

Richard K. Taylor

Richard Taylor was born in Philadelphia in 1933 and has lived in the city for most of his life. Dick was raised in the Quaker faith, with its strong emphasis on peace, nonviolence, social and racial justice and the equality of men and women. While still young, he applied these beliefs by working successfully to bring about the racial integration of the school affiliated with his local Quaker Meeting. He attended both Quaker and public schools through high school.

Richard first learned about Catholicism at Haverford College by taking a class called, "Classics of Religious Literature." The course was led by Douglas V. Steere, a Quaker professor who had many Catholic friends and who later was a Quaker observer at the Second Vatican Council. Dick was deeply moved by reading Catholic spiritual classics like "Introduction to the Devout Life" by St. Frances de Sales, the "Confessions of St. Augustine" and "The Practice of the Presence of God" by Brother Lawrence. He did not yet see Catholicism as a faith option, but a seed was planted which slowly grew until he joined the Catholic Church in 1982, at age forty-nine.

Long before taking that plunge, Dick worked for the Quakers in El Salvador, Central America, spent a year at Yale Divinity School on a Rockefeller Fellowship, was staff for a Quaker race relations program and received a social work degree from Bryn Mawr College. He founded and became the first executive director of the Fair Housing Council of Delaware Valley, an inter-faith agency that worked to break down discriminatory barriers that prevented African Americans from buying homes outside predominantly Black areas. In that capacity, he had many opportunities to test his belief in nonviolence by relating to hostile White home-owners, including during a riot. He also started Project FREE (For Real Estate Equality), which used interracial, nonviolent marches and picketing to challenge racially discriminatory suburban real estate practices. In 1965, Dick travelled to Alabama and joined Dr. Martin Luther King and others in the march over Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge.

One year before the Selma march, Dick met Phyllis Brody, a Jewish freedom rider from New York who was studying in Philadelphia. Seeing one another as soul-mates almost from their first date, they soon were married at a Quaker Meeting in Manhattan. Thus began a partnership, not only of marriage and family, but of common work for peace, justice and human rights. Skipping ahead, the Taylors now have three children (one "homemade," one adopted and one a "daughter of choice") and nine grandchildren.

Dick was working as a research staff for North City Congress, a predominantly African American inner-city agency when Dr. King and his staff came to town to organize Philadelphia support for the Poor People's Campaign in Washington, DC. Dick at first volunteered for this effort, but soon was asked to join the staff of Dr. King's organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Working as a member of the national field staff, Dick was in the presence of Dr. King on numerous occasions, attended SCLC retreats and planning meetings led by him, joined marches, travelled to "Resurrection City" and became Administrator of the Philadelphia SCLC office. This was an intensive

time of learning and practicing the nonviolent methods of America's civil rights movement whose creative, suffering, loving power broke down 300 years of legally-enforced segregation.

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, Dick taught at the Martin Luther King Graduate School of Social Change at Crozer Theological Seminary, the seminary where Dr. King received his first theological degree. After Dr. King's assassination, Dick joined with Phyllis and others to form the Philadelphia Life Center, whose purpose was to uphold Dr. King's legacy by offering training in nonviolence and engaging in nonviolent campaigns for peace and social justice.

At the Life Center, Dick published his first and second books, "Economics and the Gospel" and "Blockade: Guide to Nonviolent Intervention." The latter was based on a successful campaign, paddling canoes in front of ammunition ships carrying weapons to a dictatorship in West Pakistan. As a result of this work, and the related formation of the new nation of Bangla Desh, Dick and Phyllis were honored by Bangladeshis at Madison Square Garden as "courageous soldiers for human rights, armed with nonviolence and love for humanity."

Dick and Phyllis also joined or co-led many demonstrations against the Vietnam war. At one point they spent time in jail as the result of kneeling in front of an ammunition train. Dick was knocked over by the train, but luckily was able to put his body between the rails and, although dragged, was not injured.

As a professional social worker, Dick also has held several social service jobs, including five years with a homeless shelter run by a Catholic community and several years in a program of outreach to low-income, mentally disabled elderly men and women run by an evangelical church.

In the 1980's, Dick worked for the peace and outreach ministries of the Sojourners Community, a fruitful collaboration that has now spanned over three decades. In the '80's, Dick and Phyllis helped found Witness for Peace, a national nonviolent organization that sent several thousand trained peace activists to Nicaragua in an effort to stop the so-called "contra" war. Both of them travelled to Nicaraguan war zones, jointly for a total of eight times. Together, Dick and Phyllis also helped start groups like Christians Concerned About El Salvador and American Christians for the Abolition of Torture and well as continuing to participate in many other nonviolent movements, demonstrations and campaigns.

Dick also wrote dozens of magazine articles and more books, including the co-authored "Nuclear Holocaust and Christian Hope" and "A Peace Ministry in Practice." In the meantime, Phyllis had gotten her nursing degree and was beginning to develop a national reputation in the hospice movement and, later, as a pioneer in bringing end-of-life care to inmates and staff in prisons.

During these years, Dick came in contact with many Catholic peace and justice advocates, whom he greatly respected. He also learned of the fascinating Catholic practice of spiritual direction. Long before even considering becoming Catholic, he began years of meeting with a variety of spiritual directors, both priests and nuns. These very fruitful and meaningful relationships have lasted to the present. At one point, a Medical Mission Sister from whom he was receiving direction, said to Dick, "This is not a requirement of our meeting, but if you ever would like to pursue Catholicism as a faith option, I'd be glad to discuss that with you." Feeling an immediate response in his heart, Dick accepted her offer. This began a number of years of thought, prayer, searching and discernment which finally resulted in his decision to respond to God's call and to join the Church.

Dick was baptized and confirmed at St. Vincent de Paul Church in the Germantown section of Philadelphia on April 19, 1982. Almost simultaneously with joining, he helped to found the St. Vincent's Peace Ministry, which is still active today. After a few years, Dick was invited to join the staff as Coordinator of Ministry Development, a position he has held now for fifteen years. Many challenges have come to the Church in that time, not the least of which the wrenching sexual abuse crisis. Some of Dick's close Catholic friends have withdrawn from the Church or describe themselves as hanging on by their fingertips. Because of his continuing commitment to the Church and his belief in its fundamental beauty, truth and goodness, Dick wrote the widely-circulated article, "Why I Am Still Catholic," in the Oct. 1, 2004 issue of the National Catholic Reporter. One of his most meaningful current efforts at St. Vincent's Church is facilitating discussion groups on the subject, "Why Stay Catholic?"