

Why Quakers Didn't

Washington

Despite heavy pressures to strip President Nixon of his Quakerism, the East Whittier (Calif.) Friends Church will continue to consider him an "active member," the church's pastor has pledged.

Dismayed by the gap they see between Quaker principles and Mr. Nixon's performance in such areas as the Indochina war and the Watergate scandals, Friends meetings and individuals around the country have urged that the President be asked to resign his affiliation with the Society of

Friends.

T. Eugene Coffin, minister of the East Whittier Church, where the President has been a lifelong member, acknowledged in a telephone interview that the church's committee on ministry and council has discussed the matter.

"But on no instance did we consider taking such a step," he said.

Membership in the Society of Friends is controlled by the local Friends meeting or church with which an individual is affiliated. There is no larger body in Quakerism with the power to force a lo-

cal meeting to "disown" a member.

Coffin conceded that the East Whittier Church, has received "numerous" communications from other Friends meeting, challenging Mr. Nixon's continued membership in the Society of Friends in the light of his apparent disregard for Quaker principles.

It was these expressions of concern from Friends elsewhere, he said, that prompted formal consideration of the President's membership.

"Many of our Friends meetings have been very concerned about (Mr. Nixon's) conduct of the war, about the bombing," he said.

The disclosures that emerged during the Watergate hearings prompted further expressions of concern Coffin said.

But the East Whittier church committee concluded that such a course of action would not be the "Christian" thing to do.

The East Whittier church is one of a group of West Coast Friends congregations more evangelical in outlook than Friends meetings in the East and somewhat less preoccupied with social issues.

While they respect the historic pacifist tradition of the Society of Friends, there is less tendency in the East Whittier church to apply it to the contemporary scene.

In contrast, many East Coast Friends have interpreted the society's peace testimony as a directive to oppose U.S. involvement in Indochina.

These friends have been particularly resentful of the President's repeated references to his own Quakerism as he pursues policies they see as distinctly un-Quakerly.

Opal Gooden, former clerk of the Florida avenue Friends Meeting here, voices the annoyance some Friends feel for the President.

Disown Nixon

She summed up the situation during his years as President: "He's been a great embarrassment to us."

Washington Post