

older among us to share again their experience of engaging in an alternative service program in lieu of military service during and since World War II.

We are in name one of the historic peace churches. This is a time for us to live up to that name.

—James F. Myer

A letter to Muslim neighbors

This letter was written by Ed Heilman, pastor of Lakewood Church of the Brethren, Millwood, Ohio.

Sept. 16

Dear neighbors at the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo,

We who follow God through the life and teachings of Jesus, are taught to love our neighbors as ourselves. Therefore in light of the recent acts of hatred in this country, we the

friends and members of the Lakewood Church of the Brethren extend to you our love. We reassure you of our neighborliness during

these troubled times.

We pray for the happiness and well-being of you who worship at the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo. We will work together with you for a future of peace and justice. We invite you to ask us for whatever aid a good neighbor can give.

—Ed Heilman

A prayer for peacemakers

Delivered at the Northern Indiana District Conference, Middlebury (Ind.) Church of the Brethren, Sept. 14, by Daniel Petry, pastor of the Middlebury congregation.

Great, loving, eternal God: no one here knew, when the plans were laid for this conference, that we would be gathering on a national day of prayer and mourning. But let our prayers be added to those across this land as we

plead for the healing of our nation.

We stand in need of your amazing grace as we sort through the rubble of our devastated cities and shattered sense of security. But even as we share with our countrymen the sadness, the anger, and the great sense of violation that these horrible acts of terrorism have caused, give us the courage to remain true to our own best selves as members of the Church of the Brethren.

We have come once again to a time of great testing. Sabers are rattling; war fever grows more intense with each passing day. Will we, your church, hide in a corner, say nothing about our convictions, and let violence have its way throughout our land? Or will we stand tall for Jesus, speak the convictions we learned from him, and teach our children by word and example that true discipleship is neither easy nor popular in times like these?

Lord, you told us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. It will take great fortitude for us to do so. It will require boldness to remind our sisters and brothers of this command. Many, if not most, will think we are speaking nonsense. Our words may be lost in the hot wind of war rhetoric. But, O Lord, we believe in your way. We have seen the power of the cross—the power of love to conquer evil, the power of grace to transform hearts of stone. And we have seen the power of the Resurrection. You can bring life from death; you can wrest victory from hell's grasp. And all without an army.

Christ lives! And because he lives, we shall live also. Make us bold, Lord Jesus. Make us soldiers of your peace. Amen!

—Daniel M. Petry

Returning evil is not God's way

The following was sent as a letter to the editor of the Ashland (Ohio) Times-Gazette by Donald Parker, who is chair of the Church of the Brethren General Board.

This is a time that tests our faith. How do we respond to such a vicious attack on our country? I just read

this quote: "The challenge for us as a society is to respond in a manner that reflects our values."

Does our resolve include the commitment to live by the deepest understanding of our faith in a loving God? In a forgiving God?

My belief in God, as manifested in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, calls me to practice in my living the type of love Christ showed when he was confronted with evil and violence. In many instances he was able to face evil with the power of love and turn the tables to thwart the evil intent. When he was overpowered by violence, he did not resist but forgave his attackers. He did this knowing that there were those that followed him capable of establishing his church; and he did this in complete trust of God's ability to bring about good from his suffering and death.

I do not know if I have the kind of resolve that would carry me through that kind of suffering, with God's love holding highest priority in my response. But I live each day with the desire to grow into a greater capability of showing God's unconditional love in every circumstance.

I cannot speak for those who have lost loved ones, who are injured and suffering at this moment, who have been traumatized emotionally in unimaginable ways. I do not know for sure what I would do in similar circumstances. But I am more deeply convinced since the tragic events of Sept. 11 that returning evil for evil is not God's way. Retribution that takes human lives is descending to the level of the terrorists themselves. The intent may be different, and the language of justification may be different. But unless the response of our nation can be gauged in terms of Christ's example of how God intends for us to live, I cannot fully support that response.

I sense that this overwhelming tragedy is a wake-up call to consider the values that mean the most to each of us.

—Donald Parker

