

2006

## Book review: Taking a stand: A guide to peace teams and accompaniment projects

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### Recommended Citation

Harder, J. (2006). Book review: Taking a stand: A guide to peace teams and accompaniment projects. *Journal of Community Practice*, 14, 144–146.

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## Book Review for *Journal of Community Practice*

Book: *Taking a Stand: A Guide to Peace Teams and Accompaniment Projects*, by Elizabeth F. Boardman, New Society Publishers.

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This easy-to-read book presents the “nuts and bolts” of participating on a peace team or accompaniment project in a violence stricken area of our globe. If you’re looking for an introduction to a very “gutsy” kind of peacemaking, then this is the book is for you. If you’re a firm supporter of U.S. policies, then this book may not be so palatable.

Written by a Quaker and long-time peace activist, this book outlines many of the questions that may arise for someone considering participation on a peace team or accompaniment project, with a motivational bent towards encouraging this type of activity. The text is sprinkled liberally with quotes from active peacemakers, as the author did her homework by talking with many organizations and participants in the preparation of her manuscript.

After an introductory chapter, this 160-page book has chapter titles such as: “Why go?” “Go where and do what?” “What will people say?” “Isn’t it dangerous?” and “Who will know or care?” The author defines “peace teams” as groups of people who “may physically get in the way of hostile maneuvers, or they may come close to the action as observers so that they can send back reports to the media, to decision makers, and to the alternative press and the peace movements” (p. 5). The author defines “accompaniers” as people who “literally accompany or escort local activists in a conflict situation as they go about their work, to help protect them from harm, and to be able to testify to decision makers in the western world about what is happening in the area” (p. 5).

The second chapter of this book lists several reasons why someone might participate in a peace team or accompaniment project: “Activists cross national and cultural barriers to learn more about others, to express solidarity, to prevent violence, to affirm our common humanity” (p. 15). This chapter continues by detailing the logistics of participating, and the questions to consider when choosing a geographic destination that best matches a person’s needs and skills.

The third chapter is interesting in that it seeks to prepare the participant for answering the questions of family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors as to why they are going. The author speaks of “coming out” as a peace activist, and later refers to this as quite possibly the “scariest” part of this kind of work. This chapter is a little “meatier” than some other chapters, but still remains on the surface. Some folks may take issue with the author’s acceptance of racism as just “the way it is.”

The author’s answer to the question of “is it dangerous?” seems contradictory. On one hand, the author insists that the fear of the unknown when preparing for a peacemaking venture is the most difficult, however, the examples given in the book are dramatic and often place peace

participants poignantly close to violence. The fifth chapter contends that while the peacemaker is the one who goes, a large community remains behind and provides vital and multi-faceted support functions. Chapter 6 of the book is surprising in that it suggests the peacemaker learn about soldiers, weapons, and other war elements – areas not usually examined by peacemakers. Nearing the end of this book, each of four chapters discusses a “sponsoring organization,” such as the Christian Peacemaker Teams, Voices in the Wilderness, Peace Brigades International, and others. The final chapter of the book wraps up the content with a brief look to the future of peacemaking by raising questions of effectiveness and use of technology.

This book, by definition, takes a strong anti-war stance and is clear in stating that participating in letter writing and protests are not sufficient for promoting peace. A number of the chapters in this short book may be offensive for those who staunchly accept U.S. policies, especially regarding war and international relations.

This book seems to be for the individual who has already decided to participate in a peace team or accompaniment project and is looking for practical information. Consequently, this book only scratches the surface of motivations or purposes for these types of peacemaking activities. While strongly advocating for a more active role in peacemaking, the author acknowledges that people do not always go to violence-stricken areas to be martyrs, but may also go for various professional and personal reasons. In addition, the book is very focused on the individual going rather than on the types of activities and relationships in which they may be engaged. The author uses interesting terminology in referring to peace teams and accompaniment projects going to “cross-border” rather than “cross-cultural” situations. I found the lack of information on what it is like to work cross-culturally and to work with people in these “cross-border” places to be a glaring hole. Also, although a number of the organizations discussed are faith-based, this book does not touch on that element of their work.

Nevertheless, this book is easy to read, provides important information, and offers some food for thought. While the language in the book is decidedly not social work-ese, it does call us to be true to our mandate of promoting social justice and advocating for our world’s vulnerable populations.