

25 Jan. 2019

**Letter from Mid Essex Area Meeting to Lyndsay Burtonshaw
and fellow members of the Stansted Fifteen**

Dear Lyndsey,

From scenes in the courtroom, and in the immediate response to the hostile verdict, it must be obvious to you the degree of support you enjoy for the stand you made in Essex and elsewhere. Amnesty International had observers in court – the first criminal trial in the UK they have attended for many years. Essex Quakers were well represented in the public gallery and all the church leaders in Essex support the stand you made. It was a most unusual offence, in that you committed it not for yourselves, but to help others less able to stand up for themselves. This was a gesture in the best tradition of British liberty.

You are well aware that some or all of you may go to prison on 6th February. With this possibility in mind, Mid Essex Quakers write to you now. It is much easier to endure a court appearance and prison sentence when you know that you have the support of people around you. Prison is likely to prove a less destructive experience for people who feel they were morally justified in what they did. Our suggestion is if the worst happens and you find yourselves behind bars, regard this as an opportunity for continuing your witness. Do not make trouble for the officers; you have no quarrel with them, and they have a difficult and thankless job already. Be clean, punctual and courteous to everyone you meet, even if they react with abuse. Use your time constructively to read, meditate and study. You may be able to befriend vulnerable or inadequate prisoners. We see this policy as working for good within a setting which could not be more calculated to encourage evil: it is carrying the war into the enemy's camp, though it will be a quiet war.

Be of good courage: you do not have to face this testing time alone.

With love and best wishes from Mid Essex Quakers,

Adrian Smith on behalf of AM