



## 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

*Jesus answered: Watch out and don't let anyone fool you! Many will come and claim to be me. They will use my name and fool many people. When you hear about wars and threats of wars, don't be*



*afraid. These things will have to happen first, but that isn't the end. Nations and kingdoms will go to war against each other. There will be earthquakes in many places, and people will starve to death. But this is just the beginning of troubles.*

*Brothers and sisters will betray each other and have each other put to death. Parents will betray their own children, and children will turn against their parents and have them killed.*

### **Mark 13:5-8; 12 (CEV)**

Not everything that Jesus spoke about sounded like good news! In the days before he was arrested and crucified, he warned his friends that hard times were ahead for them all. The way of the Kingdom of God is so totally different from the way of the world that there will inevitably be clashes. People would even use the name of Jesus for evil purposes and sometimes families would be torn apart. Jesus never promised his followers an easy faith.

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

- I wonder whether the disciples really understood what Jesus was talking about. It was much easier to follow Jesus when he was saying and doing wonderful things than to listen to him talk so gloomily about the future.
- I wonder why people even today still react violently against the good news about Jesus. Worldwide, many Christians are persecuted for their faith.
- I wonder how we can avoid being fooled by those who use the name of Jesus but who are not really his followers. How can we tell the difference (see Matthew 7:20)?

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

Acholi Land in northern Uganda has suffered through decades of fighting. A group calling themselves the 'Lord' s Resistance Army' (LRA) has terrorised this region, causing the displacement of about 1.5 million people and the abduction of tens of thousands of children to serve as child soldiers or slave wives. However, the good news is that security in the region is improving today and many people are returning to their homes. A cessation of hostilities was signed in 2006 and slowly the overpopulated internal refugee camps are being dismantled. Today, the emphasis is on distributing seeds and farm tools so that something like normal life can start again.

The LRA was seeking to overthrow the Ugandan government and there are many horror stories of how they abducted young children from their homes; often drugged and certainly in fear for their lives, they were forced to take part in the fighting. In response to this situation, the CMS (the Church Mission Society) initiated a cross-making project. Young people in the area around Kitgum who had escaped the LRA make small wooden crosses as potent symbols of their faith in God and his power to bring them through even the most awful suffering. They chose to use Cwa wood. This native tree has branches that are thin, flexible and tough and, sad to say, were used as rods to beat the captured children and punish them if they disobeyed.

Sales of the crosses have enabled the Anglican Diocese of Kitgum to support displaced children -



many of whom are now grown up and often have families of their own, born to them while prisoners. Christians in Britain buy the crosses as a symbol of solidarity with the plight of their brothers and sisters in Uganda and a reminder to pray and act on their behalf. You can obtain packets of these crosses on the [CMS website](#).

The Church in Uganda is relatively young, only about 140 years old, and there are many who follow Jesus. Uganda today is one of the more stable countries in East Africa and the Church is playing its role in the country's development, especially in the areas of health and education.

This cross provides a powerful link between churches in the West and the vibrant and growing churches of Africa. There continue to be many challenges for the Christians in northern Uganda, including most recently outbreaks of diseases such as cholera, Bubonic plague and Hepatitis E. The cross continues to remind us to pray and act on behalf of each other in the worldwide Christian family.

In the beginning of Uganda's Christian story, it was missionaries from the West who brought the gospel to this part of Africa. Today, many Ugandan Christians have come to Britain and are working in churches to help Christians here to share the good news of Jesus.

### **Crafting the cross**

This cross is quite literally two small branches from a tree that have been glued together.

Is there a particular tree near your church or school that you could use to make some simple crosses in the same way? Different varieties of tree can be symbolic - linked to their qualities of strength or suppleness, or maybe to a particular usage (such as willow for cricket bats), or because they have a special personal or community association.

Decide on which tree you are going to use. You will need to collect some small branches - as straight as possible and gathered preferably after the tree has been pruned or following the effects of a storm. Decide on a length for the down piece of the cross and then find another piece about half that size as the cross piece.

Make a groove in the down piece about one third the way from the top and glue the cross piece in at this point. A small tack could be tapped into the top of the cross as an anchor to attach a piece of string, if the cross is to be hung around the neck.

Here is a prayer of blessing for a tree that comes from Uganda:

*Bless this tree; make it grow; let it be entirely a blessing without any evil. Remove all evil; let it not come but let only the good come. Give your blessing that we may increase in all things and grow in plenty and be free from disease. Let blessings abound.*

### **Cross reflection**



*Jesus, at the cross:  
Your shame, means of my glory;  
Your wounds, my healing;  
You abused, cause of my praise;  
Your loss, my gain;  
Your death, my life;  
Your all, my all.  
Naked for all to see,  
Stretched out like animal skin being dried,  
Back deeply sliced like bread,  
Hands blistered by hard work,  
Battered face.  
What shame,  
What pain,  
What love,  
All for me,  
All on the cross.*

From a CMS prayer paper, Anon.