



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 of Christianity 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 come stories of how communities experience God's love and put it into action. For further background and ideas about exploring the worldwide Christian Church, see [Where in the World?](#)

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 in the classroom. 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.

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

Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from? Do you think they just happen? Think again. They come about because you want your own way, and fight for it deep inside



yourselves. You lust for what you don't have and are willing to kill to get it. You want what isn't yours and will risk violence to get your hands on it.

You wouldn't think of just asking God for it, would you? And why not? Because you know you'd be asking for what you have no right to. You're spoiled children, each wanting your own way.

James 4:1-3 (The Message)

The letter of James is always thoroughly practical and shot through with God-inspired common sense. He knows how easily human beings fall out with each other and how the tendency to want our own way can be quickly magnified into personal feuds, community rivalries and ultimately all-out wars.

The cultural and social causes of international warfare are of course complex but James recognises that so often beneath it all lies human greed and selfishness. The history of the world is littered with wars and whatever your opinion as to the best way to deal with this – be it as a pacifist or a believer in a just war – innocent people suffer and young soldiers are killed in action.

It is right that every death in war is remembered and not treated lightly. For this reason, the act of remembrance in November is still an important focus for national grief and a shared determination to work for peace. And as James writes, we should be quick to turn to God in prayer rather than be at each other's throats in hostility. For Christians, the cross of Jesus is the only sure way to make peace that lasts, both within us as individuals and between us as peoples.

Wondering about this Bible story

- I wonder why people still get involved with wars when we know how destructive they are.
- I wonder whether my feelings of anger towards someone are really the beginnings of 'war'.
- Do you think it can ever be right to go to war?
- What would happen if more people refused to fight in wars? Wouldn't we just be overrun by evil forces?
- In what ways do you think people in the armed forces are heroes?
- What are we remembering on Remembrance Day? What difference should this day make to each of us personally?

The story of this cross

The cross with a poppy is a common sight in the war cemeteries of the world and also on war memorials and in churches, particularly in the month of November. The poppy has now become a globally recognised symbol for remembering those who have died in wars. Scarlet corn poppies grow naturally in disturbed earth across Western Europe and so it is not surprising that they were seen in the war-ravaged fields of northern France and Belgium during and after the First World War. A Canadian poet, John McCrae, picked up on this connection in his poem 'In Flanders Fields' in 1915:

In Flanders fields the poppies blow



*Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below...*

And this quickly led to the poppy being adopted as a lasting symbol for those who had been killed. The Royal British Legion adopted it for their annual Poppy Appeal in aid of those serving in the British Armed Forces from 1921 onwards.

Poppies are sold and worn in the UK annually around the day of remembrance on 11 November (also known as Armistice Day) – the day hostilities formally ended in 1918 – or on the nearest Sunday to that date. Many other countries, especially those that are part of the British Commonwealth, also observe 11 November as a national day of remembrance, but other customs and symbols exist worldwide.

In Australia and New Zealand, Anzac Day (Australia and New Zealand Army Corps) is a day of remembrance celebrated on 25 April. Sprigs of rosemary are worn, which is a herb that grows wild in Gallipoli in Turkey where many Anzacs lost their lives in World War I.

In France and Belgium, 11 November is a national holiday – the blue cornflower (*le Bleuet*), rather than the poppy, is often worn in France.

In Italy, 4 November is known as the Day of National Unity marking the beginning of the ceasefire in 1918.

In Holland, Remembrance Day is celebrated on 4 May followed by Liberation Day on 5 May.

In Ireland, there is a National Day of Commemoration in July for Irish men and women who died in past wars, including Irish members of the United Nations Peacekeeping Forces who have died in more recent times.

In the United States, Veterans Day is commemorated on 11 November; there is also a Memorial Day on the last Monday of May.

In Japan and in many other parts of the world, Hiroshima Day on 6 August is observed as a time to pray and work for peace not war. It was on this day in 1945 that the war with Japan was ended when an atomic bomb was dropped on the city of Hiroshima.

Another international remembrance day is Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January, when the millions of victims of the Jewish genocide of the Second World War are remembered.

A poppy attached to a small wooden Christian cross is a bringing together of the remembrance symbol and the chief sign of the Christian faith. Jesus died on a cross, which for Christians means, among other things, that God understands and shares in the suffering of the world, including all the pain and bereavement that comes through war. Often, near or on such poppy crosses are written the



following words of Jesus:

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

John 15:13 (NIV)

Where someone's death in a war has helped secure peace for others, then it has indeed been just this sort of ultimate sacrifice, in imitation of the great sacrifice that Jesus made to bring us peace with God.

Crafting the cross

Why not create your own row of poppy crosses of remembrance as part of an activity for Remembrance Day or to explore attitudes to war and peace with a group.

Create a paper chain of crosses by folding a length of paper into a fan or an 'accordion'. Draw a cross on the top piece, making sure that the left and right arms of the cross touch the folds at the sides. Now cut out the cross shape, but remember not to cut along the folds on the left and right edges. The crosses should be linked when the paper is unfolded. You can make as many crosses as you like depending on the number of folds you make.

Now make poppies out of leaves of the appropriate size cut from red paper to decorate the centres of the crosses.

For some poppy templates and instructions, [click here](#) or [here](#).

Cross reflection

The Christian cross can often have other symbols on it that carry a special meaning. For example, you sometimes see the letters **IHS** emblazoned at its centre. This stands for the Latin phrase *Iesus Hominum Salvator* which means 'Jesus Saviour of the World'. These letters have also been interpreted by some as standing for the phrase 'I have suffered', which has been of particular comfort to those who have lost those they love through tragedy and war.

What new words or symbols of comfort, peace and hope might you like to place at the heart of a cross of remembrance?