

Reconciliation

To consider the ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation.
by Janice Ross

Suitable for **Key Stage 3**

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Aims

To consider the ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Preparation and Materials

- Air-raid montage from www.bbc.co.uk/schoolradio/subjects/history/ww2clips/sounds/air_raid_montage
- Three large nails.
- The website of Coventry Cathedral and images from the virtual tour.
- Extract from Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* (optional).

Assembly

1. Play the air-raid montage as students come in to the assembly.

Explain that this was a sound and sight familiar in Britain during the Second World War. Many large cities, such as London, Liverpool and Coventry, were bombarded night after night by the German Luftwaffe (the German air force).

2. For people emerging from the safety of the air-raid shelters there was often a scene of utter devastation.

This was the case on the night of 14 November 1940 when Coventry was bombarded by bombs which left the city and its cathedral blazing.

3. Churches were important to people in these difficult times and a decision to rebuild Coventry Cathedral was taken the morning after this disaster. This would not be an act of defiance, of fighting back, but rather a sign of faith, trust and hope for the future of the world.

The Provost of Coventry Cathedral, Dick Howard, made a national commitment not to take revenge, but to forgive and be reconciled. Speaking from the cathedral ruins on Christmas Day he vowed, when the war was over,

to work with those who had been enemies ‘to build a kinder, more Christ-child-like world’.

4. Shortly after the destruction of Coventry Cathedral a stonemason noticed that two of the charred medieval roof timbers had fallen in the shape of a cross. These two timbers were set up in the ruins as a sign of hope and faith. Later, they were placed on an altar made of rubble. Next to them was an inscription with the moving words, ‘Father, forgive.’

(A virtual tour of Coventry Cathedral will show this particular cross in the left of the Sanctuary area.)

A local priest found three medieval nails lying amid the debris and fashioned these into another cross.

(Use three nails to fashion the shape of a cross similar to that shown on Coventry Cathedral’s website.)

The worshippers of Coventry Cathedral took these two crosses as a sign that God was calling them to take the message of forgiveness and reconciliation across the world.

5. The rebuilt cathedral was consecrated on 30 May 1962. The composer Benjamin Britten had been commissioned to compose a requiem mass. (A requiem mass is a church service held to pray for the rest of the souls of the dead.)

Britten’s *War Requiem* was based on nine poems written by Wilfred Owen, a First World War soldier, killed in 1918. The poems portray the desperation of a man at the front of the battle. Wilfred Owen was killed two weeks before the end of the war.

War still holds the world in its grip, and the *War Requiem* has immediacy even today.

6. After the war, the three nails fashioned by the priest became a symbol of what is now a worldwide ministry of reconciliation - the Community of the Cross of Nails. Today, the Community of the Cross of Nails is an international network of over 150 organizations in 60 countries.

Reconciliation means restoring good relationships between people, or becoming friends again. The Bible encourages us to be reconciled first to God through faith, and then to one another.

The three nails remind people everywhere that Christ died on a cross for us so that we might be forgiven. We should therefore forgive others who hurt us, or sin against us.

7. In many countries where there has been war, be it the Congo, Rwanda, or some of the countries involved in the Arab Spring, a nation has risen against its own people, and friends and neighbours have risen against friends and



neighbours.

When peace is established there is always a great need for forgiveness and reconciliation, which takes time and commitment. The Community of the Cross of Nails has developed as a place of hope for this work.

On Saturday 13 November 2012, the eve of the seventieth anniversary of the bombing of Coventry, Coventry Cathedral will once again host the *War Requiem*. For many people this requiem will be for the fallen in war in the Falklands, in Iraq, in Afghanistan. The *War Requiem* is a meditation on the pity of war for all humanity. Its message is as relevant today as it was 50 years ago when the Cathedral was rebuilt.

Optional further activities

As the pupils leave the assembly, play an extract from Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem*.

Listen to some reflective music, such as Elgar's 'Nimrod'

Pupils could be encouraged to read some of Wilfred Owen's war poems.

Time for reflection

How do we overcome war, whether on a national or international scale, or within our own homes?

When he was dying on the cross, Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.'

Forgiveness and reconciliation begin with us and with our relationships.

How can we work 'to build a kinder, more Christ-child-like world'?

Prayer

Almighty God of light and peace and justice,

we pray for countries and peoples who are at war today.

We pray for those who work to bring forgiveness and reconciliation to all who have known grief, sorrow and loss as a result of war.

May their work bring hope and peace and freedom from anger and bitterness.

Amen.