

EQUALITY

This has been designated as '*Equality Week*' by Quakers in Britain.

Now Quakers are interested in many aspects of equality. But at this particular time, in vigils up and down the country they are highlighting the issue of wealth inequality in our rich country and suggesting that this should be a matter that is on our minds in an election year.

The UK is one of the world's richest countries yet still we have food-banks, according to the *Office for National Statistics* around 13 million live below the UK poverty line and the richest 20% of people are 100 times better off than the poorest 20%

Gross inequality is on the rise - the gap between richest and poorest has grown wider here since the 1970s than in any other developed nation.

Christians share with a great many other people the belief that human beings are intrinsically equal in worth.

In the Hebrew Bible governments were judged favourably not on the basis of their wealth creation but by how well they supported those who were poorest. In the teaching of Jesus what matters is that we care for the neighbours around us. And Jesus explained that our neighbour is simply another person in need.

Research indicates that perhaps the most important factor is not how rich or poor we are, but rather the extent of the divide *between* richest and poorest. Where there is greater inequality there are greater problems - in areas of health, education, crime and almost every indicator of well-being.

This affects all citizens, not just the poor. So, income inequality is not just bad news for those with the least. The effects pervade the whole fabric of society and impacts on **all of us**.

In this election year Quakers are highlighting an issue that needs to be considered by everyone - and one that politicians of every stripe will need to address.

We have the privilege to live in a country of great **wealth**. But if we want to live in a great **country**, where human beings are of equal worth, then we need to do something about inequality.

One of the posters being used by Quakers for this Equality Week reads: ***A more equal world would be a more peaceful world.***

It's hard to disagree with that.

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