

Sermon notes for Cross of Nails Sunday, 29th September 2019

The Community of the Cross of Nails now has around 235 partner organisations across five continents: churches, peace organisations and charities, schools (ICONS) and seminaries, and a small number of chaplaincies in universities, prisons, and one hospital trust. Each one signs up to the three guiding forces of the CCN: Healing the wounds of history; Living with difference and celebrating diversity; and Building a culture of peace. All partner organisations are active in their reconciliation practice in their own ways according to their community needs, and pray the Litany regularly.

Each year we welcome 10-12 new organisations into the network on average.

Here we group three partner spotlight stories, one under each of the guiding principles, but of course their work spans all three areas in different ways.

Healing the Wounds of History

We heartily encourage partners to make linkages between each other, generally via the 'board' networks within specific countries or regions with sizeable memberships (Germany, North America, the Netherlands, South Africa, the UK, Central & Eastern Europe, and Asia). But we have been really encouraged by a specific linkage between two partners just this past month, **the Evangelisches Dekanat in Darmstadt-Stadt**, central Germany, and **St Clement Danes, the Central Church of the Royal Air Force in London**. Church of Scotland and Free Churches Principal Chaplain RAF, Revd (Wing Commander) Paul Mellor, attended the 75th anniversary commemorations of the bombing and massive-scale destruction of Darmstadt in 1944. This is a type of occasion that a Canon from Coventry would very often attend, as the heart of the CCN, but on this occasion it was particularly poignant and appropriate that two partners in the CCN were able to support one another, through this network, on an anniversary so very significant.

Living with difference and celebrating diversity

This autumn will see our 50th ICON school join the CCN and ICONS network! One of our existing ICON partners since 2013, features here:

The **Neue Mittelschule Guntramsdorf**, lies in Eastern Austria, in a new suburb of Vienna. It teaches 307 pupils aged 10 to 14, from 12 nationalities and 5 religious denominations, and celebrating diversity, as a regular, secular state school, is very important. Guntramsdorf formerly was the site of an aircraft engine factory with an attached concentration camp, parts of which are still visible and are managed by a remembrance club. The president of the club regularly visits our school to talk about the horrors of the holocaust. Numerous school projects foster a culture of peace and forgiveness: every year select pupils are trained to be mediators for their colleagues, to help in conflict situations. Democracy is also an important subject to discuss. This year we had a chance to take part in a Student-Democracy project, with each class pitched against others, presenting their ideas to a forum of student representatives, teachers and town council members, and decided by vote. Once the heated phase of the election campaigns began it was clear that the children's strategies were similar to real-life political campaigns: rival posters were removed, competition bad-

mouthed and false promises made! After the election, there was plenty of opportunity for forgiveness. We have also held our first Concert for Peace, as well as an exhibition which featured our pupil's artistic interpretations of the theme "Peace and Reconciliation"; an annual Charity Lunch to support children in the developing world, and this year's winning "Plumbline" artwork competition entry: around 30 pupils planned their project, cut the pieces, painted them and glued them until their interpretations of "Guntramsdorf" was completed in the art work, now on display in Coventry Cathedral.

Building a culture of peace

A very new type of partner joined the CCN this year; our first hospital chaplaincy, at **Guys' And St Thomas' NHS Trust** in central London. This is a chaplaincy that covers two major hospitals on the south bank of the Thames, one just opposite the Houses of Parliament; as well as being the chaplaincy for the London Fire Brigade, and whose staff and chaplains have been involved in major, high-profile incidents and atrocities including the Grenfell Tower Fire and the London Bridge Attack, both in 2017. The Revd Mia Hilborn, who carries the ancient (and now rare) role of 'Hospitaller', had us humbled and enthralled with the stories of healing and caring that her chaplains get involved with day-to-day in this incredibly busy and high-pressured environment, when she first came to visit us on pilgrimage in 2018. She returned a year later with a number of chaplains of other faiths, and it was a real joy to share with them in stories and lessons of personal reconciliation, and later in the summer to visit them to welcome them into both the CCN and its new sister network for those of other, or no, faith, Together for Hope.

We have several partners yet to join the network this year, and the Crosses of three of them will be blessed in the Eucharist at Coventry on Cross of Nails Sunday, 29th September; these are:

The Ludwigskirche Saarbrücken, Germany; Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church in Texas, USA; and Bury CE High School, UK.

As always, we really look forward to welcoming them to our unique network!