

## Christmas Message from Dean John



I've found myself reflecting this year on the peculiar paradox of the Prince of Peace being born into such a crucible of conflict. On Sunday December 7th, we welcomed our most recent CCN partner, **Embrace the Middle East** (right) in a beautiful Cathedral Evensong service. The contrast between church and Cathedral Christmas services and the reality of life in the middle east, both 2000 years ago and today, has often been noticed – but for some reason this year it has struck me with renewed force, not as something to be avoided, but embraced, as we speak with honesty about the world, and hope about the gospel of peace.

The Coventry story is one of God's love in Jesus being made known precisely in the midst of the rubble of conflict. It's actually a very Christmas story – and of course Provost Howard's repudiation of 'all thoughts of revenge' was initially made on Christmas Day. Our crosses of nails speak of God's love and hope discovered in that crucible of conflict – that's where God's presence is most powerfully revealed. As the text in the entrance of the Cathedral says, "To the glory of God this Cathedral burned November 14 1940". The light of God's love shines brightest in the dark, and some things are quite dark at the moment.



As many of you will know, I will be retiring from this role at the Cathedral in May 2026. It's a bittersweet move to be making, as I will be stepping away from so much that I have loved to be part of. During the last thirteen years, we have seen the CCN and ICONS together almost double in number, and I have personally had the privilege of taking crosses of nails to dozens of new partners in some extraordinary places (pictured left: with **Trinity Cathedral, Sacramento**, which was welcomed with a Cross of Nails in November). As the world continues to fracture, the work of the CCN offers a way for people to say that reconciliation is the way forward, that peace and justice can go hand in hand, that we can find the strength to reach across divisions to forge a better future. I'm always thrilled to see new communities place a cross at their heart, as a signpost to a way of following Jesus which is including rather than excluding of difference.

I hope very much to stay in touch with many of you – as we know, Coventry has a way of getting under your skin! If you're able to join us for one of several farewell events in May (Saturday 9th for a Cathedral party in the evening, Sunday 17th for morning or evening services, with cake from our CCN friends from the Mothers' Union after evensong) we would love to see you. In the meantime, may you know Christ's presence with you over these coming days, wherever you are, and God's calling upon you as a peacemaker for the New Year.

The Very Reverend John Witcombe



## President of Germany visits Coventry Cathedral

We were so honoured that **President Frank-Walter Steinmeier** took the time to visit Coventry during his UK state visit in early December, laying a wreath in the Cathedral ruins. Pictured (far right) with Dean John; and with our German interns, Sylvia and Pia (right, standing to the far left and far right in the photo). Read the Church Times article [here](#).



It's been Board meeting season - with our German and Dutch boards both gathering members together. The German partner assembly took place in Muenster (right) with a special focus on building peace and relationships across boundaries in Russia and Ukraine, both countries having CCN partners. Raising funds for CCN partner St Paul's, Odesa is also their seasonal appeal: more information and to support:

<https://nagelkreuz.de/nagelkreuzgemeinschaft/ccn-germany/spendenauf-ruf-hilfe-fuer-unser-nagelkreuzzentrum-in-der-ukraine>



### Opportunities to connect with others monthly on Zoom to pray

#### the Litany of Reconciliation: all welcome!

Usually on the first Friday of the month, but in January on the second Friday (9th) at midday Central European Time, led by our UK & Ireland partners:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88484456943?pwd=ZJNsti3fZPa4Qk3sbHrgKR3dbt4A2f.1>  
Meeting ID: 884 8445 6943 Passcode: 688379

On the third Wednesday of the month (note recent day change) at midday US EST, led by our North American partners:

<https://zoom.us/j/91751768631?pwd=9gQO2FYvie0HiWMqgeB6enWeFt68Vs.1>  
Meeting ID: 917 5176 8631 Passcode: 896595

Contact us at:

[alice.farnhill@coventry.anglican.org](mailto:alice.farnhill@coventry.anglican.org) <https://www.facebook.com/CCNCoventry/>  
<https://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/reconciliation/community-of-the-cross-of-nails>

Read this and earlier newsletters [here](#)

Access the Cathedral's recent sermons [here](#).



## CCN Newsletter December 2025

Healing the Wounds of History  
Learning to live with Difference and Celebrate Diversity  
Building a Culture of Justice and Peace

### Practical Peacemaking, 22-23 April 2026

2026 is the 800th anniversary of the death of St Francis, and both the Third and First Orders of the Society of St Francis are encouraging spending time on pilgrimage.

A CCN partner for several years, the Third Order is teaming up with the CCN to hold a two-day conference at Coventry on 22 and 23 April 2026 (right). Tickets go on sale in early January - all welcome!

### 150 years of the Mothers' Union

A major milestone year for the Mother's Union approaches, and the six provincial areas of Wales are planning to make joining the CCN a focal part of their celebration in 2026. We look forward enormously to extending our links with both the Mothers' Union - Coventry and Warwickshire, and the central Mothers' Union at Mary Sumner House being already CCN partners - and with Wales.



#### Practical Peacemaking: from global to local

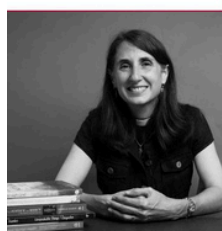
What is the nature of peace?  
How do we live it?

Coventry Cathedral  
22-23 April 2026

Speakers include  
Revd Dr Isabelle Hamley  
and  
Revd Dr Al Barrett

Limited spaces - sign up from  
early January 2026.  
Tickets £50/£60 (subsidised)

All welcome!



### ICONS news...

We've been delighted to welcome **Nina** to the team as the new ICONS Administrator, working closely with Emma Griffiths to support the continued growth and impact of the ICONS programme. Nina in fact was a volunteer intern here in 2002-3 - welcome back Nina!

Emma recently spent two days at St John's Primary School in Coventry, delivering Ambassador training to 15 enthusiastic pupils, focussing on reconciliation, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding—core themes that the children embraced with maturity and passion. They will now take these teachings into the playground as the first group of Peace Ambassadors in their school. Following their training, these pupils confidently presented their learning at an education event, where Emma also led a workshop for headteachers across Coventry diocese to introduce the ICONS programme and highlight its transformational potential for school communities.

Emma has also welcomed St Augustine's Primary School in Coventry as an ICON School. For more information on ICONS, please see our [website](#).

With our best wishes for a Happy Christmas, our thanks for all your support this year, and our prayers for a peaceful 2026.

