

## Peace & Reconciliation

**'Blessed are the peacemakers: they shall be recognised as children of God'**

Part of the tragedy of the First World War is that anyone could have imagined for a moment that a war could end all wars. History shows that wars do end things, for a while, but it also shows that peace is much more than just an absence of war. Far away from any fighting it is easy either to romanticise war or to stand piously above the battle while taking any benefits that accrue from it.

Jesus offers us peace as his free gift. He calls us to peace at every level: in ourselves, in our relationships, in our society and between nations. Therefore we should not accept that war is inevitable. Nor should we accept war as a way of resolving conflict, except the immediate right of self defence within strict 'just war limits'.

We have to take our role as peacemakers seriously. What does this mean in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain? We might begin by considering how we can avoid being 'war-makers'. The seeds of war are germinated by many things, including injustice, fear, hatred, prejudice, indifference to suffering, triumphalism, and humiliation of other people's aspirations, as well as by a desire for power and domination.



Pope Paul VI told us "if you want peace, work for justice".

Peacemakers are often 'invisible'. We need to support those who strive through diplomatic channels, the UN and other organisations to prevent or shorten conflicts. And we need to remember those who work behind the scenes to restore trust and heal divisions, as well as those who risk their lives by intervening between combatants. We need to support all who work for **just** and lasting peace.

### **Arms and money**

Every year, tens of billions of dollars are spent on arms across the globe. There are direct benefits for our economy, jobs and pensions; and equally direct but disastrous consequences for people in war zones and in unjust societies worldwide. In our name export licences are granted to countries involved in major armed conflicts, or with dubious human rights records. High profile harmonious international meetings can coincide with less publicised arms deals.

The Catholic Church calls the disparity between global military spending and the real needs of the poor 'a scandal', and the arms trade 'a serious disorder'. What then do we make of the fact that the UK and the other permanent members of the UN Security Council together account for around three quarters of exported arms?

### **Weapons of mass destruction**

Nuclear weapons pose a particular challenge. Of countries that count on nuclear arms for their security Pope Benedict said: "*this point of view is not only baneful but also completely fallacious. In a nuclear war there would be no victors, only victims.*" The Church speaks of tolerating nuclear deterrence, on a temporary basis within a call to eliminate all such weapons of mass destruction.