



On your marks:

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 BRF in 2011, 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.

Get set:

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 a mixed-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

For further cross ideas linked to the church's year, go to:

- [Easter - A resurrection cross;](#)
- [Lent - an ongoing idea for exploring the cross through Lent;](#)



Go!

To view associated pictures for this cross, go to: A Cemetery Cross - [picture 1](#) and [picture 2](#)

Bible Link

My friends, I want you to know that our bodies of flesh and blood will decay. This means that they cannot share in God's kingdom, which lasts forever. I will explain a mystery to you. Not every one of us will die, but we will all be changed. It will happen suddenly, quicker than the blink of an eye. At the sound of the last trumpet the dead will be raised. We will all be changed, so that we will never die again. Our dead and decaying bodies will be changed into bodies that won't die or decay. The bodies we now have are weak and can die. But they will be changed into bodies that are eternal.

Then the Scriptures will come true,

'Death has lost the battle!

Where is its victory?

Where is its sting?'

1 Corinthians 15:50-55 (CEV)

Because Christians believe in the resurrection of Jesus, they do not think that death is the end of this life. In fact, what we have experienced on earth is only the very first part of a new sort of life that will go on forever. Jesus promises this for all who believe in him (see John 6:40). However, the new life in heaven will be as different from life on earth as the life of a flower is different from the seed from which it came. This is the big change that Paul is writing about in these verses. Existence in heaven will be life in a whole new dimension and with possibilities that we have not yet even dreamt of!

Wondering about the Bible story

I wonder what heaven will be like? Is it 'up there' somewhere or is it like a 'parallel universe'? Christians believe that only one person, Jesus Christ, ever came back from the dead, and he is the one who invites everyone to join him in heaven one day.

I wonder why we can't get new heavenly bodies now? Why do we still have to grow old and die, if we believe in God?

I wonder how Christians can be so certain that they're going to heaven? Where do they find their confidence?

The story of this cross

Some people feel that cemeteries or graveyards are rather spooky and sad places, whereas the truth is that they can often be very inviting and peaceful. Many people today are not very good at accepting the fact that they will eventually get old and die; and so they like to hide death away and try to forget about it. They even kid themselves that somehow miracle cures and new discoveries will



mean that they may never die.

In times past, however, people were more realistic. Death was an ever-present reality and many people died at a very young age compared with today – although life-expectancy in some parts of the world is sadly still very low.

Christians who believe that death is not the end often want to mark the place of their burial with the one sign and symbol that for them is a guarantee that they will indeed live again in heaven. That sign is, of course, the cross and so many graves are marked by crosses in some form or another.

However, faith in God has declined, in particular in the West, over last half century, and one obvious result of this has been that far fewer crosses are found in cemeteries. Instead you will often find pictures of the person who has died or symbols from their life, such as musical notation, a favourite flower or even an engraving of a place that was special to them. Alongside this, instead of confident verses from the Bible, you will find poems and moving tributes. These tend to focus on the life that has been lived not the one to come.

If you look closely at older gravestones, you may find Latin words or phrases such as:

Resurget (he/she will live again); or *Resquiescet in pace* (R.I.P. = may he or she rest in peace). Both of these express confidence in the resurrection. These words and the crosses themselves focus the mourner's attention on Jesus, not just the person who has died.

I wonder what you think about these different approaches?

As a group or class, a trip to a local churchyard can reveal all sorts of interesting secrets and prompt many questions. Although life after death is a key part of Christian belief, do not imagine that Christians have all the answers. Particularly when talking to children it is important neither to pretend that all this is easy to understand nor should we dismiss what the children themselves have to say about death. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2:9: 'What God has planned for people who love him is more than eyes have seen or ears have heard. It has never even entered our minds!'

In many parts the world cemeteries can even become places for special religious services and parties! All Saints' Day (1 November) is celebrated as the 'Day of the Dead' in many countries where there is a strong Roman Catholic tradition. Families build elaborately decorated altars around the graves of deceased relatives using candles, flowers, cooked foods and even sugar skulls to welcome 'the spirits of the departed'. All this is an annual symbolic reminder that they believe that these loved ones will rise from the dead one day. The graveyards can be full of candlelight and activity all night long. Special sugar crosses are made to mark the graves of very young children who have died.

Crafting the cross

Crosses come in all shapes and sizes and with different designs, of course, but when we are planning to create a cross to remember someone who has died, it needs a lot of thought.



For many children their first encounter with death will be the death of a pet. However, some may well have experienced the death of a relative and so this whole area needs to be treated with much care and sensitivity.

One approach is to explore with the group the very best way to remember someone in an abstract way at first. Perhaps a statue of the person would be a good idea? Or a special blue plaque put up in the place where they were born? A popular way of remembering someone today is to inscribe their name on a bench and have it put up at a favourite spot – you may well have some of these near to where you live.

Another approach is to ask the question, 'How would each one of us like to be remembered?' What sort of cross would you choose for yourself and what sort of design would it have?

Give the group freedom to choose what sort of activity they would like to do in response to this cross. Perhaps the simplest approach is to make small icing-sugar crosses* such as those used on the 'Day of the Dead'. If you do this, encourage decoration of the cross in a way that expresses both a big 'thank you' for a life that has been lived and a big hope in the life that is to come.

Here is a recipe to make sugar candy crosses. The recipe takes less than an hour to prepare. You can do most of the work ahead of time, and then bring it out at the last minute. Then everyone can make their own crosses and paint them together!

2 cups of powdered sugar
1 egg white
1 tablespoon of light corn syrup
1/2 teaspoon of vanilla
1/3 cup of corn starch
Blue, green, red and yellow food colouring
1 fine paintbrush

Sift powdered sugar. Mix egg white, syrup and vanilla in a dry, clean bowl. Mix sugar into wet mixture gradually. Mix with fingers until the mixture forms a ball.

Sprinkle cornstarch on table or board. Put the mixture on the table and shape into smooth, manageable ball. Wrap tightly in plastic and chill until ready to use. (Mixture will keep for months.)

Use plenty of cornstarch when making cross shapes. When the crosses are dry, colour and decorate them as you wish.

Cross reflection

*'Creep to the cross on knees
And kiss it for a jewel'*

From 'Piers Plowman' by the English medieval poet William Langland