

were imposed with little consistency from court to court. The degree of punishment and the laws by which one was judged were often arbitrary.

Friends' experiences in prisons led to a unique understanding of the plight of those who are incarcerated. They told the world of their experiences, and of concerns both for those wrongly or unfairly convicted, and for those who had committed unthinkable harm against others. They knew that respecting "that of God in all people" meant treating *everyone* with dignity and respect. This awareness has fueled the historic concern amongst Friends for prison conditions, the imposition of 'justice' through the legal system, and the use of corporal and capital punishment. Friends visited prisons to foster reconciliation among those in conflict, to encourage education, and to advocate for the weakest of the prisoners. They did not visit to proselytize or convert prisoners to their faith.

Today, some Friends continue to choose to break the laws of their region based on their understanding of the Quaker Testimonies. Quakers Fostering Justice (QFJ) supports Friends who come into conflict with the law over issues of conscience, especially when the action has been threshed and cleared according to Quaker practice.

Friends in Canada were active at Clayoquot Sound (BC) protests in the early 1990's. Other Friends withhold payment of taxes through Conscience Canada. Late Friend Jack Ross spent time in a provincial jail in B.C. for failing to pay fines in association with his civil disobedience. He followed a leading to use disobedience to protect a watershed in the Slocan Valley. (To Dwell in the Power of Truth - SPG Lecture 1999).

Friends became more organized and active with justice concerns in the mid 1970's, largely due to the work of Toronto Friends, and Yonge Street Half Yearly Meeting. This resulted in the formation of CFSC's Quaker Committee on Jails and Justice, subsequently renamed Quakers Fostering Justice. The work of many Toronto Friends, including Ruth Morris, Fred Franklin, and Richard Broughton, led to the acceptance of CYM Minute number 93 in 1981. It is known as the "Prison Abolition Minute" or the "Statement on Prison Abolition" and has been read and studied worldwide.

We approved Friends Response to Crime:

*Friends, partly through their own experiences in the prisons of the seventeenth century, became concerned about the treatment of the accused or convicted. Friends witnessed to their concern for the Divine Spirit in humans by seeing prisons as an alternative to corporal or capital punishment. Subsequently, they worked for reform of these prisons. Today, Friends are becoming aware that prisons are a destructive and expensive failure as a response to crime. We are therefore turning our efforts to prison reform - to replacing prisons with non-punitive life affirming places of reconciliation. The prison system is both a cause and a result of violence and social injustice. Throughout history, the majority of prisoners have been the powerless and the oppressed. We are increasingly clear that the imprisonment of human beings, like their enslavement, is inherently immoral and is as destructive to the 'cagers' as to the caged.*

*The challenge before us is to use alternatives based on economic and social justice and on the fulfillment of human needs. Some alternatives to prisons have already been developed and more are needed to bring about reconciliation and healing within the community. Friends need to seek out, develop and support such programs. At the same time, we need to foster awareness in ourselves, and others, as to the roots of crime and violence in society, to ensure that our lives do not unintentionally reinforce these evils.*

*Prison abolition is both a process and a long-term goal. In the interim, there is a great need for Friends to reach out to and support all those affected: guards, prisoners, victims and families.*

*We recognize a need for restraint of those few who are exhibiting dangerous behaviour. The kind of restraint used and the help offered during this time must reflect our concern for that of God in every person."*

This Minute raised awareness among many Friends worldwide. The inspired language continues to inform the work of many in the field, and articulates our shared anxiety and uneasiness with the current state of institutions of law and corrections.

It planted a seed that resulted in the International Conference on Prison Abolition (ICOPA) meeting in Toronto in 1983. ICOPA brings together ex-prisoners, advocates, for front-line workers, academics, and many students to share information and form strategies for further change. Ten gatherings of ICOPA have been held on five continents since the first meeting in Toronto.