

# Thought for the week archive 2018

## Contents

Contents.....	1
CCN Thought for the Week for 5th January – Bishop John Stroyan, Bishop of Warwick.....	3
CCN Thought for the Week for 12th January – Maite Boehm, Reconciliation Intern at Coventry Cathedral.....	3
CCN Thought for the Week for 19th January – Revd Harold Schorren from the Pauluskerk, the Netherlands.....	4
CCN Thought for the Week for 26th January – Virginia Theological Seminary .....	5
CCN Thought for the Week for 2nd February – register for the CCN International Members’ Gathering! .....	6
CCN Thought for the Week for 9th February – register for the CCN International Youth Gathering! ...	7
CCN Thought for the Week for 16th February – First Baptist Church of Matanzas, Cuba .....	8
CCN Thought for the Week for 23rd February – Dean John Witcombe, Dean of Coventry Cathedral ..	9
CCN Thought for the Week for 2nd March – Cerys Smith, Reconciliation Intern at Coventry Cathedral .....	11
CCN Thought for the Week for 9th March – Jane Hill, Mothers’ Union Coventry and Warwickshire..	12
CCN Thought for the Week for 16th March – Berkeley Divinity School at Yale .....	13
CCN Thought for the Week for 23rd March – Revd Robert Childers.....	14
CCN Thought for the Week for Good Friday, 30th March – Revd Canon Dr Sarah Hills.....	15
CCN Thought for the Week for 6th April – introducing Together for Hope, the CCN’s new sister organisation .....	17
CCN Thought for the Week for 20th April – the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship .....	18
CCN Thought for the Week for 27th April – St Clement Danes, London .....	19
CCN Thought for the Week for 4th May – Tantur Ecumenical Institute, the Holy Land .....	20
CCN Thought for the Week for 11th May – Flodden Peace Garden at Crookham United Reformed Church.....	21
CCN Thought for the Week for 18th May – two months to go until the CCN International Youth Gathering! .....	22
CCN Thought for the Week for 25th May – the Joy of Community.....	23
CCN Thought for the Week for 15th June – Kirchenbezirks Esslingen.....	24
CCN Thought for the Week for 22nd June – St Aidan’s Primary School, Hartlepool.....	26
CCN Thought for the Week for 29th June – Somerset College, ICON, South Africa .....	27
CCN Thought for the Week for 6th July – St Martin’s Church, Coney Street, York .....	29
CCN Thought for the Week for 13th July – we look forward to the International Youth Gathering in two weeks! .....	30

CCN Thought for the Week for 20th July – Burundi Update! .....	31
CCN Thought for the Week for 29th July – the International Youth Gathering opens! .....	32
CCN Thought for the Week for 3rd August – farewell to our International Youth Gatherers! .....	34
CCN Thought for the Week for 10th August – a wrap-up on the International Youth Gathering.....	36
CCN Thought for the Week for 23rd September – Welcome to our International Gathering attendees! .....	37
CCN Thought for the Week for 12th October – ‘Journey of Hope’ reconciliation training .....	37
CCN Thought for the Week for 19th October – Revd Canon Dr Sarah Hills .....	38
CCN Thought for the Week for 26th October – a look back on last month’s CCN International Gathering .....	38
CCN Thought for the Week for 2nd November – the Netherlands CCN Board.....	39
CCN Thought for the Week for 9th November – the German Board .....	39
CCN Thought for the Week for 23rd November – the USA Board.....	40
CCN Thought for the Week for 30th November – Coventry diocese visit to partners in Berlin.....	41
CCN Thought for the Week for 7th December – a look back at 2018 .....	42
CCN Thought for the Week for 14th December – Farewell to Canon Sarah, from all the CCN International Reps.....	45
CCN Thought for the Week for 21st December – Canon Sarah’s final sermon from Coventry Cathedral .....	45

## CCN Thought for the Week for 5th January – Bishop John Stroyan, Bishop of Warwick

Bishop John, the UK President of the CCN, shares with us his thoughts and what inspires him towards reconciliation.

<https://youtu.be/oxAplfhsI5k>

## CCN Thought for the Week for 12th January – Maite Boehm, Reconciliation Intern at Coventry Cathedral

My connection with Coventry Cathedral started to form almost four years ago when my church in Germany worked on becoming a member of the Community of the Cross of Nails and therefore went on a pilgrimage in May 2014. I was asked to join some other members of my congregation to represent the younger people of our community on this journey and happily accepted this offer. During the pilgrimage we were introduced to the cathedral's story of reconciliation and Provost Howard's message of 'Father Forgive', which were very moving and impressive for me. The radical idea of forgiving the enemy, especially in that war situation, was overwhelming for me. But do not get me wrong, I mean this in a positive way.

In today's Thought for the Week, I want to talk about my thoughts on the Litany of Reconciliation which I first engaged with at the pilgrimage I mentioned above. This text which is at the core of the Community of the Cross of Nails starts with a quote from Romans 3:23: "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God". Though this could be understood as quite a negative and depressing statement as it shows the imperfection and failure that we are facing in ourselves every day, this quote is quite an uplifting and relieving one for me. Because seen in combination with the steadily repeated 'Father Forgive' it allows me to accept that I am not and cannot be perfect but God forgave me this imperfection through his son Jesus Christ.

This leads me to the end of the Litany, where there is used another quote from Ephesians 4:32: "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you". For me this is a demand that God is asking me to do, to share the gift of forgiveness that I received from him with others.

Looking at these two quotes together, they describe what we at the Reconciliation Ministry state as what enables us as Christians to do reconciliation work with the words "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and has entrusted us the Ministry of reconciliation" which is taken from 2 Corinthians 5:18. Being reconciled to our God because of the death of his son Jesus Christ and because of the knowledge of us being forgiven, we are enabled and asked to show this mercy and forgiveness to the world we are surrounded by.

This message and therefore the Community of the Cross of Nails inspired me to be part of the amazing reconciliation work that is done at Coventry Cathedral because it welled up in me the desire to be part of it which made me apply to this internship. So I think I am right when I say that the Community of

the Cross of Nails is a major reason why I am where I am now because without it I would never would have come to Coventry and started my own journey of reconciliation.



One of Maite's wonderful photos, of the four most recently presented Crosses of Nails late last year at the High Altar as they awaited blessing.

### CCN Thought for the Week for 19th January – Revd Harold Schorren from the Pauluskerk, the Netherlands

**In our first Thought for the Week from the Netherlands we're really pleased to hear from the Pauluskerk in Breukelen, a village located between Utrecht and Amsterdam, and after which Brooklyn in New York is named. Breukelen has seven churches of different denominations, and here Revd Harold Schorren gives us his Thought at the start of the Week of Christian Unity.**

We are now entering the worldwide Week of Prayer for Christian Unity that is traditionally celebrated between 18th and 25th January, between the feasts of St. Peter and St. Paul. This Sunday we will start with an Ecumenical Service in the Roman Catholic Church in Breukelen. During the week we will have a daily evening prayer, every day in a different church. Every year it is a feast to celebrate the Sunday with so many Christians from different denominations. But every year it is also difficult to see that only three of the seven churches are willing to celebrate together. Sadly, the underlying problem relates to traditions, beliefs, dogmas... There seems to be no prayer to wash these away.

What is the purpose of our search for 'Christian unity'? To my mind, it is not institutional unity we must look for. The diversity of churches in our world can be a colourful treasure of ways of praising, singing and celebrating. We don't have to look for unity in form. Let there be different churches with different traditions. What I look for is the unity of Christians, unity of believers who want to be pilgrims to God's future. Not captured in and bound by traditions and undisputable beliefs, but set free to follow our Lord Jesus Christ. Learning from Him about love that gives us the power to let each other

stand up in new life. Living by his hopeful vision of a new creation: the Kingdom of Heaven. Together we can follow the path of love and the conviction that – in union with God – we can turn this world around, make the hell so many people are living in into a heaven on earth. While travelling we will sing the Magnificat with Mary:

*He hath put down the mighty from their seat: and hath exalted the humble and meek.*

*He hath filled the hungry with good things: and the rich he hath sent away empty.*

When we are praying for unity or when we are praying for peace and reconciliation we cannot but think about our own beliefs, thoughts and actions at the same time. Am I a child of the future? Is my church a true instrument of peace? We know that the early Christian communities followed Christ in his love despite the hatred of the world around them. They shared everything, they looked after people in trouble with great mercy, and sought for justice for those who found no answer elsewhere. They didn't live by church dogmas about original sin or trinity, or by the fear of condemnation. Just one creed: Love! And no tombstone that could silence their voice of love. They were willing to follow their Lord, breaking themselves to give life to others. Unfortunately, all that changed over time. Maybe one of the crucial moments occurred in 380 AD. The Roman emperor Theodosius I made Christianity the sole authorized state religion. At that time the persecuted started to become the persecutors. Other religions were persecuted and also other Christians that had other beliefs than the so-called orthodoxy. The focus on creating a new earth through the loving ways of Christ was abandoned for the focus on eternal afterlife, which could only be gained by subscribing to orthodox dogmas. Power corrupts.

We need this mirror of history and presence to grow in faith, to grow in unity and to become true instruments of peace as individual believers and as Church. Are we free from judgments? Do we liberate each other from traditions and dogmas so we can be pilgrims on our way to the Promised Land? The fact remains that in many churches women still have no voice and position. That gays have to fear their lives in many parts of the world where dogmas violently silence the voice of love. That other beliefs are severely persecuted where Christians are in power... These things divide Christians all over the world and even in a small village such as Breukelen. Seven churches. Seven different forms of celebrating. No problem. But let us pray that we can reunite in the love of Christ. Not to rule the world, but to serve the world. Not to bind each other, but to set each other free. Let God rule; He is Love! And in that freedom and in that serving attitude we will meet people of all denominations and of all religions as co-pilgrims on their way to a future of peace, as children of a new and heavenly future.

### CCN Thought for the Week for 26th January – Virginia Theological Seminary

We were delighted to spend a couple of days this week on mini-pilgrimage here in Coventry with four seminarians from VTS – and so we asked them to provide this week's Thought for the Week: hear their reflection on the power of Place, and of being present in that space in learning about reconciliation.

<https://youtu.be/tsabGhdgr1o>

## CCN Thought for the Week for 2nd February – register for the CCN International Members' Gathering!

This week's Thought is an unashamedly promotional Thought for the Week, as we are so pleased to announce that registrations open today for our CCN International Gathering, "A Pilgrimage of Prayer, Theology and Practice". This takes place in Coventry from lunchtime Wednesday 26th to lunchtime Sunday 30th September, and we would encourage as many CCN members as possible to try and attend!

Why? This is a once-in-every-few-years opportunity to meet, discuss, debate and socialise as the worldwide Community that we are. It's easy sometimes to overlook our uniqueness as an organisation, but we number now, some 70 years on, over 200 churches, charities and schools around the world, bound together and strongly inspired by the Coventry story, to work and pray, in our multiplicity of individual ways, for a more forgiving and reconciling world. There's no other reconciling network quite like us. As we continue to grow – by around 10 partners per year on average – word continues to spread, and our value as a network deepens.

What can I expect? Join us to celebrate, and to reflect on, and input into, our role in the world, here in Coventry where it all began. Become more involved in The Coventry Way, and hear about and share in the sheer variety of reconciliation practice going on across the network. We are firming up the full programme as we speak, but there will be (for those who want to!) singing, and dancing, and creative workshops – as well as speakers and various streams for debate and discussion, balanced with time to eat together, and to simply reflect and pray.

Cost: We are so proud of this Community here in Coventry, and really rejoice in this chance to bring people together. The cost per person is £200 for the full five days, which covers all activities and meals other than bed and breakfast – for which various accommodation options payable separately are suggested. There will be a bursary travel fund for a small number of pilgrims from overseas to attend who might otherwise not be able to – please contact us if this could be you.

Register! All information and links to register can be found here <http://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/ccn/gatherings2018/> – for the moment, we are taking registrations only from those who can attend the full five days, but will open registrations for those who can only attend for a part of the Gathering, where spaces permit, in a few weeks.

With our blessings, and in anticipation of your company in September!

Revd Canon Dr Sarah Hills, Coventry Cathedral; Revd Mark Pendleton, CCN North America Board; and Oliver Schuegraf, Nagelkreuzgemeinschaft/ CCN German Board.



## CCN Thought for the Week for 9th February – register for the CCN International Youth Gathering!

Are you aged 18-25 and lit up by the prospect of learning more about reconciliation here in Coventry this summer with 40-50 others from around the globe? Taking place over 6 days, from Sunday 29th July to Friday 3rd August 2018, the CCN youth gathering provides a unique opportunity to experience Coventry Cathedral, share with others, and grow spiritually and practically as a young Christian reconciler.

Framed around the CCN core tenets healing the wounds of history, living with difference and celebrating diversity, and building a culture of peace, sessions being planned include:

- A formal welcome from the inspirational and world-renowned speaker and theologian Revd Canon Paul Oestreicher, former Canon for Reconciliation at Coventry and ongoing activist and pacifist;
- Learning sessions on listening, conflict transformation, and leadership skills;
  - Practical examples of reconciliation in action from CCN partners and Coventry diocese projects;
  - Organised discussion on multifaith and integration issues with other Coventry faith leaders;
  - The full range of worship opportunities within and around the Cathedral, including a special major youth worship service for this youth gathering;
  - Time to quietly and prayerfully experience Coventry in your own time and way.



Lunches and suppers (not to forget tea and of course cake!) will all be eaten together as a group, with a different activity into the evening each day. View the provisional full programme.

The cost to attend is £300 per person, which includes all sessions and meals, and five nights' accommodation in twin rooms at the Britannia Hotel, right next to the Cathedral (single rooms are available at extra cost).

If you know or are connected to a CCN partner, it is worth talking to them to say you wish to attend, and in some cases they may be able to assist you financially. There is also financial assistance available to attend, including travel assistance, for young people from further afield – contact us if you are interested in this.

Spaces are limited so don't delay! If you are from Germany, please contact us here. If you are from Eastern Europe, please contact us here. If you are from anywhere else, please register at our main registration page.

We really look forward to having you with us!

With our blessings,

The CCN International Youth Gathering Team

## CCN Thought for the Week for 16th February – First Baptist Church of Matanzas, Cuba



It was a spirit-filled, emotional evening when our church, the First Baptist Church of Matanzas, Cuba, officially joined the Community of the Cross of Nails on February 7, 2018. The sanctuary was filled to capacity with quite a diverse congregation, including representatives from churches in South Africa, Germany, Switzerland, the United States, and Canada, and we were especially honored to have Canon Sarah Hills from the Coventry Cathedral in England to present the cross. There was diversity among the Matanzas participants as well, with representatives from Catholic, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist and Metropolitan Community Church congregations present.

No doubt part of the intense emotion of the night was due to the theme of reconciliation and peace. When Canon Sarah spoke about CCN's three-fold focus on grief, hope, and love, all the Cubans present could resonate deeply. Virtually every Cuban family has suffered the grief of being

divided as a result of the various waves of emigration that have occurred over the past 58 years; over two million Cubans have left since the Triumph of the Revolution. Between 1960 and 1962, over 14,000 children between the ages of 3 and 17 boarded planes without parents or guardians ("Operation Peter Pan" emerged as a result of false propaganda that the newly formed government was planning to send children to Siberia for Soviet indoctrination). In 1965 the Cuban government opened the port of Camarioca for one month and permitted those who were not supportive of the Revolution to leave. Also in 1965 Fidel Castro and U.S. President Lyndon Johnson reached an agreement for "Flights of Liberty" with two planes a day carrying more Cubans into exile (around 250,000 people took advantage of these flights, which lasted until 1973). Then, in 1980 came the famous Mariel boat lift, in which 125,000 Cubans abandoned the island; among them were many people considered "unfit" for the new society that the Cuban government encouraged or forced to leave — prisoners, mentally ill, and homosexuals. And then in 1994, in the middle of Cuba's "Special Period" of severe economic crisis and shortages, came the exodus of the "balseros," those who risked the dangerous passage on homemade rafts.

Up through the emigration of the 1990s, these divisions were not just measured by geographical distance; they were laden with heavy emotional baggage. Many of the people who left had to suffer the humiliation of taunting as they made their exit, sometimes with garbage as well as insults thrown at them, as they were labeled "gusanos," worms, traitors to the Revolution. Many of these "traitors" earned the label by joining hard-line political dissent movement's intent on toppling the Castro regime. And so the division, the rupture, was deep.

That is the grief, the suffering. But there is also hope. The intense feelings have softened in the past 20 years. Since the 1990s, some of the emotional baggage has lessened and people are no longer stigmatized for leaving. The geographical distance does not necessarily mean a break in relationship. Exiles abroad now represent a large swath of the Cuban economy through the financial remittances regularly flowing back to families on the island. But the easing of tensions brought about by this economic support does not mean the wounds have healed. There is still so much work to do. And that's where love enters the picture. The church as an ambassador of reconciliation trusts that the



love of God, the love of Jesus Christ, and the love instilled in us by the Holy Spirit, is a powerful healing force. This love is intentional, and requires action.

We are thankful for the ways First Baptist Matanzas has been part of love in action in our community over the past few decades, building bridges of trust and understanding not only among the various Protestant and Catholic communities, but also between the church and the Afro-Cuban religious communities which have been marginalized for so long. And now, we are so blessed and grateful to be part of this network of reconciliation, the Community of the Cross of Nails, which will provide us accompaniment in our journey. It is inspiring to know that we will have the accompaniment of prayers, prayers that are reinforced by so many stories and examples of communities that have experienced and are experiencing healing of historical wounds and traumas. We look forward to adding to those stories, and adding our prayers to the world-wide work.

Stan Dotson, Matanzas, Cuba

### CCN Thought for the Week for 23rd February – Dean John Witcombe, Dean of Coventry Cathedral

In February 1942, the worst battle in human history eventually came to an end. Over 200 days, almost two million people had died – one and a half million soldiers and around half a million civilians. It was the battle of Stalingrad, and earlier this month I was with the Lord Mayor of Coventry and 180 other international representatives to share with the people of Stalingrad – now called Volgograd – and the country of Russia in commemorating what they hail as a glorious victory. In Russia, they don't really do repentance and reconciliation on the national stage, so although there is a Reconciliation monument in the city, with a cross unveiled by German and Russian representatives, it didn't feature on our tour, and the mood was all about the glorious defeat of the Nazis – which is understandable, given the circumstances of the battle.



Hitler had ordered his troops into Russia, and they had advanced rapidly Eastwards across a fairly level landscape until they reached far into the country, almost as far as the great Volga River. They expected to sweep on across the river and turn left, in effect, up towards Moscow. However, the people of the city, and the amassing Russian armies, put up a determined resistance – and Stalin ordered that no one, not even women and children, be allowed to leave the city – and the siege of Stalingrad began. In the early stages, it was the Russians who were pinned against the sweeping river by the Germans – but by Christmas the tide had turned and it was the German troops who were surrounded by Russians. The conditions were atrocious, with starvation and sickness the order of the day on both sides. In the midst of this horror, a pastor-doctor in the German dugouts drew an extraordinarily beautiful image of a Madonna and Child in the Russian style, which became known as the Stalingrad Madonna.

The artist, Kurt Reuber, survived the siege but not the prison camp, but the image, drawn on the back of a Russian Military map, and is now in our sister church in Berlin. A faithful copy is in our Millenium Chapel, presented by the Lutheran Bishop of Berlin and the Orthodox Archbishop from Volgograd.

On February 2nd 1942 the German General, Paulus, finally surrendered. In 1944, the women of Coventry sent a message of solidarity to the surviving women of Stalingrad, embroidered on a tablecloth – over 800 names were sewn into the fabric. With that act, the first twin cities were established, and so already out of great horror, something good was begun to be born. The twin cities movement, which started there between our city and a ruined city in the wastelands of Russia, now links peoples across the whole world. But what else can we find of hope in this ghastly story?

Because my visit was part of a civic delegation, one of the most disconcerting things was the almost total absence of any religious context. Stalingrad, or Volgograd, is twinned with 40 different cities, of which 28 were represented. We went to visit the Mother Russia statue on the Mamayev Hill, a key site of fighting in the battle – the statue is almost 300 feet high, twice the height of the statue of liberty – it was quite unbelievably cold. But nowhere was there anything other than celebration of victory.

I knew that there was a cross of nails in the City, somewhere – I had heard from Paul Ostereicher, former Canon of Reconciliation here in Coventry, that he had seen one on his visit, around 1990. But no-one could point to where it was. But eventually we did find the cross. It had been moved from its original location in the Kazak Cathedral to the Museum of the Battle. It was probably sent to Stalingrad before it was renamed in 1961 as part of an exchange of gifts which began with a beautifully designed greeting from the Lord Mayor of Coventry in 1958, which was reciprocated with the gift of an Icon to our City – which is now in our gallery downstairs, which we think led to the sending of the cross of nails. It was remarkably moving to find. However, even more moving, and in the end the heart of the visit for me, was an invitation to accompany the German Ambassador to Russia, along with the Austrian ambassador and their delegations, to the huge German War Graves memorial far outside the city. A Russian war grave and a German war grave sit alongside each other in what was a snowy, wintry waste. They have interred the bodies of 62,000 German soldiers there, and there is a memorial to a further 120,000 who were never found. Between the two cemeteries is a simple Chapel of Reconciliation, open to the sky, and with two crosses, one in the Western and one in the Russian style. I was asked to lead prayers, and to stand in that bleak wasteland, which has seen such unimaginable horror, and read first the Coventry Litany of Reconciliation, and then to lead the Lord's Prayer in the German Language, was an immense privilege. We were also accompanied by representatives from the British Embassy in Moscow – who we had met in our brief visit there before travelling on down to Volgograd – and they believe that the presence of senior Anglican Church representatives is the most significant thing in British – Russian relations for the last three years. In Moscow, I had stood by the cross of Nails in the Anglican chaplaincy, which Archbishop Justin visited only last November.

The Christian faith has something quite unique, embodied here in our buildings in Coventry. We are able to stand in the midst of horror, of destruction, of fractured and broken dreams, and know that God has not abandoned us. We have a precious commodity to share: the gift of Hope. We live our lives in the foothills, and we lose perspective so quickly – caught, as someone once said, in the 'ambush of personal history'. Sometimes we have to dig deep to discover the presence of God – or climb up high – to discover the light of God shining in our darkness, sometimes with just enough light to take a single step forward. Having seen that light, we discover the strength to carry on – just as Jesus and the disciples went on from the Mount of Transfiguration where Jesus was revealed in glory towards Jerusalem where his glory would be revealed in quite a different way. The Mount of Transfiguration is so different to the Mamayov Hill: on the latter, hope is found through violent and dogged defiance – heroism, to be sure, but no secure hope for the peace of the world. On the former, hope is found through the light of God breaking through and revealing his presence, to accompany Christ and his disciples through the coming journey to Jerusalem.

Today, of course, there is a radical resurgence in faith, through the Russian Orthodox Church, who are busy rebuilding across Russia. The great gift of the orthodox tradition, through their theology and their worship is mystery. A huge treat whilst I was there was to stand face to face with the great icon of the Trinity by Andrei Rublev, calling us into us into community, even conversation with Godself. I had to stumble through streets full of deep snow and stranded vehicles to reach it, in the

few minutes I had to spare before our transport left Moscow for the flight down to Volgograd. Perhaps in the end it is mystery, whether rich darkness or light so dazzling that you cannot see, the effect is the same, which is hope for a country so great as theirs: the story is simply too great to grasp, and we somehow need to be grasped by also the presence of God beyond our understanding.

As we journey together through Lent, like other journeys we make, whether external or, perhaps more significantly, internal, it will be a journey of discovery. To be truly valuable, it will be a journey of honesty, to take us to the heights and depths of ourselves and discover God there. The truth of my time in Russia was that the most profound journey I made was the internal one, when I discovered something of that conversation taking place in the Rublev icon still continuing, and reassuring me of God's presence, his purpose, his hope.

There is a song by the Smiths, written in 1986, which has the refrain 'there is a light that never goes out'. Russia, and Stalingrad in particular, is a place where that truth needs to be known, and held, Like Coventry, it is a place that can share that truth with the rest of the world – because they have discovered it for themselves. But we hold it alongside brokenness, and are not afraid to do so. That gives it truly redemptive power, because it is based in the truth of Jesus Christ – our truth, which holds us wherever we are, and lights the way home.

*Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

## CCN Thought for the Week for 2nd March – Cerys Smith, Reconciliation Intern at Coventry Cathedral

Hello, my name is Cerys and I am one of the three interns this year in the Reconciliation Ministry. I am local to Coventry, having grown up in the West Midlands and I was one of the many school children to visit the cathedral over the years to learn about its history and message of forgiveness and reconciliation. We interns are now half way through our internship, so I have been asked to reflect on my experiences so far and what I am looking forward to for the remainder of our time here.

Our first experience as interns was welcoming a large group of pilgrims from across the CCN in October. We loved meeting them and sharing all that Coventry Cathedral has to offer. We have also been to Lambeth Palace and attended a service there led by the Most Revd and Right Hon Justin Welby. We have been busy planning the St Michael's House and Ruins programmes which started in January and will continue throughout the year and will be taken on by the next lot of interns (a scary thought as we are not ready to pass the torch on just yet!). We have also received training in reconciliation skills and started to deliver our own workshops. We are enjoying the work we are doing and feel very blessed that we have been given this opportunity to experience and learn more about reconciliation.

We have done so much already but we have still so much more to do over the next six months. One of the things I am excited for is Canon Sarah and us interns travelling to Israel Palestine in April to meet with our CCN partners in the region as well as welcome a new partner to the CCN. We also have at least 3 ICONS presentations, and 5 CCN presentations who we are excited to welcome into the CCN over the next two months. Canon Sarah and I will also be travelling to Burundi in July to deliver some much needed reconciliation training to clergy and lay workers in the diocese of Bujumbura, and, we are also excited to welcome back the Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby to Coventry as he celebrates Coventry Diocese's 100th Anniversary with us here in May.

I would like to finish by thanking the German and North American CCN boards who generously fund Maite (from Germany) and Stacy (from the USA) and the Friends of Coventry Cathedral who fund me. Without your continuous generosity we would not be here. I would also like to thank all the people at Coventry Cathedral and those who we work with in reconciliation for welcoming us and becoming our friends. I would finally like to thank the Reconciliation Ministry Team. We love working with you and thank you for trusting us with your ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation.

## CCN Thought for the Week for 9th March – Jane Hill, Mothers' Union Coventry and Warwickshire

As we approach Mothering Sunday in the UK and particularly think about our own mothers, Mothers' Union is empowering mums both locally and around the world, helping families to thrive and communities to support one another.



*"Mothers' Union..... isn't that just about sitting around drinking tea and eating cake?"*

Tea and cake can be transformational. In the past few years, our members have raised thousands of pounds, through holding cake sales and coffee mornings (and lots of other ways, too). Money that has been used to help people in the UK and worldwide, whose lives are devastated by conflict, whose communities may be torn apart by discord, whose families may be facing poverty.

And sometimes when it is needed our members are reaching out to each other and their communities, offering prayer, practical support and yes, sometimes a cup of tea.

*"And knitting – don't they do a lot of that as well?"*

Knitting warm clothes, toys, prayer shawls, blankets and a whole lot of other goods is just one of the ways we reach out to families and communities both locally and overseas.

*"Well, I heard they do a lot of talking....."*

Our members are not just having a good old gossip at their meetings, we are using our voices to speak up for social justice and are very good at being heard. Our Bye Buy Childhood campaign against the commercialisation and sexualisation of children has led to industry and legislative changes to improve the safety of children. Gender-based violence is also high on our agenda and we are proud to be a part of 16 Days of Activism every year – campaigning for women's equality throughout the world.

*"There's more?"*

In Coventry Diocese, Mothers' Union runs parenting programmes, supports prisoners and their families in various ways, provides holidays for families who would otherwise not get a break at all, provides toiletries to refugees and sexual assault centres. In fact, "faith in action" in many different ways in our communities.

In reflecting this weekend on motherhood, please pray for mothers around the world and the work of Mothers' Union – from teaching a mother to read and write to providing lifesaving relief in the most dire of circumstances, it impacts not just mothers but their families and communities for the better.



Find out more: [www.mothersunion.org/MotheringSunday](http://www.mothersunion.org/MotheringSunday)

[www.mothersunioncoventry.com](http://www.mothersunioncoventry.com)

### CCN Thought for the Week for 16th March – Berkeley Divinity School at Yale

In a shorter Thought this week, we asked a few of our visitors from Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, who were with us on a visit up from their annual week in Canterbury, this week, to let us know their thoughts on their visit to Coventry. It's always so interesting to hear the impact that Coventry has on people, and Berkeley students are familiar with the Litany of Reconciliation but for all in this group, this was a first time to Coventry itself. And here are some thoughts from some of the seniors in the group:



*"Being at Coventry Cathedral made me think of the paradoxes we hold together in Christian life – death and resurrection, sin and repentance, joy and sorrow – and how they are bound together in forgiveness. Coventry holds the past in tender-hearted forgiveness while offering a balm to those of us in the present. I found it to be a deeply healing place".*

Jasmine Bostock

*"The transition from death and destruction into resurrection was just so moving. The resurrection window/doors were the gateway into resurrection into a holy space. The moment of real understanding the resurrection was turning from the high altar back toward the resurrection window. It was a transformational moment".*

Marilyn Jenkins

*"Seeing the place and learning more fully the story of the Litany of Reconciliation that we pray in our community each Friday morning as a part of the daily office at Berkeley Divinity School at Yale was very powerful. It helped me to gain further understanding of the history and of the community of people committed to reconciliation around the globe"*

Holly Clark

## CCN Thought for the Week for 23rd March – Revd Robert Childers

*“Do you want to be made well?”* John 5:6

In the gospel of John, Jesus asks this question to a man who had been ill for 38 years. This man spent his days next to a pool near one of the city gates in Jerusalem. It was believed that the water of this pool had healing properties that were activated whenever the water began to stir. Because of his infirmity, however, someone always got to the water before this man.

This encounter between Jesus and the man and Jesus’ question to him have caused me to wonder. If Jesus asks us the same question—“Do you want to be made well?”—I wonder what we would say? Well, of course, Jesus. You know I want to be made well. But do we, really? What would happen if Jesus gave us His wellness and wholeness? What changes would we have to implement in our lives? Would our same old day in day out routine continue? Why did the man do the same exact thing every day for 38 years—knowing someone would always beat him to the water—and expect to be healed?

We want the pain, the fear, the anxiety, the hurt, the stress, the “whatever”, to go away, but are we willing to implement the changes necessary to make it happen. Jesus offers wellness to the man at the well in a simple and very direct way. He tells him to “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” John 5:8

Think of what the man could have said. “I’m sick.” “I’m lame.” “I haven’t ever walked.” “I can’t.” All of these responses would have been true. What would we have said? The same, I suspect. But in this gospel, Jesus’ Truth slams up against our truth—BIG T truth and little t truth; our brokenness against His wholeness.

In these last weeks of Lent, I am continually hearing Jesus’ voice calling out to me: “Do you want to be made well?” To be honest, I find myself a bit hesitant in replying. Do I really want His wellness? Do I really want to lay myself out for Him to change and transform me? Do you? Either way, there is a cost. To remain broken will cost us as well as those around us. To be well, to be whole, requires us to change our lives and our relationships.

To be well asks us to let something die. In the gospel, the lame man had to die so the well man—the man who took up his mat and walked away—could live. As we look ahead to Easter, what needs to die so that we can be well and whole? What do we need to give to Jesus so that we can embrace and live into the new life promised to us in the resurrection?

The Rev. Robert T. J. Childers

Church of the Good Shepherd, Diocese of East Tennessee

Lookout Mountain, Tennessee, USA

## CCN Thought for the Week for Good Friday, 30th March – Revd Canon Dr Sarah Hills



Today, Good Friday, we look back on Jesus's life, we await his death and we look forward to his resurrection. We look back in order to remember. And we look forward in order to find the hope of the resurrection, our reconciliation with Christ, who died and rose for us, so that we might be his ambassadors in this world. So today, we find ourselves in this liminal space of the present – looking back and forward at the same time, and often an uncomfortable space to inhabit, particularly on Good Friday.

I have been thinking a lot about space lately. About space and reconciliation, and what is needed to create a safe enough space for reconciliation, perhaps something like this liminal space which pulls and pushes us back and forwards. When we remember as Christian people, we hold together in this space past, future and present. God's kingdom exists in this space – in the liminality of the past, the future and the space we inhabit today.

There is a poem by the 13C Persian poet, Rumi: He wrote, 'Out there beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I'll meet you there.'

In thinking about the pain of Good Friday, and the hope of reconciliation, about past and future, about liminal space, I'd like us to imagine this field, the field of meeting beyond wrong or right doing. What do you imagine this field to be like?

The field you are thinking about now might be a place of childhood memories; of playing in a meadow; the field might be a field of gold; or it might be a muddy field, shell pocked, fought over, in Vimy Ridge, or Passchendaele, or Arnhem, or Dunkirk or a field of scorched earth in Vietnam; or desert in Afghanistan; Iraq, Syria, Palestine...

Our field could be this desolate wounded place. It could be. It sometimes, it often is. But our field could be a space of growth, abundance, blessing. Whatever our field is like, we need to meet there. To be ready to choose to be vulnerable, to forgive and be forgiven. To love our enemies in our field. Our field, you see, is this liminal space where we can both look back and forwards. Our field is here, it is now. Or it can be, if we decide to meet there.

Today, when we exist in this field, in this liminal space of looking back and remembering, and looking forward to reconciliation, is a time to reassess how we live. How can we, how do we take part in God's kingdom?

Last year I spent part of Holy Week and Easter on a peace walk in Northern Iraq, in Kurdistan. About 20 of us from CCN partners in Europe and others walked with local Christians, Muslims and Yazidis. A quarter of people living in Northern Iraq live in refugee camps, people internally displaced from their own country due to ISIS attacks. Many refugees and aliens in their own land, their own field.

We walked for peace, to proclaim the possibility of peace in that fought over space. On Good Friday we visited a village about 30km from Mosul



– Mosul, incidentally is the ancient city of Nineveh – a village that had been destroyed by ISIS, the villagers having all fled or worse. It was a place of destruction, completely devoid of life. Houses were rubble, shops damaged, and the church though still standing had been desecrated, the altar broken and lying in rubble. We could hear Mosul being shelled. So I held a Good Friday service in the desecrated church (pictured above). We laid candles that we had brought with us in the shape of a cross in front of the destroyed altar and prayed the prayers of Good Friday, the Litany of Reconciliation, for healing, for the end to that conflict, for peace. That day the field indeed seemed desolate. I placed a small cross of nails on the broken altar that had been blessed by Bishop Christopher in Coventry on Maundy Thursday. As a sign of Christ's peace.



On Easter Day we returned to that deserted village and desecrated church. But this time, the bleakness in the Church was transformed. The same rubble was there, the same bullet holes in the walls, the same broken crosses and hacked memorials. But there were people from the surrounding villages, flowers on the altar, children dressed in white, and a packed church there to proclaim the hope of the resurrection, the hope of peace and the possibility of rebuilding. The local Peshmerga, the soldiers came to receive their Easter communion. There were even painted eggs and chocolate after the service. As an aside, people were rather surprised to see a female priest- unknown in those parts – I don't

think I have been asked to bless as many babies and people in wheelchairs ever! The foundation of a rebuilt community was born that day. A space for remembering and for reconciliation. A liminal space, 'where every tear is wiped away'.

Today, in 2018, what can we as the church do, what should we do, to respond and act for justice, for hope, for reconciliation? In today's world where white gated communities trump cardboard shacks. Where Europe is again being torn apart. Where the colour of your skin, or your gender, or your ethnicity or your sexuality can deny you justice. Where your fields have been appropriated, or taken away like those of the Canadian indigenous peoples and countless others around the world.

Is it time for a new Declaration of Reconciliation? Can we as the Church, as the CCN, speak out to our nations, our communities, ourselves? We need to courageously inhabit this liminal, reconciling space, steering our communities toward peace and reconciliation and away from conflict and division. We truly need to inhabit this liminal space however uncomfortable it may be.

In his Son's death and resurrection, in his body and blood, God enables us to inhabit his blessings. That is why and how we inhabit this space we find ourselves in today, how we as committed Disciples of Christ can tilt our communities towards reconciliation. That is how and why we live with difference and celebrate diversity. That is how we live with the gift of blessing we receive as peacemakers. That is how and why we live the gospel, the gospel of reconciliation.



What will we write into our Declaration of Reconciliation today? Maybe as a good starting point we would do well to follow in Provost Howards footsteps in 1940 when he said, 'Let's build a more Christ-childlike and kinder world.' So as we look back and forward today, as we remember and reconcile, let us indeed build a more Christ child like and kinder



world, because nothing much else seems to be working. And lets then meet in the field, where we find Christ in the face of the other.

Amen.

## CCN Thought for the Week for 6th April – introducing Together for Hope, the CCN’s new sister organisation



Across continents and generations, the Community of the Cross of Nails gathers and encourages reconcilers and peace-makers who are inspired by both Coventry’s story and the Christian mission of reconciliation through Christ. The Cross and the litany of reconciliation, with its ‘Father Forgive’ response give the CCN its uniquely Christian voice.

The cathedral, situated as it is in the heart of Coventry – the City of Peace and Reconciliation – attracts and inspires residents, visitors and students from a multitude of nations, faiths, cultures and communities. This wider world is looking for ways to be involved in the work of reconciliation and peace-making as well. Secular and multi-faith organisations who are inspired by the CCN and Coventry’s story, are asking for ways to join with what we do. Together for Hope (TforH) is our response: it is the sister-organisation to the Community of the Cross of Nails, for partners of other faiths or of no faith. We began TforH from our core commitment as Christian reconcilers, recognising that the ministry of reconciliation is, in part, a ministry of hospitality. TforH partners are invited to sit with us at the table of hospitality; the table of reconciliation.

Together for Hope shares the same priorities as the CCN, namely: Healing the wounds of history; Learning to live with difference and celebrate diversity; and Building a culture of peace. As with the CCN, all TforH partners share a common commitment to pursuing reconciliation, peace and justice in their own unique contexts.

Together for Hope formally launches at Coventry Cathedral on May 4th with a service to welcome our first partner, Faithful Friends, from Sandwell here in the British West Midlands.



Faithful Friends are a group of eight faith and community leaders in Sandwell who came together as a result of one Anglican priest’s visit to Coventry Cathedral. Rev. David Gould was inspired to contact faith and community leaders in his town with a hope of building a community of reconciliation which would become a positive cross-cultural influence in Sandwell.

The eight met together regularly to share a meal and get to know one-another. As they became friends, and with a clear respect for one-another’s faith perspectives, they began to talk about places

that were particularly significant to their individual spiritual journeys. Together, they undertook to visit each of these places as a group, and 'Faithful Friends on Tour' was born! The group most recently visited a number of holy sites in India.

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLEu\\_MQJo7sdalOVicsDH\\_VU7Q6MzUAc0Z](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLEu_MQJo7sdalOVicsDH_VU7Q6MzUAc0Z)

Alex Albans, Coventry Cathedral Reconciliation Project Officer

[alex.albans@coventrycathedral.org.uk](mailto:alex.albans@coventrycathedral.org.uk)

### CCN Thought for the Week for 20th April – the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship

I have long been inspired by Provost Howard's public prayer after the bombing of Coventry Cathedral in 1940, FATHER FORGIVE.

Of course this resonates with the original words of Jesus from the cross,

"Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."

And also with the subsequent prayer of St Stephen for those stoning him to death,

"Lord do not hold this sin against them."

Witnesses laid their coats at the feet of Saul. It is probable that Stephen's prayer influenced his conversion on the Damascus road taking the new name of Paul. The enemy of Christians had become a friend.

However, Jesus had not waited to become a victim so that he could put into action the forgiveness that he taught. Knowing God's plan to reconcile the world to himself, Jesus took up the way of the cross. This was his initiative: life laid down, proactive love in searching for lost sheep, and drawing all people to himself.

At Pentecost, when the pilgrims heard that God had raised Jesus whom they had crucified, they asked Peter what they should do. Peter told them to repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus. About three thousand made the change of heart. God was reconciling to himself those complicit in Jesus' crucifixion.

Jesus' call for his disciples to take up the cross was more than call to endure suffering: it was a call to intervene in society as he had done amongst the sick and outcast; religious and political authorities; and pilgrim crowds. For dialogue and reconciliation to begin disciples must be ready to go the extra mile, love the enemy and do good to those who hate.

I offer an example from Kaduna in Nigeria where Pastor James used to lead a Christian militia, and Imam Nurayn led a Muslim militia. A wise Imam reminded Nurayn that Muhammed, when attacked, had prayed "My Lord forgive your people for they do not know what they are doing." This led Nurayn to visit in hospital the mother of Pastor James. This was the beginning of their reconciliation, and has borne fruit in programmes of Christian-Muslim Inter Faith Mediation.

I write this as one of the Counsellors of the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship, aware of our links with Coventry through Paul Oestreicher, Lucy Barbour and others. I enjoyed being with our Chair Sue Claydon at the Cathedral on April 8th for the blessing of our Cross, as a new partner of the Community of the Cross of Nails, and we look forward to the presentation of the cross at our Conference in Leeds on April 21st, and future partnership in prayer and action.

Donald Reece

The Revd. Donald Reece retired after 44 years of parish ministry in 2004, and now lives in Oxford. He joined APF in 1956.

### CCN Thought for the Week for 27th April – St Clement Danes, London



For over 1,000 years a church has stood on this part of The Strand in central London. Tradition holds that it was originally built by Danes expelled from the City of London by King Alfred in the

ninth century. It's mentioned in William the Conqueror's Domesday Book (1086) and for nearly 150 years was in the care of the Knights Templar (1170-1312). In more recent centuries it, and its ring of ten bells, has found fame in the first line of the nursery rhyme 'Oranges and lemons'.

The church escaped damage in the Great Fire of London, but was rebuilt in 1682 by Sir Christopher Wren, and a steeple was added to the tower by James Gibbs in 1719. Famous people who attended the church included John Donne and Samuel Johnson (and later, the Revd William Webb Ellis was Rector here during the 1840s – he who famously, whilst playing football at Rugby School one day, picked up the ball and ran with it).

Then, on 10 May 1941, virtually the last night of the blitz, incendiary bombs gutted the building leaving only the walls and tower standing.

In 1953 the church was handed into the keeping of the Air Council, and a world-wide appeal was launched to rebuild St Clement Danes. Bequests and donations from organisations and individuals poured in, so that within two years restoration work could begin. Re-consecrated in 1958 as a perpetual shrine of remembrance, it is today a living church, prayed in daily and visited throughout the year by thousands of people seeking solace and reflection. In addition, it is now the central church of the UK Royal Air Force.

The Books of Remembrance contain the names of all those personnel who have died in service, for whatever reason, since the foundation of the Royal Air Force in 1918. The books are updated three times a year.



Above the sanctuary is an inscription, in Latin, beneath the restored Stuart Crest. In translation it reads:

"Built by Christopher Wren 1682; destroyed by the thunderbolts of air warfare 1941; rebuilt by the Royal Air Force 1958".

Welcome, St Clement Danes, to the Community of the Cross of Nails!

## CCN Thought for the Week for 4th May – Tantur Ecumenical Institute, the Holy Land

Sent to Coventry – Twice

*Dan Koski, a staff member of Tantur Ecumenical Institute, reflects on the journey towards membership in the Community of the Cross of Nails.*

This past April, Tantur Ecumenical Institute of Jerusalem received its Cross of Nails from Coventry Cathedral's Reconciliation Ministry. In a simple but moving service in the Holy Land's only purpose-built ecumenical Christian chapel, Rev. Canon Dr. Sarah Hills of the Community of the Cross of Nails presented Tantur's rector, Fr. Russ McDougall, C.S.C., with our cross as the symbol of our membership.



This moment has been a long time coming; so long, in fact, that the relationship predates the present involvement of virtually all clergy, staff and volunteers of both Tantur and the Reconciliation Ministry. While this lack of institutional memory can be a hindrance in some cases, it is also an indication of the guiding strength behind the vision of joining our respective missions through this ministry, a vision that is larger than any one individual or institutional era.

My involvement with this process began three years ago, when our present rector asked me to work on formalizing the process of Tantur becoming a full Community member following a pilgrimage to Jerusalem led by the Very Rev. John Witcombe, Dean of Coventry Cathedral. Since then, I have sent been "sent to Coventry," (an older English expression which implies ostracism) in a manner of speaking, on two occasions; the spring 2016 and autumn 2017 pilgrimages. Both have been memorable encounters which were filled with moments of reflection, learning and fellowship with others working or volunteering within parish and diocesan ministries, as well as educational, civil society and peacebuilding institutions, as well as offering me a chance to step away from the relentless pressures of life in conflict-torn Jerusalem and Bethlehem and find some peace in the quiet beauty in the gardens, ruins and places of worship in and around Coventry Cathedral. My own pilgrimage tradition while at Coventry is to spend time in reflection in the Chapel of the Madonna of Stalingrad, as it is known, where a copy of the illustration of the Virgin Mary and Child drawn by a military physician and chaplain attached to the Wehrmacht at the height of the horrors of the Siege of Stalingrad during the winter of 1942, is on display. There are few other images that capture the hope of light amongst darkness through the Nativity story as does the Stalingradmadonna, or convey the present circumstances of my adopted home city of Bethlehem, where I have lived and worked for almost a decade.

Upon returning from each visit, I have found that opportunities to share the story of the Cross of Nails within my work at the Institute are plentiful and feel anything but forced. Hundreds of program participants and visitors have shared in our reading of the Litany of Reconciliation, with the only problem usually being that I frequently have to run off more photocopies after every litany due to the number that are kept by our participants.

Contrary to that delightful English expression, "being sent to Coventry" on behalf of Tantur has been a privilege and a blessing. I am pleased to have played a small role in our reception into the Community of the Cross of Nails, and to see this relationship begin a new chapter.

Dan Koski is a permanent resident of Beit Jala, Palestine, and is Communications Director at Tantur Ecumenical institute. He has been informed that he is being sent to Coventry yet again this coming September for the 2018 CCN International Gathering. He can be reached at [dkoski@tantur.org](mailto:dkoski@tantur.org).

## CCN Thought for the Week for 11th May – Flodden Peace Garden at Crookham United Reformed Church



It has been a week of blessings. Coventry 's commitment to peace and reconciliation around the world was reflected last Saturday when our Cross of Nails, to be presented to us just a few days later, was blessed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby as part of Coventry Cathedral's and Diocese's centenary festivities. It was a deeply moving and poignant moment as he blessed it in the midst of a congregation of hundreds including these words:

*"in the name of our Lord the Spirit ,  
who rescues and restores us in peace;  
we send this Cross of Nails to the Flodden Peace Centre  
as a symbol of our partnership in the work of reconciliation;  
for the glory of God*

*and the coming of his kingdom of justice and peace.*

*Amen*

Flodden Peace Centre was opened on 8th May 2013, Red Cross Day, during the 500th anniversary year of the Battle of Flodden, a major battle between Scotland and England in 1513. The loss of life was appalling in just a few short hours –more than 10,000 slain; unimaginable carnage. This was the last major battle before the two countries were united under one crown peaceably and accidentally in 1603. The Peace Centre was the vision of Rev. David Herbert, now Synod Moderator, Northern Synod, United Reformed Church and Diana Herbert, his lovely, late wife. Rev. Herbert went to a meeting about marking 'Flodden 500' in different ways, and "A connection sparked in my head: faith/remembering/Flodden/Crookham United Reformed Church/peace. By working for Peace in the world as it is today, Crookham United Reformed Church could play her part in contextualizing the bitter lesson of war with reference to Flodden on our doorstep. What would people think?"

The fact that you are reading this thought today shows Rev. Herbert's thought has become a wonderful reality. The peace and reconciliation garden, open 24/7, is visited by people of all faiths and none. It is a garden designed "to grow people". At the entrance is a black garden, which is a dark place to be. Next is the red garden, with red swords reminding us of conflict and confrontation. In its midst is a red cross reminding visitors that that the Red Cross and Red Crescent are to be found working impartially where there is conflict. In the grey garden there is a Weeping Pear, planted as a memorial to victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Feelings of loss and desolation are tangible here. At the corner is a white and gold garden from where a beautiful outside stained glass window can be seen, featuring Deacon James from the 7th century who brought the Gospel of Peace to these hills. The theme of peace continues as visitors journey around the garden looking at the stunning timeline, reflecting 500 years of conflict and peace. The last panel is "What will you do for peace?"

Last May I went on pilgrimage to Coventry and then spent time during my sabbatical visiting Partners of Cross of Nails churches in Leipzig, Monchengladbach, Cologne, 3 in Dresden and then 2 in Berlin: miles of thanks for your warm welcome and hospitality. What wonderful Partners in the Cross of Nails you all are and what a privilege it is to be with you and to continue learning from and being a pilgrim with you. I am looking forward to the international gathering in Coventry in September, and to welcoming you to Crookham in the years ahead.

On Tuesday Flodden Field was blessed as Canon Sarah Hills, Canon for Reconciliation, Coventry Cathedral, with Cerys, Stacy, Maite, her team of interns, and Northumbrian and Scottish residents visited and prayed the Coventry litany of reconciliation there. It was a powerful moment. Flodden Peace Centre itself was then further blessed when the sun shone on the garden, and there was a joyful and special service of peace and reconciliation. And so we at Flodden became the newest CCN Partner; the Cross of Nails was welcomed in both Crookham United Reformed Church and in Crookham village, which has about 60 inhabitants. Canon Sarah Hills spoke so inspirationally of peace walks and peace gardens and encouraged the growth and strengthening links with the Community of the Cross of Nails. Our ministry of reconciliation continues and deepens as our vision centres on 2 Corinthians 5 v18-19, remembering the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby's message to begin with our own reconciliation with God, and only then can we be reconciled reconcilers.

We would love to hear from others in the Community of the Cross of Nails, and all are very welcome to come and visit us!

Revd Mary Taylor

m.taylor\_1@btinternet.com

[www.flodden1513.com](http://www.flodden1513.com)

## CCN Thought for the Week for 18th May – two months to go until the CCN International Youth Gathering!

We're just two months away from an exciting and varied week of reconciliation in Coventry this summer for young adults (18-25) from around the world! Held from Sunday 29th July to Friday 3rd August, anyone still interested in attending, now's the time to sign up! (pictured are those attending from South Africa).



Last held in 2012, the CCN International Youth Gathering is a focal point for inter-continental conversation and learning about each of our places in the world, and how we can make our own difference in healing the wounds of history, living in harmony despite difference, and building a culture of peace, in our various contexts.

Over the six days there will be:

- a variety of different prayer and worship, in both the new Cathedral and the Ruins, and in St Michael's House;
- creative learning about Coventry's own incredible story, how it continues to inspire and how it could help in your own context;

- training in the skills and practices needed for reconciliation, both generic, and specific to your own situations;
- real life examples from Community of the Cross of Nails partners and other organisations related to the Reconciliation Team at Coventry;
- great meals in and around the stunning Cathedral quarter, a varied social programme and accommodation right next to the Cathedral.

If our last attendees are anything to go by, you will go home inspired and refreshed, with a new angle on your work and faith, and quite likely some new directions to take that faith and calling to.

The cost all-inclusive for the six days is £300, or £150 without accommodation for those who live locally. Questions? Email [alice.farnhill@coventrycathedral.org.uk](mailto:alice.farnhill@coventrycathedral.org.uk) or view the programme or sign up to attend here. We would love to hear from you, and look forward to having you with us in July!

### CCN Thought for the Week for 25th May – the Joy of Community



We have just held our spring pilgrimage to Coventry – three days of sharing time and space, thoughts and prayers within this incredibly powerful place that we in the Reconciliation Ministry Team are privileged to call our place of work.

It's always something very special to welcome visitors here, for any of us at the Cathedral – we see the buildings afresh ourselves, through the

very clear impact that it has on people seeing it for the first, or for some, the umpteenth, time.

What has made this pilgrimage unusual was the breadth of different organisations that attended, from various parts of the globe, and what they brought to the group – from several practising clergy taking some time on sabbatical and including a visit to Coventry in their valuable time for personal and spiritual growth; from both clergy and lay people not on sabbatical but somehow shoeorning some time here with into their existing busy lives; a hospital chaplain with a pastoral and public workload of which many of us were in awe; a new peace and social justice organisation – every person attending, whether they felt familiar with this thing called reconciliation or no, bringing their own perspectives (and questions!) to the table.

There were some wonderful artworks that arose from our creative reconciliation session, ably led by our intern team (two pictured – thank you David and Philip, both from St Michael the Archangel, Southampton). And amongst everything else, we laughed. There were some stories of unimaginable toughness in the mix, too; there was a wide variety of personalities in the group; yet through much of it we laughed together. A memory of laughter, and a joy in being together, is what we in Coventry will take away from the past week.





And what we want to hang on to! It's not always easy or possible to get together in one place, but it has such value where it can be done – we encourage it when people join us, and to continue to remain in touch with – and meet with, as far as possible – other partners in reconciliation once in the CCN, or to otherwise maintain regular contact. Community requires communing!

One way of doing this in the short term is this September: our autumn pilgrimage this year gives way to our international gathering here in Coventry – five days of being together with 70-80 other CCN individuals. There are spaces still available – do join us if you aren't already – we'd love to have you with us!

In the meantime we wish our pilgrims God speed back to their regular lives and look forward to seeing them all again before long!

With our blessings,

Alice Farnhill

Community of the Cross of Nails Project Officer

## CCN Thought for the Week for 15th June – Kirchenbezirks Esslingen

For an English version of the text below, please scroll down ... with thanks to @Ulrike Rapp-Hirrlinger for the pictures.



Bernd Weißenborn, Ulrike Sämman, David Stone, Siegfried Bessey (v.l.)

*„Friede uns allen – weil wir ihn brauchen!“*

Diese Liedzeile aus dem südafrikanischen Lied ‚Siphamandla Nkosi‘ begleitet das Friedensteam des Kirchenbezirks Esslingen schon eine ganze Weile. Es ist kein Zufall, dass es ausgerechnet eine Liedzeile ist, die uns begleitet, denn Musik spielt eine wichtige Rolle in unserer Arbeit! Man könnte also auch über unser Team sagen: Musik und Friede, uns allen – weil wir sie brauchen!

In der evangelischen Landeskirche in Württemberg ist es üblich, in jedem Kirchenbezirk einen Beauftragten für Friedensarbeit zu haben. Unüblich ist es jedoch, dass dieser ein ganzes Team von Friedensaktiven um sich hat, die seine Arbeit unterstützen, wie es in Esslingen der Fall ist. Aus diesem Team ging vor einiger Zeit der Impuls aus, sich verstärkt mit der Tradition und Arbeit von Coventry auseinanderzusetzen. Im vergangenen Jahr, 2017, hat sich daher eine Gruppe aus Esslingen auf den



Weg nach Coventry gemacht, zu Begegnungen und intensiver Gemeinschaft, und immer mehr reifte der Entschluss, Mitglied der Nagelkreuzgemeinschaft zu werden.

Dieser Weg konnte nun schließlich am 15.04.18 mit der Verleihung von zwei Nagelkreuzen für den Kirchenbezirk würdig beginnen!

#### *Uns allen*

Zwei Kreuze wurden uns von Rev. David Stone übergeben, denn dahinter steht der Gedanke „uns allen“ – uns allen im Bezirk soll eines der Kreuze zur Verfügung stehen, um wechselnd in den Kirchen und Gemeinden zu Friedensgottesdiensten, Andachten und thematischen Veranstaltungen präsent zu sein und also zu wandern. Das andere Kreuz wird fest in der Stadtkirche in Esslingen angebracht und kann Besuchern und Gemeindemitgliedern damit ein Anlaufpunkt sein.

#### *Musik uns allen*

Als Friedensteam hat Musik eine besondere Bedeutung für uns. Sie bietet uns einen tiefen geistlichen Raum der Begegnung mit Gottes Frieden. Weniges kann Menschen so sehr ins Herz gehen wie Musik! Wir erleben Gottes Nähe, seinen Frieden und seinen Segen in gemeinsamer Musik. Daher treffen wir uns regelmäßig, um zu singen und zu spielen, und um diese Freude in unseren Friedensgottesdiensten musikalisch weiterzugeben.

#### *Friede uns allen*

Als ein Bezirk mit insgesamt 22 Kirchengemeinden – städtische wie auch ländliche – umfasst unser Wirkungsgebiet ein breites Spektrum an Menschen. Doch egal wo sie alle leben, wir sind überzeugt: Gottes Frieden, und die Kraft der Versöhnung, wie sie uns im Gebet von Coventry begegnet, geht uns alle etwas an! Angesichts der aktuellen Weltlage, aber auch ganz individuell in unseren Leben: Frieden für alle – weil wir ihn brauchen. Dafür wollen wir uns als Mitglied der Nagelkreuzgemeinschaft in unserem Kirchenbezirk stark machen, und wir freuen uns, damit einen kleinen Teil zum großen Ganzen beizutragen!

#### *“Peace for us all – because we need it!”*

These lines of the South African Song ‘Siphamandla Nkosi’ have guided the peace team of the church district of Esslingen for a while; not a coincidence that it should be song lyrics, because music plays an important role in what we do! One could say about our team: Music and peace, for us all – because we need them!

It is normal in the Evangelische Landeskirche Württemberg (Protestant Federal Church of Württemberg) to have a commissioner for peace work in every church district, however it is unusual for this person to have a supporting team like we have in Esslingen. A while ago, this team started taking a closer look at the story and work of Coventry, and in 2017, a group from Esslingen decided to make their way to Coventry for a pilgrimage, and more and more it became clear that we should become a part of the Community of the Cross of Nails. This new phase began on 15th April 2018 with the presentation of two Crosses of Nails to the church district of Esslingen!

#### *For us all...*

Two crosses because our idea is “For us all”: a Cross present across our different churches and parishes for peace services, prayers and other events; a wandering cross, a not completely new idea but still

unusual within the CCN; and the other Cross located in the Stadtkirche (City Church) in Esslingen, to be an open place for visitors and members of the congregation.

### *Music for us all...*

Music plays an important role for our peace team. It offers us a deep spiritual space to encounter the peace of God. Only a few things can move a human heart like music can! We experience God's closeness, his peace and his blessing in shared music. Therefore, we meet regularly to sing and to play, and to pass on the joy in our peace services through music.

### *Peace for us all ...*

As a church district with 22 different parishes – urban and rural – we can reach a huge variety of people. But no matter where, the peace of God and the power of reconciliation, as we experience them in the Coventry Litany of Reconciliation, are important to us all! Because of the world we live in and our individual situations: Peace for all – we all need it. That is what we want to work for in our church district as a partner of the Community of the Cross of Nails, and we are happy to contribute a small bit to the bigger picture!

## CCN Thought for the Week for 22nd June – St Aidan's Primary School, Hartlepool



St Aidan's CE Memorial Primary School is the 41st International Cross of Nails (ICON) School in the world, and we are very proud of our title!

A month ago, on Monday 21st May, 2018, we held our second Annual ICONS Day, and all 350 children in the school were off timetable for the day, concentrating instead on all things Peace and Reconciliation.

We began the day with an act of collective worship, where we looked at the story of Pentecost, and how God's Holy Spirit brings people together and helps us to communicate together, regardless of where we have come from or what has happened before.

Our ICONS Council reminded the school of the long word we had spent a lot of time thinking of...and many of the children remembered the word, and chorused it together; RECONCILIATION! When asked what this long word meant, there was a lot of head scratching and very few hands went up. The children were all set the challenge of finding out exactly what it means and they all returned to their classrooms for a day of fun learning activities.

Before the end of the day, the children returned to the hall for a closing act of worship and a 'showing assembly'. Each class shared a sample of their day's learning and there was some wonderful work produced. We had storyboards and origami paper cranes, wall displays and photo exhibitions. We had prayers and poems and actions.

The youngest children had thought about people who have hurt them in the past and wrote their names on their own hand. In a large paddling pool, they all washed their hands and learned about forgiveness. One child said he could still faintly see the name of the person who had made him sad,

still there on his hand, so we talked about how sometimes we need to take some time to forgive, and sometimes it is hard work.

And then came the real test, and the whole school were asked if they could define what Reconciliation really is. Many, many hands shot up into the air and a little year one child was asked for her thoughts. She said 'reconciliation is when we make friends with people and play with them again'. Amen and amen.

May this ICON School, the whole Community of the Cross of Nails, and humankind beyond, become a generation of people who make friends with people and play with them again. And may we each inspire others to do the same.

For the glory of God, and the establishing of God's Kingdom here, on Earth as it is in Heaven.

## CCN Thought for the Week for 29th June – Somerset College, ICON, South Africa

### Two principles of giving

To ask or not to ask?

How often should we ask others to give?

As a well-resourced school, known for serving a largely affluent community, we are regularly and frequently asked by a wide range of organisations and NGOs to make financial or other contributions to the important work that they do in our community.

'We need to limit the number of causes we support,' I hear people say. 'We can't meet everyone's need and the more we bombard those that can give with requests, the more resistant they become and donor fatigue kicks in, which ends up being counterproductive.'

This reasoning is unhelpful as it wrongly presumes that our community is just one source of support. If this were true, it would be right to limit the number of areas to engage with. But our community is as many sources of support as there are individuals in it.

So I have been arguing the opposite for some time. Bombard the school with requests on a daily basis if needs be, but help the community how to respond to these requests.

You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves a person who gives cheerfully. (2 Corinthians 9:7 – NLT)

This verse teaches us three things about giving:

- Give Giving is important, no matter how much anyone has. This is clearly easier for me to say, as a person who has far more than I need. But the principle is the same for everyone and, like the poor widow's offering (Mark 12:41-44), I have seen people with very little, tithe and give generously to others.
- You must each decide in your heart how much to give.
- Give selectively This is crucial. Don't feel the need to respond to every request that comes your way – that is the best way to fuel donor fatigue. It's OK not to respond to some requests. It's not OK to respond to no requests, however!
- Don't give in response to pressure.

- Give willingly now that the pressure is off from having to respond to every request, follow your heart and give to a cause that you are passionate about – and put your heart and soul into it.
- God loves a person who gives cheerfully.

This works. A few years ago, a local organisation asked us for donations of wool to make dolls for the orphaned children in their care. In that same week, another organisation asked us to collect football boots for a township football club that was running a local tournament during the FIFA World Cup. We made both requests to the school in the same week, whilst stressing the principles of giving as laid out above. Those students with a heart for children gave wool and made dolls for the orphaned children. Those with a passion for football donated boots. The response from both appeals was substantial and those that gave did so cheerfully. Imagine if we had told one organisation that we weren't able to help them for fear of donor fatigue? Not only would they have missed out on some valuable resources, but I am not sure that the organisation would have received more.

Since encouraging our community to respond in this way and thus increasing the number of requests for help, it is difficult to quantify whether we give more, but it is clear that we are giving more widely and that there is more engagement with a wider spectrum of our community than ever before.

To ask or not to ask? Ask, ask, ask! But before that, teach how to respond.

Giving better

By and large, our community is kind and generous when it comes to giving to those in need around us. We regularly have 'drives' for food, clothes, blankets, toiletries or toys throughout the year.

This has been identified as the Good Deeds model of giving. Someone identifies a need, people respond and others benefit. When I give using the Good Deeds model, the thought process is as follows:

*I have, you don't have.*

*I think I know what you need, you don't get the opportunity to tell me what you really need.*

*I give, you receive.*

*I feel good, you feel obliged to be grateful.*

*I do things for people*

*We may never meet each other.*

I realise that this is a generalisation and that many people use this Good Deeds model with a pure motive and a genuine desire to help. It is good. But there is a better way.

With the Community Engagement (CE) model of giving, the rules are different. I can't offer to do anything for or give anything to anyone before the other party has offered something in return. This immediately implies something different and sometimes new: the need for me to engage. I need to identify someone or a group of people and meet them. We need to spend time getting to know one another and hearing each other's story. Only then are we in a better position to know what we both need and start to serve one another.

The thought process here is different:

*I don't presume to know what you need*

*We meet and get to know one another*

*I give, you give*

*I receive, you receive*

*I learn, you learn*

*I do things with people.*

*We get to know each other.*

A group of University Professors in the Eastern Cape of South Africa wanted to engage with a local crèche. They contacted the lady in charge and under the CE rules, they met. After sharing some of their stories and spending time together, the lady asked the Professors to paint some rooms and provide some furniture. But they weren't allowed to do this until they had agreed something that the lady would do in return. They both got stuck with their mind sets. "What is a lady running a township crèche capable of doing for us?" thought the professors. "I can't offer these people anything. They're educated and clever, I'm just a township woman" thought the lady. Finally, they found a solution and the lady offered to give the Professors cooking lessons.

At Somerset College, two Grade 8 (14 year old) boarders were tasked with putting this CE model into practice. They decided to visit the ladies who work in the kitchen. Up until then, the only interaction the students had with them was to say hello, receive food from them, and say thank you (nothing wrong with that). The ladies' interaction was to say hello, serve up a plate of food and wash the dishes afterwards.

The boarders and the ladies chatted and heard a little of one another's stories. The boarders asked the ladies to teach them to cook and prepare a meal and a couple of the ladies asked the two boarders for a guitar lesson.

This model doesn't only have to be between rich and poor. One student recently engaged with a Swiss neighbour who had recently moved in. The student taught his Swiss neighbour how to surf while in return, was given a German lesson. Another student struggled to find someone to engage with and asked if he could engage with me. We chatted and in return for some help with his French conversation, he taught me how to juggle! We both left knowing each other a little better.

Throughout this process, both parties give and both parties receive. Barriers of prejudice and misconceptions are broken down and are replaced with bridges of knowledge, mutual respect and hope. Both parties feel better about the experience. This process is more time consuming, it demands more from us and may be more uncomfortable than the good deeds model, but it is so worth it if we are serious about changing the unsustainable status quo in South Africa.

*Giving is good, but engagement is better.*

[CCN Thought for the Week for 6th July – St Martin's Church, Coney Street, York](#)

Monica Lawrence from St Martin's writes: "Many visitors from all over the world come to York, and some come into St Martin's, a church today dedicated to peace and reconciliation. We provide a pew prayer as a form of outreach, lately with the Coventry Litany of Reconciliation printed on the reverse

side, and we find it certainly helps us reflect more deeply on the three CCN remits – Healing the Wounds of History, Living with Difference and Celebrating Diversity, and Building a Culture of Peace – but also it focuses how we apply our prayers in daily life today. Hopefully, the prayers may encourage those who take them away from St Martin’s, as well as our local supporters of our Community of the Cross of Nails link.

This month, we celebrate the life of Nelson Mandela 100 years since his birth, and International Nelson Mandela Day, this year on Wednesday 18th July”.

**God of truth and justice, we commemorate the life of Nelson Mandela in this centenary year of his birth.**

**May we take inspiration from his vision that all can live together in harmony with equal opportunity. Guide us, that wherever there is injustice, we may support initiatives that promote justice and truth. Amen.**

**“Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity,  
it is an act of justice”**

**Nelson Mandela**

**1918-2013**



[CCN Thought for the Week for 13th July – we look forward to the International Youth Gathering in two weeks!](#)

Plans are coming together for our International Youth Gathering in two weeks’ time! We are really looking forward to welcoming our 23 visitors from South Africa, across Asia, Germany, Belarus, Poland, Georgia, the USA and the UK, for five days of learning, talking, praying and sitting around the table together. This is the stage of tackling all the fine details such as who arrives when, who eats what, and other such essentials, prior to confirming details with those poised to make the journey here very soon, so things are a little busy at the Coventry end at the moment, but that’s all good!

Overall, the youth gathering is a culmination of lots of people’s effort and investment: the German CCN particularly (to whom a very big thank you!)



who have made so much of the event possible, but also all other benefactors and partners who are funding individuals to attend as well; those who have oiled the wheels in various ways to enable the logistics to work out; and those who are giving up their own time to come and speak, run a workshop, run some worship or discussion, or to otherwise offer help. ... And of course all those individuals giving up time to attend.

There will be several occasions for others (of any age!) to join in with various parts of the programme if they wish: our Taizé Worship on the 1st August (to which we joyfully welcome also a large group of young people from Spain), and our Cathedral by Candlelight quiet reflective prayer evening on 2nd August, both at 7.30pm in the main Cathedral; and Bishop Peter Price's opening talk on being a Christian peacemaker in a world of war, on 29th July at 4.45pm. Look out for more information on these on our Facebook and twitter pages (@ccncoventry) in the next two weeks, and just come along if you would like to take part.

The last youth gathering was six years ago, so most of us in the gathering team haven't been here for one before ourselves! As our South African CCN team have said, it's a privilege to be part of the process, and we look forward to the sharing of light and love garnered on this journey, both here in Coventry and more importantly, beyond.

Alice Farnhill, Community of the Cross of Nails Project Officer

### CCN Thought for the Week for 20th July – Burundi Update!



At the beginning of July, Canon Sarah and I travelled to Bujumbura in Burundi to deliver training in Reconciliation skills and to continue to strengthen our relationship with CCN partners and friends in the region.

With the Diocese of Bujumbura, we trained 40 people: 10 pastors, 10 Mothers Union representatives, 10 Youth Leaders and 10 parish committee

members over 4 days in reconciliation. The training included bible study on reconciliation, facilitation skills, conflict theory and active listening skills that gave them the tools they need to be reconcilers in their own community. The training delivered will also enable the trainees to train others with the hope that they can bring peace and reconciliation to their communities.

The training went really well and the group were very engaged and enthusiastic about learning from us. We are very thankful to Bishop Eraste, Bishop of Bujumbura, for inviting us to Bujumbura and Dean Jean Marie of the Cathedral for hosting us while we were there. We are also extremely grateful for Rev Canon Israel who has worked tirelessly with us to make this project happen.

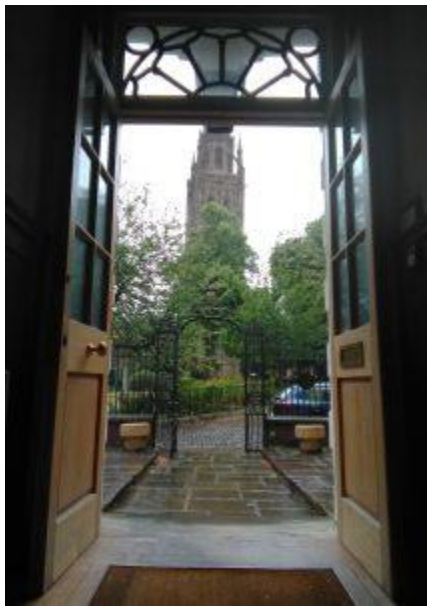
While we were in Burundi we also met with CCN members Cord and New Generation. This was a good opportunity to see the great work that they do in Burundi. Canon Sarah and I were inspired and encouraged by them in the work that they do to bring peace and reconciliation.



The entire trip for Canon Sarah and I really reminded us that the work of the Reconciliation Ministry here at Coventry Cathedral and the CCN around the world is vitally important and it reinvigorated our commitment to the work that we do in peace and reconciliation.

Cerys Smith, UK Reconciliation Intern at Coventry Cathedral

## CCN Thought for the Week for 29th July – the International Youth Gathering opens!



It's a grey, blustery, rainy day in Coventry, but we are looking forward to the week ahead! Bishop Peter Price, former Bishop of Bath and Wells, was due to deliver the youth gathering opening talk this afternoon, and very sadly he's now not able to be with us today. His shortened text is below however, and you can read the full text [here](#).

This morning I watched as the wind blew the remaining petals from one of the 'Peace' roses in my garden. Close by another was in full bloom, and still more in bud, waiting to break forth and offer blossom and scent – symbolising for me the birthing, blooming and dying of acts of peace in our world today.

My first conscious act of peacemaking occurred when a gang of teenage boys burst in on a youth club I was helping to organise in South London. Their leader quickly identified one of the weakest looking boys and tried to pick a fight. Almost without thinking I stepped between the two and after a short conversation, offered to let them hit me instead of their intended victim. "We couldn't do that," the leader said, "You're a decent sort of bloke." "So is he," I replied, "and so are you." The atmosphere lightened. The gang went off. I saw the boy to his home. The next day I encountered the gang on the street. They greeted me like a long lost friend, and we had no more trouble.

Many of us have been in situations where we either have been, or could be peacemakers. Most movements for peace in conflict begin at the local level. They begin with simple acts – sometimes something as ordinary as a smile, a kind word, or a question: 'How are you today?' Or as one community builder put it: 'If I was asked to give one piece of advice to young people today it would be, 'Get to know your neighbours.'



Like many in my teens I was struggling with matters of faith and belief. I sensed that any God I would believe in, would have to be one who understood what it was like to be human, as well as one who was concerned with the realities of the world as it is, not simply One who was using human experience as a conveyor belt for heaven. I had been taught in Sunday school that 'God became human.' The challenge for me was could God in Jesus genuinely become human; and if so what kind of human being? And if the kind of human being Jesus was, then what kind of human being was I to be?

One clue lay in a remark of Jesus: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be recognised as children of God.' This statement revealed two truths: all humanity is equal before God, but to be recognised as a child of God, one needs to be a peacemaker. In 1967 I married a woman from Ireland. It was at the beginning of the conflict known as the 'Irish Troubles.' Over the next nearly forty years civil war raged. Early on we had to make a decision. Were we to try and be peacemakers, or were we to leave that to other people? For the next four decades we spent time on the streets, in people's homes, at centres for reconciliation, along with others seeking to find the things that make for peace. It was challenging, exciting, depressing and hopeful almost all at the same time. We still contribute now, even though for many people the conflict is over.

Peace loving, is not the same as peace making. We all love the idea of peace. But peace making is costly in any society. To use Jesus's language it involves a 'laying down of life' for the welfare of others, friends, enemies. One of my friends building peace in Ireland used to say:

Pray peace

Think peace

Speak peace

Act peace.

When we choose to act for peace, paradoxically we will meet hostility and enmity. Peace threatens power. You have only to look at the lives of Martin Luther King, Ghandi, Dag Hammarskjöld, and many others to realise the truth that this happens.

Today we are in Coventry Cathedral. I first came here in 1961 as the new cathedral was being dedicated. What moved me then, and still does, is walking through the ruins of the old cathedral destroyed in the blitz of 1940. Looking over the smouldering ruins the next morning the then Provost Richard Howard preached forgiveness in his destroyed cathedral. He vowed to rebuild it as a sign of reconciliation and of hope. It was message that was not appreciated in Coventry at the time. But today it is the centre of a worldwide ministry that is gathering people from all over the world to consider the things that make for peace.

I was privileged to receive the Coventry Cross of Nails in Jerusalem in 1999, along with people who had suffered greatly for their commitment to peace. I felt honoured, and something of a fraud alongside such courageous people. I have been in churches in Germany, South Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere where the Coventry Cross of Nails is displayed as a symbol of their commitment to the ending of conflict and the making of peace. Each symbolises a truth: you don't reconcile with friends you reconcile with enemies.

As I look again at the 'Peace' rose outside my window, I see petals fall, symbolising others who have gone before, even people like myself in the later years of life. I see flowers in bloom, people, mostly hidden and apparently insignificant praying peace, thinking peace, speaking peace and acting peace. I see too unopened buds – symbols of peace makers in the making – perhaps you. I hope so.

I am sorry not to have been with you, but you have been in my thoughts and prayers and will remain so. I hope these next few days will be ones in which you respond to the call to be recognised as children of God – no longer peace lovers, but peace makers.

## CCN Thought for the Week for 3rd August – farewell to our International Youth Gatherers!

...and what a fantastic, inspiring and suitably exhausting week it's been for our 17 youth gatherers and all of us on the organising team! Discussion, singing, learning, worshipping, socialising and simply hanging out together in and around the nucleus of St Michael's House's reconciliation ministry team base.



Here in Coventry we wish them all the very best as they head back to their regular lives in Germany, Austria, Poland, the USA, Mauritius, India, South Africa and elsewhere in the UK. Please stay in touch!

It's been a fantastic team effort as well, and thanks to all staff, interns, session leaders, overseas colleagues and Cathedral volunteers who have helped make this all work so well. View the daily videos from the gathering at the foot of this post!

Each night a different nationality team closed the day with a team-led compline, and below is part of the prayer from the South African group, with thanks to Rhine Phillip Tsobotsi Koloti:

*As we honor the legacy of our revered Archbishop Desmond Tutu, we also honor his commitment to prayers that are not independent of; but that are accompanied by concrete actions for justice. It is in this spirit that we recognize that thoughts and prayers ring hollow, in the absence of action for justice.*

*Let us pray...*

*God most compassionate, God most merciful*

*We recognize the futility of lighting candles for the victims of Terrorism*

*When the blood of the dead protestors stain the pages of the report which lies yet unattended*

*We recognize the hypocrisy of offering thoughts and prayers for the so-called conflict in Israel and Palestine*

*While keeping our beliefs about divine access to land "in check"*

*(Father Forgive)*

*We recognize the futility of offering food parcels for the poor during the holidays,*

*When we support structural systems that prescribe unjust minimum wages,*

*Which can barely sustain a family on cheap genetically modified foods*

*We recognize the futility of praying about state capture*

*While the resources of the country remain firmly captured in past economic injustices*

*(Father Forgive)*

*We recognize the futility of offering thoughts and prayers*

*In the aftermath of the rapes and murders of lesbians in this country*

*When we judge, based on our sacred texts, and cultural beliefs*

*same love to be unnatural,*

*instead of recognizing that love is kind and patient and knows not judgement;*

*Love is indeed divine*

*(Father Forgive)*

*We recognize the futility of building shelters for battered women*

*While we still preach that the man is the head of the home*

*We recognize the futility of prayers for reconciliation*

*when there is little action for reparation*

*(Father Forgive)*

*Indeed, we recognize God most compassionate, that there is little use for thoughts and prayers when death and destruction are already before us*

*Help us therefore, dear God, to concern ourselves more with life before death, than worry about life after death*

*(Father Forgive)*

*Give us the courage, our creator,*

*to supplement, strengthen and sustain our thoughts and prayers with policy and change;*

*With active agitation for a world of equity, dignity and truth;*

*And a yearning for peace that's not simply the absence of war but the presence of justice.*

*Om Shanti Shanti Shanti*

*(Adapted from an opening prayer: 7th Annual Desmond Tutu Peace Lecture – 7 October 2017) – Sarojini Nadar*

*And from the German team:*

*O Lord, thank you for this wonderful day.*

*As we travel home, we pray for a safe journey.*

*We pray for our families and friends who are expecting us.*

*Let us keep this wonderful gathering in our hearts and minds:*

*The talks we had with different people*

*The discussions we had in this group*

*The nice evenings we've had together*

*and also the new friendships we are building*

*Lord, we also pray for those who could not take part.*

*Give them the chance to join in the next one.*

*Thinking back over the last week, we think of those close to our hearts.*

*Amen*

Day 1

<https://youtu.be/dwui4PbvBhc>

Day 2

<https://youtu.be/aRsbmgMZxU8>

Day 3

<https://youtu.be/F-NTNj86bly>

Day 4

<https://youtu.be/LUmWUFbR3IE>

Day 5

[https://youtu.be/fzMnUJx\\_hlg](https://youtu.be/fzMnUJx_hlg)

## CCN Thought for the Week for 10th August – a wrap-up on the International Youth Gathering

After such a wonderful few days finishing just a week ago, we thought we'd share with you this final summing-up video, which shares the views on their experience in Coventry of a number of the young adults who came along. Watch and be inspired too!

With thanks, as ever, to Tim Wagner for his filming!

<https://youtu.be/KmUVIHgb3o0>

## CCN Thought for the Week for 23rd September – Welcome to our International Gathering attendees!



Thought for the Week returns after a long summer break, and on this occasion it's suitably in anticipation of a very promising week coming up! We look forward hugely to welcoming a good number of our partner organisations and individuals to Coventry for our members' gathering here on Wednesday, for four days of being together, prayer, learning, sharing, laughing, singing, and coming to sit around the table as members of our unique Community. It's

rare indeed that we get a chance to do this – the last time was in 2012 – and we are blessed to have such a geographical spread among those attending, comprising both existing partners and those who are not yet part of the Community formally – we've guests coming from Burundi, South Africa, Rwanda, Germany, Austria, the UK, USA and Canada, India and Pakistan.

There is bound to be much inspiring and fruitful discussion arising from the few days, and we look forward to bringing you more about the Gathering in the coming weeks. For now, to all those attending, and all those who will be following events on social media, Welcome, from Canon Sarah and the Reconciliation Ministry Team!

## CCN Thought for the Week for 12th October – 'Journey of Hope' reconciliation training

*This week's thought carries news of a fantastic training opportunity in reconciliation taking place next year, but with applications sought in the next few weeks – a golden opportunity to learn from and with others from across the church (with apologies, this is currently for participants in the UK only).*



St Michael's House at Coventry Cathedral is delighted to be part of a new ecumenical network of peacebuilding and reconciliation centres across the UK, collaborating on a project called Reconcilers Together. This is formed of: St Michael's House at Coventry Cathedral, Corrymeela, The Rose Castle Foundation, Bridge Builders Ministries, St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace, The Blackley Centre, Place for Hope, and the Archbishop of Canterbury's Reconciliation Ministry. Our shared mission is to inspire and equip Christian leaders to be a reconciling presence in their churches and communities.

We are offering 20 churches a training opportunity to establish or develop a ministry of reconciliation in their church and/or community. Between January – June 2019 we will mentor and support 20 participants through monthly 2 day residentials at 5 of our centres, with continued resourcing throughout 2019. The programme is funded in part by Allchurches Trust, so all training, accommodation, food, and travel costs will be covered.

As the CCN has a 'commitment to working and praying for peace, justice and reconciliation among our network through mutual support, fellowship, and occasional joint action', we hope that this will be a useful opportunity for you and for other organisations or individuals in your area.

We particularly welcome people who have:

- A leadership role within their church or faith congregation
- Support from their congregation or church leadership to develop reconciliation work
- A long-term commitment to a ministry of reconciliation in their church and community
- Some basic experience of reconciliation work, dialogue facilitation or mediation
- An ability to lead diverse groups and to inspire others

Do spread the word to anyone who you think would benefit from this programme. More details, the dates for the training residentials, and information on how to apply can be found here: <https://www.reconcilerstogether.co.uk/leadership-training>

### CCN Thought for the Week for 19th October – Revd Canon Dr Sarah Hills

A short time ago Canon Sarah revealed that she will be leaving Coventry at Christmas to follow a calling and take up a post as Vicar of Holy Island, Lindisfarne, Northumberland in the new year.

We will miss her wit and wisdom and care of our team and our work terribly.... but we're so pleased for her that she is going somewhere so unique and special and where her talents will be so well used.

See her speak about the move, and reflect on her time at Coventry and with the CCN, here:

<https://youtu.be/jUto5RnPOz0>

### CCN Thought for the Week for 26th October – a look back on last month's CCN International Gathering



What a week it was! Take a look at these videos to revisit the occasion on which 65 people from across 30 or so different partner organisations came together here in Coventry for four days to spend time together, pray, sing, reflect, eat, drink, dance, listen, talk and share. A thoroughly memorable few days!

CCN International Members' Gathering

## CCN Thought for the Week for 2nd November – the Netherlands CCN Board

A gorgeous sunny day saw 28 Dutch board members meet in Utrecht on Wednesday 31st October, for a great day of catching up, visiting and worship together. We met in the wonderful pre-Reformation Domkerk, once the prime ecclesiastical building in the Netherlands and a mighty treat to see, and the meeting opened with a discussion about 'Father Forgive'. The relationship between forgiveness from God and the forgiveness that needs to flow from the individuals or parties concerned; the strength of everyone across the network praying those same words; and how important it is to keep revisiting why Provost Howard's words are so powerful, in that they encompass every facet of where a situation can need to be blessed with forgiveness in order to heal. At the next meeting the group undertook to discuss the word 'Father' and their different interpretations of this according to their communities' needs.



The Dutch board has 14 member organisations, 7 of whom have Coventry Crosses of Nails and the remainder of whom are simply interested in the network and possibly working towards applying to join in the fullness of time – two of whom, communities from Breukelen and from Wageningen we have either had, or look forward to having, visit us in Coventry on pilgrimage and receiving a Cross in the near future! It was fascinating to hear these and everyone else's quick updates, whether it's the need for a Cross to move due to a church closing, the travels of a Cross that has multiple 'owners', or simply more good work being done with nothing special to report.

We finished up at the Nikola Community, an ecumenical community of men and women located in three townhouses on the banks of the river – a peaceful homely place to have a late soup and rolls lunch all together. Thank you to Bert Kuipers and Annaleis Steenbrink for organising, and to all the Board for making me so welcome!

Alice Farnhill, CCN Project Officer

## CCN Thought for the Week for 9th November – the German Board



The coach stopped right in front of the hotel when I arrived in Hamburg on Friday the 26th of October. Some participants of the board were already in the hotel which was actually founded for hosting fishermen and has a little chapel providing them a place to pray and worship as well.

After everyone had arrived, we introduced ourselves to one another since there were a lot of new faces for me in the group of 9 participants. Unfortunately a lot of members were ill and so we were just a little group.

Of course this fact did us not stop from catching up on each other's projects, reflecting on the success of International Youth Gathering and the International Gathering and thinking about how to strengthen the created friendships. Moreover we advised about applications for the CCN and talked about the finances.

One big topic was the question of how to involve young people into the CCN and especially how to continue the relationships between the young adults from the international Gathering.

It was a joy to visit the St. Michael Church in the centre of Hamburg, meeting with some members of the parish who presented us their reconciliation work and would like to enter the CCN. The following visit to the crypt where Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (son of Johann Sebastian Bach) is buried was also a pleasure.

After a sunny walk back along the river and through the Portuguese region of Hamburg, we continued with the conference by getting to know about touching stories of reconciliation projects in Germany but talked about the budget as well.

I have to say that the Board conference was really well organised and everyone was focused on the topics till late in the night although the members had mostly travelled long distances from their homes, jobs and families.

After being productive, we held the litany in the hotel's chapel and the Board members presented Canon Sarah gifts for her farewell including a friendship book and "Eierlikoer", a typical German sweet schnapps. Of course Sarah also had a little present for the Board – in her opinion an elephant has to be a member of the German CCN and so she introduced little Benjamin to everyone.

Finally, after breakfast on Sunday, we all went to the church of St. Katharinen, which is also a member of the CCN, and worshipped together as a marvellous end of the German board and drunk tea and coffee afterwards.

Ricarda Pasch, Reconciliation Ministry Intern

## CCN Thought for the Week for 23rd November – the USA Board

At the close of Thanksgiving week, it's a chance to look back on the recent meeting of the CCN's USA Board at Virginia Theological Seminary earlier this month.

Slightly poignant, with the stepping down of Revd Mark Pendleton as President after "more years than he can count", nonetheless it was also an opportunity to warmly welcome Revd Robert Childers, from Good Shepherd Episcopal Church at Lookout Mountain in Tennessee, who enthusiastically took on the weight of the challenge and the President's pectoral Cross of Nails! To quote some of Mark's closing words in his final summer newsletter:

"It has been a joy serving in this role. As in my work in an Episcopal parish in Exeter, New Hampshire, the life within organisations and institutions are in a state of change, flux and re-imagining. The CCN is in the camp of those networks and fellowships that are seeking to find new ways to do what has long been our shared goal – promote peace and forgiveness in a world in need of healing. The iconic Cross of Nails and the Coventry story of destruction, rebirth and hope have inspired so many people around the world. It continues to move me to work and pray for change".





Mark's final meeting as president was an opportunity for reflection on a number of gentle and not so gentle questions: is the US board itself an agent for change? Where does or should the energy reside in the CCN network – in the national boards, or at Coventry? More generally, what is the specifically US call to reconciliation, and how are the US partners and board ambassadors for reconciliation?

The role of partners in a national board was an important discussion point too. It's not just a question of "What's in it for me?" but much more "How can I participate?" To some degree, answers to these questions drive the further ones about the nature of membership, what it's for and how it's managed. Being part of something bigger, and being connected, and how this is achieved in any practical way across large geographical areas, are always key reasons for any of the board networks to keep doing what they do.

Frequently the discussion came back to the nature of the discourse around the erosion of cherished values in the current political climate, a source of almost universal concern. How are we all addressing this?



The board's much valued financial support to Coventry for its intern programme and more generally, and how this can be sustained in the medium to long term, were discussed too.

A really valuable couple of days, with a wonderful bunch of CCN partners in a lovely setting! Which comes back to the very simplest of reasons that the CCN national boards exist: enabling partners to get together with those with like minds and similar or complementary issues, mix, share and be inspired (and have some fun too).

**Alice Farnhill, CCN Project Officer**

## CCN Thought for the Week for 30th November – Coventry diocese visit to partners in Berlin



Christ the King

This time last week I was in Berlin. I was privileged to be part of a group of clergy from the Diocese of Coventry visiting Cross of Nails communities in that great city. For four days we heard extraordinary stories of people working so hard to bring reconciliation to that great city. Stories of past, present and future peace-making.

Among the churches we visited was the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, which stands at the heart of the city and has so many echoes of Coventry. It was, like our Cathedral, 'the Bishop's Church'. It was, like our Cathedral, devastated by bombing in the Second World War – our visit coincided with that of Bishop Christopher's, to be present for the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of this destruction. The ruins, like our Cathedral, stand preserved

as a testament to the horrors of war. And most importantly, like our Cathedral, a magnificent new church has been built, as a symbol of resurrection and healing.

Go inside this new church, seemingly constructed entirely of gorgeous blue glass, and the echoes continue. Ahead of you is a beautiful golden statue of Jesus, suspended above the communion table. Once again, like in Coventry, Christ as King is the focal point.

But this image of Jesus as King is very different to the tapestry in Coventry.

The first thing that struck me was his long face, how sad he looked. This was a church built for people who were broken, sorrowful and ashamed. Christ does not look down in judgement, disdain or anger. He is sorrowful too. Christ shares in our sorrows and walks with us through the darkest times in our lives.

But as I moved closer to him, to receive communion, I noticed that as my perspective changed, his face shortened, and his countenance became less sorrowful. Maybe it was my imagination, but as I received the bread and wine, he seemed to me to have a look of deep peace.

Next I noticed his hands and feet, which clearly bear the marks of the crucifixion. I was reminded that resurrection doesn't take away what happened in the past. Christ was still crucified and still bears the scars of that horror. The wounds, tragedies and mistakes in our lives can be redeemed through the resurrection, but they won't be wiped out. That's why both Coventry and Berlin chose to leave their ruined churches in place. Reminder of the past, of the scars in war, but now in places of new life and resurrection.



And then I noticed Jesus' arms. At first glance I thought they were stretched out as on the cross. But then I looked again, and realised I was wrong. His arms are stretched out in an act of blessing. Even in their sorrow, even as the people this church was first built for grappled to come to terms with the horrors of what their country had done, Christ the King blessed them. His love and grace are never limited, never withheld. Whatever we have done, when we turn to Christ for forgiveness, his blessing is there for us.

*Father, forgive.*

*Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.*

Revd Charlotte Gale

### [CCN Thought for the Week for 7th December – a look back at 2018](#)

On the eve of the final Cross of Nails presentation of this year, to the parish of Abbeydale and Millhouses in Sheffield, it's a chance to reflect on what an incredibly busy year this has been! With a record number of new partners joining (17), two major gatherings in Coventry, visits from royalty and from the Archbishop of Canterbury, celebrations and reflections as Coventry Diocese and Cathedral mark their 100th anniversary, and a new baby sibling for the CCN, Together for Hope, being born, it

has been full of blessings. All this, as well as plenty of day-to-day enquiries and people coming to visit our reconciliation ministry.



Our royal visit came in January, when we were all incredibly honoured to welcome the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge (William and Kate) to Coventry on a stunning sunny day. They visited the ruins and new cathedral with our three Canons, met the staff of the social enterprise who run the ever-popular Rising Café in the Cathedral undercroft, heard Canon Sarah speak and met the choir.

We welcomed our third Cuban member, the First Baptist Church of Matanzas, in February, thanks to lots of relationship building on the part of the US Board and specifically Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in North Carolina. This was a really special and very memorable service, with the whole congregation literally taking a hold of the Cross of Nails and its significance. April brought us three more partners: the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship whose relationship with us grew in part from Canon Paul Oestreicher's

involvement; the Evangelisches Bildungswerk im Landkreis Esslingen, near Stuttgart, and St Clement Danes Church, the Central Church of the Royal Air Force, in central London, in the RAF's own 100th anniversary year. Canon Sarah then travelled to the Holy Land in May with our reconciliation interns to Tantur Ecumenical Institute to present them with a replacement Cross and meet with some other partners in the area.

In early May we welcomed Flodden Peace Garden in Northumberland, a small but wonderful space for peace and reflection near the site of the biggest battle between Scotland and England in the 1500's, and then we had a few months' breather before the Evangelisch Lutherische Innenstadtgemeinde Rostock and the Anhaltische Diakonissenanstalt Dessau joined us in the same weekend in September. October brought the Church of St Michael the Archangel, Southampton into the fold, and November a mobile Cross to the Diakonie Neuendettelsau, presented at Coventry while they were here on pilgrimage, and the worldwide Mothers' Union. Our final Cross this year will be presented very shortly (8th December) to the parish of Abbeydale and Millhouses in Sheffield – Canon Sarah's former parish!

Quite aside from these partners, five new ICON schools have also joined us; three in Coventry diocese, and two in Devon.

Events and welcoming people to Coventry have been a major focus this year, and the Cathedral has been looking at its best with the Chapel of Unity finally repaired and unveiled and the path around it open! Seventeen young people from Germany, Austria, the UK, USA, South Africa, Mauritius, India and Eastern Europe attended our International Youth Gathering, which was such an inspiring and uplifting five days for all connected with it, with some fantastic friendships forged. Its spirit lives on in the brilliant daily videos which Tim Wagner made for us, viewable above and in our thought for the week gallery. Two months later, 65 people from right across our membership came to our International Members' Gathering in Coventry, again for several days, with many good conversations and connections had and made. Around these were a full pilgrimage in May



and shorter pilgrimage visits from Breukelen in the Netherlands, and Neuendettelsau in Germany, and various other short visits from contacts near and far.

The Cathedral and Diocese's 100th anniversary has been a major focus for other parts of both organisations this year, and we've been really pleased to be a part of it, and for Reconciliation to have such a raised profile. Welcoming Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, back for an entire weekend of Diocese celebration in early May was wonderful, and it was really good that Flodden Peace Garden's Cross (picture above) was able to be blessed by him in a major Cathedral service when he was here. It was also during this weekend that the Cathedral was once again able to throw open its doors to the public for free, something which Dean John has been working towards for some time and which with sustained donations and income from other areas we hope can continue going forward, particularly as the Cathedral is such a major focus for Coventry's forthcoming year as UK City of Culture in 2021.



Later in May we launched Together for Hope, the CCN's largely identical in scope but secular/multifaith sister organisation, a major development in our partnership building at Coventry and the climax of several years of planning and discussion. Faithful Friends, a group of various different faith leaders in Sandwell in Birmingham, the first partner, joined at the time of the launch, in a hugely inspiring and moving multifaith service in the new Cathedral, with a brand new 'Pledge for Transformation' written for the occasion and into the future as a secular / multifaith prayer in place of the

Litany of Reconciliation.

Both the CCN and Together for Hope have a sizeable list of partners interested in joining in 2019, and both Alex Albans (Together for Hope Project Officer) and I look forward to continuing our growing ministry in the coming months. In the CCN's case, this is greatly helped by the hard work, and in some instances very gratefully-received funding to Coventry, of the CCN Boards in Germany, the USA, South Africa, the Netherlands, Central & Eastern Europe, Asia, Canada and, very newly, the UK!

Our interns in 2017-18 were a particularly finely-tuned team, who have been instrumental in allowing us to deliver all this through their support, ideas and good humour – massive thanks to Stacy, Maite and Cerys! And welcome to Jack, Ricarda, Basha and Stacy for this year.

And as we come to the end of such a fulfilling but exhausting year, we are losing our Canon for Reconciliation to her new role as Vicar of Holy Island in Northumberland! Sarah has held on steady course a reconciliation ministry team that has been navigating a number of particularly major personal challenges this year, none of which seem to have impacted on the work that we have been called to do here in Coventry; but keeping us all together and in one piece has been no mean feat, and we will miss her so very much! But above all, we all wish her all the best in her new calling, and look forward to giving her an appropriate send-off during her last weekend here, 14th-16th December.



With our blessings as we look forward to 2019,

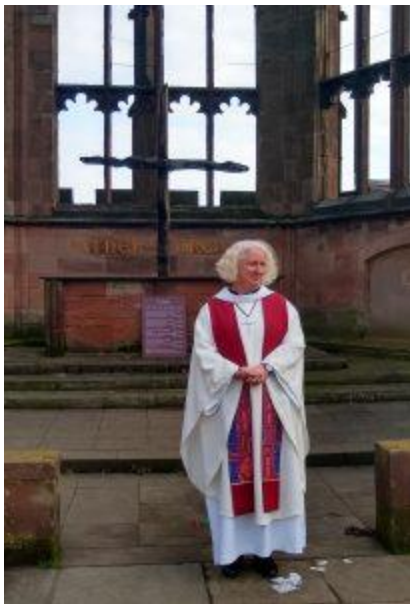
Alice Farnhill, CCN Project Officer

## CCN Thought for the Week for 14th December – Farewell to Canon Sarah, from all the CCN International Reps

On the eve of Canon Sarah's final weekend in Coventry as Canon for Reconciliation, the International Reps from communities across the CCN send her their [own personal farewells](#) in this wonderful video!

Sarah, thank you for all your guidance, leadership, care and character over the time that you have led the CCN. God bless you in your new role at Holy Island!

## CCN Thought for the Week for 21st December – Canon Sarah's final sermon from Coventry Cathedral



Sarah's final sermon at Coventry Cathedral, at the 10.30am Eucharist on December 16th 2018

'What then should we do?'

I couldn't sleep last night. Just a few things going on in my head. So I got up and made a cup of tea. I sat in the sitting room and looked at our things...that would soon be packed up and on their way with us to Holy Island. A photo of Desmond Tutu, the Father of reconciliation. Books on all sorts of things from war poetry to wild swimming. An icon of St Michael on the mantel piece. An African elephant made out of wire and beads. A John Piper print of our burnt cathedral. Some Christmas decorations, but not as many as usual...we are after all moving soon. And I thought of what is to come as we prepare to leave Coventry and move north.

And I'm not the only one moving. We are all also moving through Advent. Advent is usually known as a time of waiting...to prepare for the good news. But I think it is more active than that. Advent is a verb, an action. It translates as 'to come'

So what is to come? This Advent, what are we coming to? What is the world coming to? In the light of Brexit, Trump, etc. What is Jesus coming to this year? Peace on earth? No.

Over these past 4 or so years I have done a lot of thinking about this. About what peace and reconciliation actually mean. About what is needed to live those words. About justice and salvation. During this time of the coming, growing light of Advent our tilt towards peace, justice and salvation must be in sharp focus. In our nation in political turmoil. In a Europe where clashes between right and left are becoming ever more bitter. In a world where more walls are built to keep people out, to make them 'other', to polarise how we think and feel.

John the Baptist is warning us of what might happen if we don't bear fruit...the axe is ready at the foot of the tree. 'What then should we do?' ask the people, the people who have followed John into the wilderness, who have momentarily left their Christmas shopping, left their mince pies and mulled wine. I wonder if the people followed John into the wilderness because they were longing deep in their hearts for good news. They didn't quite know what that good news might be, but they knew that there must be something better than watching the headlines scroll, or trying to decide whether the next political debacle is fake news or just yet more bad news.

So John begins by grabbing their attention – and my goodness, if you had traipsed after him into the wilderness longing for good news would you expect to be called a brood of vipers? ‘What then should we do?’ they ask him. And his answer is perhaps rather unexpected from such a wild prophet. He doesn’t tell them to overthrow the government, or to be politically savvy. The heart of his message is simple. He tells the people to share, to be honest, to be satisfied and not to be greedy or corrupt.

So what then should WE do, here, today? Well, it’s simple. Share, be honest, don’t be greedy. Or, here’s another way of putting it. ‘The covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own. Father, forgive. The greed which exploits the work of human hands and lays waste the earth. Father, forgive. Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others. Father, forgive’...not to mention the rest of our Litany of Reconciliation, that is said here and across the world every day.

John’s message is calling us to the forgiveness and the good news that is the coming of Jesus, the word made flesh. And here at Coventry Cathedral, we have been tasked with a particular working out of this calling to the good news. We call it reconciliation. The simple heart of the gospel message. When I have been travelling around the UK and the world presenting crosses of nails or teaching about reconciliation or working with those in conflict, I have often been asked, ‘What can we do about this war?’ How can I forgive the one who hurt me? Why don’t they listen to me?’ Variations on the ‘What should we do?’ question. And the answer is strangely simple. It often feels unconvincing. And usually not what people want to hear. Share, be honest, don’t be greedy, John the Baptist tells the people. And that is what reconciliation is. Peace on earth? Well, easy to say, not easy to do. But doing it is what we must.

Because reconciliation is about more than words, it is about action. It is maybe a good start to learn how to disagree well, but it is the action towards justice and equality that we have to learn how to do, to practice. Acts of reconciliation are something we can all do. We should all do. That is the gospel imperative. That is why we look forward again for Christ to be born among us. We are all born God’s children, and as God’s children, we are reconcilers. All of us are called to inhabit this space of reconciliation. And as we are all in need of it, we can all join in with it. Reconciliation can start with sitting down at the table and listening. Sharing a meal. Inviting someone in. Share, be honest, don’t be greedy.

Reconciliation is not about sitting around trying to agree with each other. It is about learning how to engage authentically with issues of justice, of poverty, of exclusion, of stigma, of sustainability.

Our world is broken, and reconciliation is the only answer, unlikely as that sometimes seems. There is a Southern African word, ‘Ubuntu’, which means ‘I exist because you exist’. We are all connected and we are all God’s children. Practising reconciliation together isn’t easy. It is risky and hard and long. But it is the only way to live and love – each other and our planet.

We need to inhabit a space where risk and vulnerability and openness and freedom can live creatively together to bring joy and hope. That is what the Advent space is about. The risk of a new way of life, of inhabiting a space which enables us to be free enough to be vulnerable, to be surprised, to be open to the reconciling birth of Christ. That space is not safe or easy. But it’s safe enough for us to practice reconciliation. Share, be honest, don’t be greedy. Live and love.

My prayer for us all is, that this time of Advent, of coming and going, may be surprising, may give us a new way of being in our space with God, may enable us to resist the temptations of comfort, sameness, familiarity. That we may bear the fruit of reconciliation. The reconciliation ministry of this cathedral and the CCN is needed in the world. It’s needed here in this space, its needed in our communities, churches, nations, our own hearts.

This space here in this burnt and rebuilt cathedral can be a safe enough space for the reconciling love of Christ to be born again into. But only if it is intentionally held to be so. Only if reconciliation is truly at the heart of this incredible space. It's such a gift. It has such potential for transformation for all who come here, and those across the world who can only hear the story or see the photos. It is your gift to share. And you have certainly shared it with me during my time here. I will never forget what I have learnt from this space – it hasn't been a safe space, but it has been safe enough. And that is what reconciliation is about. Being enabled and enabling others to share a safe enough space to hear, to listen, to better understand, and ultimately to learn how to live better together. Or in other words, to share our space, be honest in our space, and not be greedy about keeping our space to ourselves. A space for living and for loving.

And so I preach this sermon with gratitude...for the space I have been enabled to hold here, to inhabit with you for a while, to share with you comings and goings, sadness, joy, laughter (my wonderful reconciliation team and friends put on a reconciliation pantomime for me on Friday evening...wow!! is all I can say!, as well as sharing the mundane and the surprising and beautiful nature of our life together. It's been quite a journey, with quite some comings and goings. It has been such a privilege to share your stories, and the story of this remarkable space that is Coventry Cathedral. A safe enough space which is not just a building, but a space built for relationship, for reconciliation...for you and me and all of Gods children. A safe enough space built especially for relationship with the one who cherishes and protects and watches over us...the one on that great tapestry up there. The one whose birth we await again this Advent.

The liturgy for presenting a cross of nails to a new partner has a wonderful section which goes...

Cherish this Cross, as a token of the merciful forgiveness of God, declared to us in the Passion of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Watch about this Cross, in prayer for one another and for all the partners of the Community of the Cross of Nails around the world.

Guard this Cross as a symbol of your strength to work and pray for peace justice and reconciliation and live at peace with all people as afar as it depends on you.

And so I thank you too for cherishing, watching over and guarding me in my comings and goings. And I ask you to keep watching over, cherishing and guarding each other, those who work and worship in and visit this space safe enough for reconciliation, for kindness and generosity and love. The world today still needs those words of Provost Howard which I have carried with me in the, mostly, safe enough spaces I have travelled to and from in these last few years – Burundi, Iraq, South Africa, Cuba, Coventry. Don't ask about the travel insurance! Provost Howard's words: 'We are going to try to make a kinder, simpler – a more Christ-child-like sort of world'. Yes, let's.

As I finished writing this sermon in our sitting room last night, the birds had started singing. Still in the darkness. But the sound of dawn. It reminded me of being in Iraq last year and waking up on Easter morning near the destruction of Mosul to an amazing sunrise, and the light of Christ coming again. And in our sitting room I looked around again at our things, waiting to be packed up. And learnt just what a gift I've been given over the last years here in Coventry. A gift that has enabled me to share this wonderful reconciling safe enough space with you all. So thank you, from the bottom of my heart.

Rather fittingly, today is Reconciliation Day in South Africa, and so I want to finish with a story about Steve Biko and his mother Alice. You may have heard me tell it before, but it bears repeating, especially on this reconciliation day. Steve Biko was a well-known anti-apartheid leader and in 1977 was brutally

murdered while being held by the South African police. Steve and his mother Alice were talking shortly before his death, and she was telling him how much she worried about him – she couldn't sleep at night until he was home for fear of him having been arrested and put in gaol. He replied by reminding her that Jesus had come to redeem his people and set them free.

“Are you Jesus?” she had asked impatiently. Steve had gently answered her,

“No, I'm not. But I have the same job to do.”

And so do we.

Amen.