

**The Safeguards Letter A Publication of OHIO
SAFEGUARDS
NUMBER SEVENTEEN MARCH, 1991
IN RESPONSE TO THIS CALL TO
CONSCIENCE
Sandra Landis**

The preparation for war and the violent invasion of Kuwait and Iraq by the United States and other nations has brought many people to a sobering time. To me and others this time is yet another call to conscience. Conscience is simply defined by Webster as "...a time of reflection with 'sensitive regard for fairness or justice!'" This particular call to conscience has resulted in my understanding that I shall begin to live a more public life. My hope is that I might, with others, learn to live more publicly in a way that contributes to a more peaceful world.

As I begin to speak about the reflection and decisions that come from this call to conscience I speak humbly. Only at this late date is my voice becoming truly a public one; it lacks the strength and stamina that comes from frequent practice. It is singular; it does not yet share in a common song with other voices. I don't know if such a song exists, for I have just begun to listen for it. What I can now speak about is influenced most by where it comes from inside of me. I have not sought a way to render judgments of conscience that are simultaneously influenced by anger/despair/fear/prejudice and hope. I have little confidence that I could accomplish that.

I believe that the perspectives I adopt in making judgments characterize those judgments. I assume that speaking with conscience presumes that I select the most useful response I can generate. My responses fall far short of being sensitive when they come from the perspective of anger/despair/fear/prejudice. I tend to think that this is the situation for many, perhaps all human beings.

For me, hope seems the more useful perspective to adopt. This means that I can't rely on feelings that are incompatible with hope to guide my thinking. Those are feelings to be put aside, subordinated, and replaced. My private experience is a source

of help to me as I seek useful examples of situations guided by hope. I live day-to-day in the world of family and friends, a neighborhood, and an emerging larger community. This private life is in many ways a peace-seeking, peace-enjoying one. I have confidence that the ideas that help me live peacefully with others as family and neighbor can help guide my decisions about what is just or fair in a public context as well. I want to bring with me to a more public life, and to decisions of a public concern, that which serves me well in my private life.

To accomplish living in day-to-day peace as families and friends it seems that we "put aside" those things which do or are intended to do harm. We live at our best when we put aside power strategies and the attitudes of oppression. We continue to learn about and adopt attitudes of respect and negotiation, particularly at times of hurt, confusion, and misunderstanding. We don't ask people to do things we cannot or would not do. We exist in a context of commitment to work things out. We avoid blaming or distancing a dissonant voice. We acknowledge conflict, but we do not initiate force. Although we may risk being victims of violence, we do not regard violence as a strategy for getting along. We negotiate trust among us, and we learn to extend trust more fully to one another as we grow in confidence.

Comparing these observations about what we do to live peacefully as families with what we are doing now as a nation of families is very painful. As a nation we have adopted violence as a strategy for peace, and we regard it a "reasonable" public policy. Yet we know it is not reasonable private policy. By living a mostly private life, one without active public voice with others, I participate in the perpetuation of that unreasonable public policy. Engaging others in conversation about developing a collective hopeful voice seems a way for me to begin living a more public life. I hope that conversations will focus on how we can participate in preparing ourselves and our family members to bring the peace of personal experience into the forum of public dialogue and debate. I think we must also bring with us the courage to acknowledge and experience the inevitable suffering that is present, without supporting strategies of violence, force and oppression.