



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

Timothy, you know what I teach and how I live. You know what I want to do and what I believe. You have seen how patient and loving I am, and how in the past I put up with trouble and suffering in the

cities of Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. Yet the Lord rescued me from all those terrible troubles. Anyone who belongs to Christ Jesus and wants to live right will have trouble from others. But evil people who pretend to be what they are not will become worse than ever, as they fool others and are fooled themselves. Keep on being faithful to what you were taught and what you believed.

2 Timothy 3:10-14 (CEV)

These are some of Paul's last written words to his young helper Timothy. Sadly, he knows that the Church will in the future be torn apart by troubles, misunderstandings and deliberate misuse of power. He wants to warn Timothy so that he is not taken by surprise and also to assure him that God is able to rescue him again, just as God had been there for Paul in his travels.

Wondering about this Bible story

- I wonder how Paul knew that he had to warn Timothy of troubles ahead.
- I wonder why the Church has always struggled to be united. It seems that having different views about the things that really matter can often lead people to extremes of behaviour.
- I wonder how Timothy will be able to decide who is speaking the truth and which side he should be on. (NB: In the verses that follow this passage, Paul reminds Timothy about how important the Bible will be in helping him to decide - see verses 15-17.)

The story of this cross

This cross is known as a Penal Cross and was designed to be hidden either in the hand or up a sleeve. Irish Catholics suffered, in particular during the 17th and 18th centuries, from the imposition of penal laws that were imposed by the ruling Protestant English and Anglican Parliament in Dublin. These laws forbade the use of any religious symbols such as a cross. Catholic bishops were exiled and nobody who wasn't Anglican could vote, hold public office or run an institution. These harsh laws had both political and religious motivations - both assuring an English ascendancy over Ireland and, if possible, converting the population to Protestantism. The penal laws did not just affect Catholics. Non-conformist Christians also suffered and as a result many of them emigrated to a new life in America during this time. The Catholics who stayed in Ireland had to hold their services in secret. Masses (Holy Communion) were often held late at night in the open air, around a mass stone altar - some of these can still be found today. However, despite this prolonged persecution, the Catholic tradition survived.

This cross has become a symbol of faith surviving in secret. These miniature crosses have small arms so they can be easily slipped out of sight and they are covered with a number of symbols linked to the story of the crucifixion. They are crucifixes (that means, with the body of Jesus on the cross) above which there is a halo or crown of thorns, and nearby there are the nails and a ladder that were used by the Roman soldiers. The letters INRI appear at the top of the cross, which stand for *Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum* (the Latin for 'Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews' - see John 19:19-22). These were words that Pilate said should be put on a placard above Jesus' head. These crosses also often have on them the strange motif of a cock and a pot. This alludes to an Irish legend



about a cockerel that was being cooked in a pot but which suddenly came to life again - a symbolic reference to the hope of the resurrection from the dead.

It is sad that throughout the history of the Church different branches and traditions of the Christian faith have been at war with each other. Christians can often allow their passion for their beliefs to blind them from any other possible interpretations of the Bible or other ways of worship. Jesus prayed on the night before he died that all his followers would be united (John 17:20-21). Again and again, Christians have resorted instead to bitter and often violent disputes with each other, which must break God's heart. Thankfully, throughout history there have also been movements for unity and individual Christians who have shown a different way. They have shown that different understandings of doctrine and practice need not stop the most important work of passing on the good news of Jesus to the world. In our day, there are many exciting Christian initiatives in which churches work together and demonstrate a unity in mission, just as Jesus had prayed.

Crafting the cross

The idea of having secrets or special signs is a common experience and one to which groups will easily relate. The first Christians too used secret ways to 'keep the faith', including the fish symbol (the letters of the Greek word were a mnemonic for 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour') and also an anchor and a plough, both of which contain within them hidden cross shapes.

Challenge your group to draw pictures of something 'innocent' - maybe the view from a window, a favourite place or just an imaginary scene - but to hide within their artwork several cross shapes and symbols of the Easter story, such as the ones on the Penal Cross.

Can the others in the group find the secret crosses?

Cross reflection

In the middle of the second century AD, the theologian Justin Martyr wrote about seeing the cross everywhere! In...

... all the common things that we can readily see. Ask yourself whether effective administration or community could take place anywhere in the world if there were no shape of the cross. You can only cross the sea when you make use of the sail, hanging from the cruciform mast of a ship. Without that shape a plough could not turn the earth, nor could diggers and mechanics do their work. In fact the very thing that makes the human form different from the animals is that men and women can stand erect with their hands extended... this too shows the power of the form of the cross.

Taken from his first apology, addressed to Emperor Antonius Pius about AD 140.