

Transforming conflict

Christians are called to be peacemakers. 'Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples' John 13:35.

At their best Christian communities can reflect the Kingdom of God, demonstrating how people from diverse backgrounds and with different gifts can work together. In reality, things are not always harmonious. Anxieties about change, unexplored disagreements or interpersonal animosities can give rise to quarrels in which love and forgiveness are forgotten.

Simon Keyes, diocesan Adviser on Peacebuilding says, "Parishes can experience disputes and, just like family disputes, they are often complex. A parish which becomes a 'house divided' can be



The Peacebuilding Network members

an uncomfortable place of anger, blame and pain. This is not easily remedied, even through dialogue or mediation."

Simon leads the Bath and Wells Peacebuilding Network, a group of trained local volunteers, lay and ordained. Their new Peaceful Parish initiative aims to help parishes transform a conflict by approaching it as a call to repair Christian community, rather than a problem to be solved.

It rests on three core ideas – that we are fallible and all of us fall short of our ideals; that the Kingdom of

Heaven is a metaphor for the kind of community we might aspire to become; and that forgiveness offers a way to loosen the grip of the past.

These ideas can be explored in workshops through scripture, personal reflection, and community conversation. Simon adds, "It is no miracle cure, but it can help people begin to think differently about past events and re-orientate themselves towards a better future. And we should all remember that conflict isn't all negative, it can reveal unexpected opportunities for learning and growth. To rediscover 'the miracle of diversity in unity, of the grace of God breaking down walls', as Archbishop Justin puts it." Find out more at bathwells.org.uk/peacebuilding" ■

News in brief

New art installation for St John's

Throughout November, St John's Highbridge is displaying a new art installation, Elizabeth Woodger's 'Diagenesis'. Described as 'a beautiful and provocative reflection on our natural environment and the impact of humans up on it', it is made of a photographic print which the artist folded, rephotographed and blew up to huge size. The exhibition, and a future one planned for next year, have received funding from the Somerset Community Art Foundation ■



Church and school's team effort for eco-award

After taking part in a discussion with Bishop Michael about caring for the environment, the Pupil Chaplain team at Backwell Junior School got involved in St Andrew's Eco Church application. After the church received its bronze award, the children spoke at the church's Harvest service at Moorside Farm, sharing their pride in the bronze award and their plans to go for silver ■



Find out more on these and other stories at bathandwells.org.uk/news

Bell-ringing boost

A new bell-ringers training centre has been opened at Holy Trinity Church, Street. The centre hopes to attract new and experienced ringers. Mike Palmer, tower captain at St John's Glastonbury says, "This will provide a wonderful opportunity for people, young and old, to learn a skill exercising mind and body – and make a real contribution to the community."

The new facility allows learners to develop their skills without disturbing the peace, thanks to muffled clappers and some technical wizardry which sees sensors on the bells feedback the outcome of their efforts ■

Time to re-member

By Ruth Worsley, Bishop of Taunton

I am shortly leaving Bath and Wells for a time to serve as interim Acting Diocesan Bishop in the Diocese of Coventry. You may know that the city of Coventry saw some very heavy shelling during World War 2, which resulted in the destruction of the Cathedral.

A new Cathedral has since been built and stands alongside the old ruin as a testament of hope. Though different in style, there's a harmony of old and new. It shows us where conflict can destroy, peace can be found as we seek to live together as the people of God.

This marrying of modern and traditional styles of architecture, helps us to consider how we fashion the life we are called to live as Christians in our communities. It is not that we put aside our differences nor require others to conform to our own shape or

form. Rather we recognise the value of listening fully to others and learn to hear the voice of God. Determining to value the worth of each contribution and discerning together a faithful walk with God.

This season of Remembrance encourages us to look back and to value the contributions of those who have gone before us, giving their lives in the service of others. It is not about glorifying the concept of war and conflict but the desire to establish a peaceful world for all. As we look back, so we are invited to look forward and commit to establishing a world where all have a place and where the Prince of Peace, Jesus, is our example.

Coventry is the home to the Community of the Cross of Nails. A community of reconciliation based around the cross fashioned by iron nails found within the ruins of the

Cathedral following the fire. Its mission is to live out the practice of peace-building, encouraging people across the world to learn to be reconciled with themselves and one another, as they find reconciliation with God, through Christ.

As I leave here, I do so with plenty of memories, many happy, occasionally sad. Often the latter are those where I have got things wrong and failed to live up to my calling to be the grace-filled child of God I long to be. So, if I have let you down, I am sorry and please pray for me, as I will for you, that God continues to reconcile us to Himself and to one another. And as we hold our acts of remembrance this month, may we become remembered (put back together), as the people of God.

Bishop Ruth

A symbol of reconciliation

The Revd Martin Kirkbride, newly retired Rector of St John's, Wellington, served in the Royal Navy for 16 years. He has recently received a special stole from the Falkland Islands.

What's special about this stole?

It was made for me by the charity Scarves for Falklands Veterans in recognition of my service both in the conflict and my work since then with veterans. Like their scarves, it is made from 100% Falklands wool and is the exact colour and pattern of the South Atlantic medal.

How did you come to support Argentine as well as British veterans?

In 2013, a representative of the pilot responsible for the sinking of HMS Coventry came over to meet me at Coventry Cathedral to present a letter from him, as he couldn't attend for political reasons. They specifically wanted it presented in the ruins of Coventry Cathedral.

How has that relationship



The Revd Martin with his stole made by Scarves for Falklands Veterans.

developed?
From 2013 onwards I started to develop more contacts in Argentina and that came to a wonderful focus in December 2020 when the University of Buenos Aires ran a half-day conference on the Falklands/Malvinas Conflict. I was asked to close the whole conference with the Coventry Prayer of Reconciliation, in both languages, which was incredibly moving.

What can we learn from that?

We as church have a lot to learn

from them about reconciliation.

We are good at forgiveness, but reconciliation is different. It is about truth and justice and there is a price to pay and of course that is difficult.

Do you continue to share the message of peace & reconciliation?

Yes. After the lectionary Bible of St John's got lost recently, we commissioned a new one and it features a dedication to all who died in the 1982 conflict and the Coventry Prayer of Reconciliation in both languages. The first to read from it was a parishioner whose ship was damaged in the conflict and lost two crew.

Hear more from Martin at bathandwells.org.uk/symbol-reconciliation

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