

Quaker 'TESTIMONIES'

For the month of December this year the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Chapel in the Cathedral will be hosting a display prepared by the children of Exeter Quaker Meeting illustrating the work of our 'Quaker Peace and Social Witness', our body which reflects our belief that the Spirit that is in everyone should be made visible in our lives. Having this exhibition here is an example of the part the Cathedral plays in the wider religious life of Devon. Quakers, though from Christian roots, have no Creed, no formal statement of belief. We define ourselves as much - if not more - by the principles on which we try to guide our lives than we do by any emphasis on particular doctrines about the nature of Jesus. These principles of Justice, Truth, Simplicity and Peace are the ones which inspire our corporate work and are shown in the display.

Our concern for Justice includes our desire that prison should be a place where people learn other ways of living than crime and have a chance to work when they come out. Justice also includes our concerns about unemployment and homelessness - and in other countries - access to clean water, education and medical care and, of course, freedom from arbitrary arrest. Simplicity nowadays links with our concern for the environment, as well as avoiding conspicuous consumption. It is no longer anything to do with funny clothes (in spite of the porridge packets). Truth for us does not only mean trying always to be honest and open but also encouraging our Government to be so too. The concern for peace has always been central to the life of the Society, but it is not just about pacifism. Today it is perhaps even more about reconciliation and finding alternatives to violence, not only between nations but in prisons and even in schools.

For four weeks in August and September the older children discussed and then illustrated our practical responses to most of these principles. The attack on the Twin Towers happened in the middle, and many drawings were produced of the fire and rescue work, these have not been included since they do not bear on our corporate work. However our younger children produced a big collage to illustrate the Peace Vigil which we have been holding in Bedford Square every Friday since the beginning of October*. Our response, both to the original terrorism and to our present and future involvement will raise many questions, both practical and ethical. Perhaps we should pause to ask ourselves: should we seek an eye for an eye - or try to do good to those who hate us?

*The vigil was continued for 18 months

Richard Hilken

BBCRadioDevon Nov01