

## A Cornish Cross

RE Session using St Piran's Cross and Celtic Saints to discover the history of Christianity in Cornwall and how God's people travelled to share Jesus story.

Downloaded from Barnabas in Schools - Exploring Christianity creatively-

[www.barnabasinschools.org.uk](http://www.barnabasinschools.org.uk) and heavily adapted for AMD use.

### Information for leader.

Differing Christian traditions and various Christian faith communities around the world are united by this one key and central sign of a shared faith. This universal cross has at the same time been interpreted, designed and adapted to express a unique, local expression of that same faith. With each cross comes a particular story of how each community experiences God's love and puts it into action. Pictures of crosses can be downloaded here: <http://www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk/a-cross-the-world/> Shelley Porter has a copy of the book *A-cross the World*, published by Barnabas in 2005, if you would like to use any of the other activities from it.

The first firm reference to the St Piran's cross flag dates from the 1830s. In 1835, Davies Gilbert edited the history of over 200 Cornish parishes, including one called St Piran-in-the-Sands, where there is a reference to 'a white cross on a black ground was formerly the banner of St Perran and the Standard of Cornwall; probably with some allusion to the black ore and the white metal of tin.' It is not known where Gilbert obtained his information - probably from oral tradition.



One of the oldest depictions of the flag can be seen in a stained-glass window at Westminster Abbey. It was unveiled in 1888 in memory of this famous Cornish inventor and engineer Richard Trevithick. The window depicts St Michael at the top and nine Cornish saints, Piran, Petroc, Pinnock, Germanus, Julian, Cyriacus, Constantin, Nonna and Geraint in tiers below. The head of St Piran appears to be a portrait of Trevithick himself and the figure carries the banner of Cornwall.

The inscription at the base of the window reads; Richard Trevithick born 13 April 1771 died 22 April 1833.

He was born at Illogan in Cornwall, son of Richard (1735-97), a mine manager, and Anne (Teague). He was 6 feet 2 inches in height and known as a powerful



wrestler! In 1797 he married Jane (1772-1868), daughter of John Harvey, and had six children: Richard, John, Francis, Frederick, Anne and Elizabeth. He died in poverty at Dartford in Kent and was buried in the churchyard there. A photograph of the window can be purchased from Westminster Abbey Library.)

To view a picture of the cross that may be useful to this session go to [A Cornish Cross - picture. http://www.barnabasinschools.org.uk/photos/across/cornish.JPG](http://www.barnabasinschools.org.uk/photos/across/cornish.JPG)

### **Aim**

- To think about why the cross is so significant to the Christian faith both in the past and today.
- To consider why people might leave all they know to share the story of Jesus.
- To explore the history of the Cornish Cross and its link to St Piran.

Before reading the following story, it will be worth asking the children what they know about the Easter story. When you have gathered the important information, ask them why the cross might be an important symbol to Christians.

Once you have established that the cross is central to our faith continue to recount the fact that after Jesus resurrection his followers were persecuted by the Jews and Romans alike and as a result they became a bit like refugees, moving out from Jerusalem to lots of other places all around the area.

### **Bible link**

Talk a little bit about Philip who was one of the seven deacons appointed to help spread the workload for the apostles because the church in Jerusalem was growing so fast and they hadn't time to offer effective pastoral care to the new Christians (see Acts 6:1-7). When the church met with persecution in the capital, Philip became a missionary to the Samaritans in the north, helping to take the gospel across religious and ethnic boundaries and establish a new church there. (It is worth noting that Philip was a convert to Judaism long before he became a follower of Jesus, so maybe he was better placed to do this missionary work than the apostles; but that still didn't make it easy.)

Then read Acts 8:4-8 (CEV)

*'The Lord's followers who had been scattered went from place to place, telling the good news. Philip went to the city of Samaria and told the people about Christ. They crowded*

*around Philip because they were eager to hear what he was saying and to see him work miracles. Many people with evil spirits were healed, and the spirits went out of them with a shout. A lot of crippled and lame people were also healed. Everyone in that city was very glad because of what was happening.'*

### Wondering about this Bible story

Make the following statements and leave time after each for the children to think, wonder and offer ideas.

- I wonder how Philip felt when he was forced to escape from Jerusalem and leave his important work there.
- I wonder why Philip thought it was important to tell other people about Jesus.
- I wonder if Philip was nervous about sharing the story of Jesus with 'outsiders', who weren't from the same background and tradition as he was. In fact, Jews refused to have anything to do with people from Samaria, so Philip was taking a big risk.
- I wonder why the people reacted in the way they did.

### The story of this cross

- Ask the question, 'Who knows what the national flag of Cornwall looks like?'
- Get the children to describe the flag.

Then tell them that, the black flag with the white cross is often referred to as the banner of St Piran. St Piran is the patron saint of tin-miners and also regarded by many as the patron saint of Cornwall. Tin used to be one the most important elements in the Cornish economy. The story goes that St Piran took his colours from his discovery of tin, when he first saw the white metal in the black ashes of his fire. Show Picture



Cornwall's history is full of Celtic saints. These people were Christians who shared the story of Jesus with 'outsiders', who weren't from the same background and tradition as they were.

- Ask if that reminds them of anyone? (Refer back to Bible story)
- Does it remind them of anyone today?

Many of our churches, holy wells and villages are names for Celtic saints .



- Ask the children if they can think of any places, schools, churches etc. that are named for Celtic Saints. Make a list on a White Board or flip chart.

Many of the Celtic Saints sailed from Ireland or Wales and then often travelled further on to Brittany. They spoke different languages to the people they went to share Jesus story with, they wore different sorts of clothes and were used to eating different sorts of foods too! It must have been very difficult and quite frightening at times.

### **Tell the story of St Piran.**

Piran was a Christian of Irish origin, who came to Cornwall in the 5th century. The legend goes that his Irish persecutors had tied Piran to a millstone and rolled it over the edge of a cliff into the stormy sea. However, the sea immediately became calm, and the saint floated safely over the water to land upon the sandy beach of Perranzabuloe (near modern-day Perranporth) in Cornwall. In Cornwall, people were glad to hear about Jesus and Piran taught them and led them. Other Celtic Christians also came here and settled. All of them sharing about Jesus.

Perranporth ('Piran's Port' in Cornish) hosts the annual festival of 'Lowender Peran', which is named in honour of him. St Piran's Day is 5 March and it is very popular in Cornwall; the term 'Piranstide' has been coined to describe the week prior to this day. The largest St Piran's Day event is the march across the dunes to St Piran's cross, which thousands of people attend, generally dressed in black, white and gold, and carrying the Cornish flag. A play of the life of St Piran, in Cornish, has been enacted in recent years at the event. Daffodils are also carried and placed at his cross.

- The children might like to share their experiences of St Piran's day

### **Crafting the cross**

To make your own version of the cross that St Piran 'discovered', you will need some air-drying clay and some used *tin* toothpaste tubes or similar.

Open up and clean out the used tubes, flattening the tin-like metal, which you can later use to make the cross. Cut this into thin strips.

Mould a lump of the air-drying clay into a small flattish stone shape. Now inset two of the strips into the clay in the shape of a cross. Embed them firmly but so that they are still clearly visible, as if the cross is emerging from the 'stone'.

Complete the cross by painting the clay black, the colour of the ashes, in which St Piran is said to have found the first tin.

Allow this to dry.

### Extended work.

- The children could be encouraged to think about their school values and crafting them into a cross. (see example below)
- They could design their own school flag or banner, while considering the Christian story and its influence on the history of the county.
- They could write a reflective piece on being a refugee and having a story to tell.
- They could explore and discover more about the Celtic Saints and compare them with Christian aid agencies for example.
- They could engage in some persuasive writing on a topic they feel passionate about.



### Cross reflection

The following verses are taken from an early Celtic poem about the cross:

*Christ's cross over this face and thus over this ear, Christ's cross over these eyes, this mouth, this throat, the back of this head, this side;*

*To accompany before me, to accompany behind me.*

*Christ's cross to meet every difficulty, both on hollow and on hill.*

*Christ's cross over my community.*

*Christ's cross over my church.*



*Christ's cross in the next world Christ's cross in this world.*

**The Lord's Prayer in the Cornish language:**

*Agon Taze nye, eze en Neve, Benegas bo tha Hanow.*

*Tha Gwlaskath gwrenz doaz;*

*Tha Voth bo gwreze, En Noer pecarra en Neve.*

*Ro tha nye an journama gon bara pub death,*

*Ha gave tha nye gon pehasow Pecarra tel era nye gava angye Neb eze peha war agon bidn.*

*Ha na raze gon lewa en antall,*

*Buz gweeth nye thurt droeg.*

*Rag an Gwlaskath Che a beaw, Han Nearth, han Worrians, Rag nevra venitha. Andelna ra  
bo*

*Amen.*