

With permission to add his speech to the MARP Web site, Martin sent some background: "The event was organized by the Manatee County Coalition for Peace and Justice. The rally took place in front of the courthouse in Bradenton, Florida. Mennonites were invited to provide a speaker and a small group of interested Mennonites drafted me to be their spokesperson. One of the Mennos present described it as 'an assembly of politicians and pastors, soldiers and veterans, students and children, handicapped and athletes. There were Republicans and Democrats, Methodists and Mennonites, Unitarians and Catholics, Jews and Agnostics. There were black and white, American Indian and Indian, Asians and Middle Easterners. And there were also Muslims, beautiful, gentle women in traditional veiled garb, not unlike our own Mennonite grandmothers.... Although the event was organized by what we may call "secular" folks, the message was indeed divine. Martin's words came very near the end, and provided a powerful benediction of hope and peace.' "

MARTIN: Thank you for giving me the honor and the privilege of speaking in this forum for my conscience. (This morning I participated in the Heart Health walk on Siesta Beach. I was asked what I could say that would bring others to the walk next year. I replied that I felt a strong sense of community; that we were all in this together. I can tell you that in this rally I have a stronger sense of community. More people on the beach, but more community here on the courthouse lawn! I am glad to be here this afternoon because the world has a heart problem.)

I am a Mennonite, but I do not represent Mennonites in any official capacity. Nevertheless I speak for the thousands of Mennonites who for the past 450 years have suffered or died for their faith. A major tenant of that faith is a refusal to take a human life. We stubbornly refuse, not because we are stubborn, but because our faith has disarmed us. Our faith has made us conscientious objectors to war.

We object to war because war requires the use of the wrong weapons. We object to the violence of war. We object to fear caused by war. We object to the hunger caused by war. We object to a blind patriotism that justifies war.

We object to homelessness caused by war. We object when war closes schools and fills hospitals. We object to hospitals without medicines. We object to winter without shelter. We object to feet without shoes.

We object to dismembered bodies and we object to body bags. We object to heads with blank minds. We object when war makes widows and widowers and orphans. We object to the waste of resources, and to harm done to the environment.

Ladies and gentleman, we object to war!

We objected to past wars, and we object to the war being proposed. We object, not because Saddam Hussein is a good man, but because he is a man. We object, not because the Iraqis are not enemies, but because our Master has taught us to overcome evil with good. The master taught us to pray for the enemy, to feed and clothe the enemy, to accept any pain inflicted by the enemy and not to retaliate in kind.

Our Mennonite objection to war has been a quiet one. We have been too passive. I apologize to you, and ask your forgiveness. There are a handful of Mennonites in the crowd. Perhaps you are standing next to a Mennonite and don't know it. The church has experienced many changes in the 70 years of my memory. Many of us believe that our quietness, too, will change.

I can report to you that thousands of Mennonites have signed a letter of objection, written by the Executive Director of Mennonite Church US and sent to the President of the United States. The sermons, songs and prayers have been directed toward peace. (By the way, there is a rumor that guests are not welcome in Mennonite Church services. That is not true. We welcome visitors.)

Everyone loves peace. It is time that we make peace. If you are here to object to war, for whatever your reason, we join you. We applaud you.

Blessed are the peacemakers.