



## Introduction

Finding ways to connect with the worldwide family of the Christian Faith has been a growing area of interest both in churches and schools. Such windows into the multi-cultural and international practice of Christianity in today's world are a vital resource to give us a true picture of what it means to be a global Christian in the 21st century. For Christians, this is of course also important evidence of the continuing truth and power of the story of Jesus to influence lives and transform societies.

In [A-cross the World](#), published by Barnabas in 2005, this connection to the big picture was through the symbol of the cross. 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.

## Preparation

Each of the crosses in this new series supplements the 40 crosses that can already be found in the book [A-cross the World](#). With each there is a Bible link with wondering questions, background information about the cross, stories to share and craft ideas to make a version of the cross - providing enough material for a session with children in a church group, in the classroom or at an all-age event. There is also a picture provided for each cross that could be printed or used in a PowerPoint presentation in order to provide a talking point for groups or as a focus for collective worship.

This cross belongs to a series of new crosses and, as with the first collection, the overall aim remains the same, namely:

- to enable children and adults to see the cross through the eyes of other cultures and traditions;
- to prompt discussion and debate on why this single, historical event continues to exercise such an influence worldwide;
- to explore how Christians in a wide variety of places, different times in history and in different circumstances, have lived purposeful lives because of their faith in a Christ, who died and who is risen - symbolised by the cross.

## Development

### Bible link

*Because of Christ Jesus, I can take pride in my service for God. In fact, all I will talk about is how Christ let me speak and work, so that the Gentiles would obey him. Indeed, I will tell how Christ*

*worked miracles and wonders by the power of the Holy Spirit. I have preached the good news about him all the way from Jerusalem to Illyricum. But I have always tried to preach where people have never heard about Christ.*

### **Romans 15:17-20 (CEV)**

These words are written by Paul at the end of his letter to the Christians in Rome. His missionary work had taken him all around the eastern Mediterranean and next he was hoping to visit Rome and possibly go even further west to Spain (see Romans 15:24). Helping people to meet with God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus was his life's work. All down the centuries since, the same Holy Spirit has moved others to take the good news of Jesus right around the world.

### **Wondering about this Bible story**

- I wonder if Paul ever became lonely during his travels as a missionary. We know he faced all sorts of hardships, so I wonder what kept him going.
- I wonder if he ever got tired of telling the story of how he first came to believe in Jesus. We have three detailed accounts of his conversion on the road to Damascus in the book of Acts. Why do you think he just couldn't keep quiet about it?
- I wonder why Paul was so ambitious to take the story of Jesus to places where it had never been heard before. Are there any places like this today?

### **The story of this cross**

Costa Rica is known as the 'Switzerland of the Americas' for a number of good reasons. It has a long history of successful democracy; it has been spared many of the wars and revolutions that have troubled its neighbours in this part of Central America; it has no standing army (this was abolished in 1949!); it has a very high literacy rate because education has always been a top priority in government spending. In fact, in 1869, Costa Rica became one of the first countries in the world to make education both free and obligatory, funded in the main by profits from the coffee trade.

Costa Rica was a former Spanish colony and the nation is strongly Catholic in its expression of Christian faith. The major festivals are celebrated by colourful street processions and parties that can bring the whole country to a standstill.

Among its craft and artistic products, pottery, ceramics and carpentry are perhaps the best-known. There is a centre for creative arts in the town of Santa Ana, which has become a magnet for a new wave of craftsmen and artists. This Costa Rican Cross brings together some of these artistic skills, using local tropical wood and decorative ceramic tiles with floral patterns. In this case, the flower is the lily which has long been a symbol of the resurrection.

One of Costa Rica's best-known 'icons' are the *carretas* (oxcarts). These vehicles are painted in dazzling colours and with geometric patterns. Today, many small models of them are made to be sold as tourist souvenirs.

During the Easter celebrations of Holy Week (*Semana Santa*), street events are held every day to dramatise all the stages of Christ's journey to the cross. On Good Friday itself, as in many parts of the Christian world, the crowds follow the 14 Stations of the Cross, with accompanying hymns, prayers and ritual at each stage of this sad journey.

Here are the 14 Stations of the Cross:

1. Christ is condemned to death.
2. The cross is laid upon him.
3. His first fall.
4. He meets his mother.
5. Simon of Cyrene is made to bear the cross.
6. Christ's face is wiped by Veronica.
7. His second fall.
8. He meets the women of Jerusalem.
9. His third fall.
10. He is stripped of his clothes.
11. His crucifixion.
12. His death on the cross.
13. His body is taken down from the cross.
14. His body is laid in the tomb.

The Stations of the Cross were initially developed because most people could not make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to walk the actual *Via Dolorosa* (the road to Calvary taken by Jesus). So, instead, depictions of these stations (stopping places) were set up in local cathedrals to allow worshippers to make the same devotional journey. They came into general use by the 17th century and are present today in nearly all Roman Catholic churches.

In the form of paintings or sculpted plaques, they are usually spaced around the walls of the church or are located in a prayer garden. While historically these depictions have been paintings or sculptures, they can be anything from banners to various kinds of art or plaques in any medium. The number of scenes (stations) in the series can vary from eight (the events specifically mentioned in the gospel accounts) to 15 (including a final station for the resurrection). Some of the stations vary in different traditions.

### **Crafting the cross**

Jars of differently coloured mosaic pieces can be bought from craft shops.

On a hardboard surface - if possible cut beforehand into a cross shape (with equal arms such as that of this Costa Rican cross) - fix the tiles with a strong paste to create your own mosaic patterned cross. If some plain white mosaic pieces are also included, this will give further scope for adding on to the cross individually chosen designs, perhaps with a symbolic, personal meaning.



### **Cross reflection**

*Not because of your promised heaven  
Do I wish to devote my love to you;  
Nor from dread of a much-feared hell  
Do I wish to cease from offending you.  
You touch me, Lord, when I see you nailed -  
Nailed on a cross - and I see you mocked;  
And stirred by the sight of your body bruised,  
By your sufferings too and by your death.  
I am stirred by your love in such a way  
That even without hope of heaven I shall love you  
And without any fear of hell I shall fear you.  
Naught you need give me that I may love you  
For even without hoping for the hope that is mine  
I shall love you, as love you I do.*

This is a sonnet attributed to the Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier (1506-52).