protect immigrants, visit prisons, maintain homeless shelters, demand an end to development of weapons of war, and join together in a vigil that says war is never the answer.

**"Love was the first motion" (John Woolman).**

— Margery Cornwell, Fifteenth Street Meeting

The Living Spirit works in the world to give life, joy, peace and prosperity through love, integrity and compassionate justice among people. We are united in this Power. We acknowledge that **paying for war violates our religious conviction**. We will seek ways to witness to this religious conviction in each of our communities.

— *New York Yearly Meeting Declaration of Conscience Against Paying for War (April 2006)*

## War Tax Resistance

About 58% of the federal income tax we pay, excluding social security and medicare, is spent on paying for our current or past military actions. (est. for 2027; see warresisters.org). Some Friends find that funding war through the paying of federal income tax is incompatible with Quaker beliefs in peace and integrity. Here are some ways to participate in war tax resistance:

- **File a tax return but refuse to pay your taxes**, either in whole or in part.
- **Refuse to file a tax return**. This might involve trying to stay out of the system or “off the grid.”
- **Earn less than the taxable income**. In 2025, that was \$15,750 for a single person under age 65.

Source: National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee, nwrcc.org.



Graphic from  
centeronconscience.org

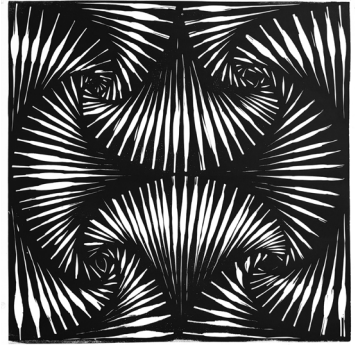
Though it is a criminal offense to fail to pay taxes, the consequences of doing so will likely be bureaucratic, not criminal. Friends can choose to pay the amount they owe in taxes into an escrow fund in case their situation (and risk tolerance) changes. Farmington-Scipio (NY) Regional Meeting manages a Peace Tax Escrow Account for this purpose.

Several Friends in NYC are currently exploring tax resistance, and it has come up in recent threshing sessions about how NYC Quakers may be led to witness.

Charlene, a Morningside Meeting Friend, just “got mad enough” to withhold payment of her federal income tax this year (for 2025). One of the last straws, for her, was the changing of the name of the Defense Department to the Department of War. In a draft of the letter she plans to send with her return, Charlene wrote, “An undeclared war on Iran is unconscionable... I must withhold my taxes in grief and despair but in accord with my deeply held religious foundation. I refuse to pay income taxes that may fund war in any amount.”

## Conscientious Objection

Many Quakers refuse military service due to our beliefs. Currently, young men are registered for selective service — that is, added to a list of men eligible to be drafted for US military service — when they apply for a driver’s license. According to NYYM’s Conscientious Objection to Paying for War Working Group (COPW@gmail.org), a new law taking effect in December, 2026, will automatically register all males between ages 18-26 for selective service.



**WAR BEGETS WAR**

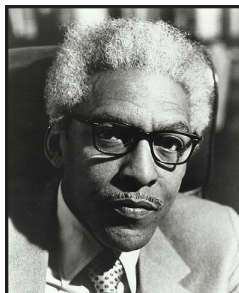
Print by Todd Drake (aka Quaker Pirate), Brooklyn Mtg/Penington

Registering as a conscientious objector (CO) in advance is not currently an option. A conscientious objector could have less than 10 days after getting an induction notice to request a CO re-classification — and provide evidence of their CO beliefs.

Friends ages 18-25 are advised to gather a portfolio of material to back up a declaration of CO status in case a draft is instituted in the future. For information on writing Statements of Conscience, see [friendspeacetteams.org/conscientious-objection-to-war/](https://friendspeacetteams.org/conscientious-objection-to-war/)

**CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION WORKSHOP:** Calling all teens and young adults! At 7pm on Monday, May 11, 2026, join activist Curt Torell for a workshop at Brooklyn Meeting & online on the new selective service law and claiming CO status. Find more: [nycquakers.org/events/co-workshop/](https://nycquakers.org/events/co-workshop/).





There are three ways in which one can deal with an injustice. (a) One can accept it without protest. (b) One can seek to avoid it. (c) One can resist the injustice nonviolently. To accept it is to perpetuate it.

— Bayard Rustin, *Fifteenth St. Meeting*

## How to Achieve Peace

To the extent that the blessing of peace is achieved by humankind, it will not be achieved because people have outraced each other in the building of armaments, nor because we have outdebated each other with words, nor because we have outmaneuvered each other in political action, but because **more and more people in a silent place in their hearts are turned to those eternal truths upon which all right living is based.**

— Dan Seeger, Morningside Meeting, quoted in *The Daily Quaker Message* on April 30, 2025

Dan Seeger was the defendant in a landmark 1965 Supreme Court case, *United States v. Seeger*, that resulted in widening of the pathway for people to claim conscientious objector status. Dan is currently serving NYC Quakers as the clerk of the New York Quarterly Meeting trustees and is a member of Morningside Meeting.

## Quaker Orgs Respond to Iran War

### War on Iran endangers us all

This war is immoral and illegal under both U.S. and international law. The justifications used by the Trump administration all center on blatant lies...President Trump says he wants regime change in Iran. History shows us that regime changes imposed by imperialist violence are devastating failures even on their own terms.

**The U.S.—not Iran—is the most significant threat to international peace and security.**

— *American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), Feb. 28, 2026*



## There is No Just War

...(T)he Quaker UN Offices in Geneva and New York express deep concern regarding recent military operations carried out by the United States and Israel against Iran, as well as subsequent acts of retaliation. **Every human life is precious and deserving of dignity**, and we grieve for those who have already been lost to this cycle of violence. It is our deeply held belief that lasting peace can never be achieved through violence, and we urge all parties to seek peace through dialogue and engagement.

— *Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO),  
March 4, 2026*



### Quaker Lobby Condemns Attacks on Iran and Calls for Deescalation, Diplomacy, and Congressional Action

The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) strongly condemns the U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran and the dangerous pursuit of a war of regime change. We hold in the Light all those across the region who now fear what comes next. We call for an immediate end to military strikes by all parties, urgent de-escalation, and a return to diplomacy...

We have and will continue to also condemn the violent actions of the Iranian government towards its own people, which have resulted in the deaths of thousands of Iranian civilians. But **more war is not the answer**. This will only multiply suffering — killing innocent civilians, placing U.S. servicemembers in harm's way, and risking catastrophic regional escalation, repeating the tragic mistakes of U.S. military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. As Quakers, we believe there is that of God in every person. Bombs cannot build the just and lasting peace that true security requires.

— *Friends Committee on  
National Legislation (FCNL),  
Feb. 28, 2026*



Friends Committee  
on National Legislation  
Lobbying with Quakers

# Oh Rascal Children Of Gaza

*Khaled Juma*

Oh rascal children of Gaza,  
You who constantly disturbed me with  
your screams under my window,  
You who filled every morning with rush  
and chaos,  
You who broke my vase and stole the  
lonely flower on my balcony,  
Come back –  
And scream as you want,  
And break all the vases,  
Steal all the flowers,  
Come back,  
Just come back...



Todd Drake (Quaker Pirate),  
Brooklyn Mtg/Penington

Palestinian poet and playwright  
Khaled Juma's poem "Oh Rascal  
Children Of Gaza" was first  
published on August 24, 2014.  
(Shared by Madison Fletcher,  
Brooklyn Meeting.)

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## Quaker Meetings in New York City

NYC Quaker meetings, or congregations, meet for mostly silent, waiting worship each Sunday morning. Visit [nycquakers.org/our-meetings](http://nycquakers.org/our-meetings) for details.

**Brooklyn Mtg:** 110 Schermerhorn St. (and Boerum Pl.) in downtown Brooklyn, NY

**Fifteenth Street Mtg:** 15 Rutherford Pl. (and E. 15th Street), a couple blocks east of Union Square in New York, NY

**Flushing Mtg:** 137-16 Northern Blvd, Flushing, NY, in the oldest house of worship in NY state

**Manhattan Mtg:** a pastor-led service at 15 Rutherford Pl., NY, NY

**Morningside Mtg:** 12th floor of the Riverside Church bell tower in the upper west side of Manhattan; enter at 91 Claremont Ave., NY, NY

**Staten Island Mtg:** Meets biweekly; visit [statenilandquakers.org](http://statenilandquakers.org)



**The Facing Bench** is produced by the New York Quarterly Meeting office, 15 Rutherford Pl., NY, NY 10003. Editor: Sarah Way, [sarah@nycquakers.org](mailto:sarah@nycquakers.org). General questions: [friends@nycquakers.org](mailto:friends@nycquakers.org). Join the email list by clicking **subscribe** at [nycquakers.org](http://nycquakers.org).