

Opening Remarks

Welcome- wonderful people to Voices of Peace and Frederick's Days of Reflection on the human cost of war. I am Beth Willis, with the Days of Reflection Planning Committee. This truly is a special event—one for which those of us who planned it hold a lot of aspirations. We are gathered here today as one community—to Reflect on the human cost of the Iraq war and to seek ways to be empowered to find resolution and healing. We mourn, and give respect to – those in the military, and to those Iraqis who have died and been wounded. And give compassion for those who love the fallen and the wounded.

No matter what our individual opinions about whether or not we should have started or should still be fighting this war, it has been fought in our country's name. This is the reality of what is. Yet, somehow, all Americans will need to find a way to come together, across our political differences, and address the very real consequences and aftermath of the war, as it continues now and after it ends. So what if, we could start that process here in Frederick and find some places of common ground? If we're going to do that we will need to really listen to each other, hear each other's stories, and be very imaginative in finding ways to resolve this war and heal.

So, we're here now to do some listening—today we will have an opportunity hear some people's stories about their experiences with this war, and understand more about its cost, the cost that is forever, for so many.

We're here to reflect on and imagine ways to peace. The planners of this event do advocate for a significant change in US Policy, for an end to this war and for a reordering of national priorities on human needs, including better meeting the needs of our veterans. And we understand that for many people the way forward to a responsible exit from Iraq is not clear. We don't have easy answers, or glib solutions either. But we do join with organizations we respect and some members of congress in supporting a number of basic changes in policy, in legislation that moves beyond the false sound bite choices we have thrown at us of either "cut and run" or "stay the course". And there are ways to support the people who have been impacted. There is a wealth of information about all that on the tables behind you.

But most of all, we are here today to tell you that the moral force of public opinion matters. It has mattered in the past, has changed policy in this country and other countries in the past, and it matters now.

It's so easy to feel overwhelmed and that there's nothing the average person can do. It's really easy to be busy in our lives and not remember the war and the people involved in it. You are here because you've chosen not to do that. We hope this event will move and inspire you, and leave you knowing that no matter each of our perspectives on the war, there are as many ways to help with the healing as there are people. We hope you will leave here today inspired to be an engaged citizen of this country, and of this world. Yes, this is for us, all of us to struggle with. This is just way too important to leave to the politicians.

It's a lot of ambition for one afternoon, with lots of different things we hope you will take the time to encounter. From this stage—there will be some fine speakers and some very fine music. And from around the band shell and in the armory much more.....