

Homelessness

Some of you may have seen John Cleese as St Peter in a training film losing his temper when a poor man repeatedly dies, having failed to take his advice. Bewildered, the man asks if anger is not a sin. Through gritted teeth St Peter says. "Not **righteous** anger."

Quakers from Devon and Cornwall met in Exeter yesterday for a General Meeting on the theme of 'Rage for Justice in Society'. We examined our responses to issues ranging from unfair trading abroad to criminal justice in Britain. Homelessness was one of our subjects and I would like to share some of our thoughts with you.

It is easy to imagine the discomfort of moving from house to house and room to room as friends tire of our presence, and we can all appreciate the dangers of sleeping rough. However there are other consequences of having no fixed abode. Without an address you are most unlikely to be given a job, indeed you will have difficulty even in getting state support. You will probably not be on any Doctor's list and so cannot get treatment for the many ailments made worse by an insecure life. If you have children, their education is likely to be disrupted as you are moved from place to place. You are squeezed onto the fringes of society and cut off from many of the benefits of being part of a community, indeed your friends are now probably only those who are also homeless. And to cap it all, in many cases you are even excluded from Government statistics.

You and I might think that being without a home means that you are 'homeless'. This is far from being the case. Most Councils only count those whom they have the resources to house, so many people with no room they can call home are not even officially recognised as having a problem. They are out of our minds and out of our sight - **and we have allowed ourselves to become accomplices**. In the place of righteous anger we offer indifference.

Let us pause to think, not only about the problems of homelessness, but also about what we are doing to ourselves by allowing the real scale and nature of the problem to be hid from our eyes.

Richard Hilken

BBCRadioDevon Oct 97