

COMMUNITY OF THE CROSS OF NAILS

You might have noticed the title of this insert on the bottom of your worship bulletin cover for the past few years and wondered who comprises this “Community.” Or perhaps you have seen the small cross made from nails in the baptistry to the left of the pulpit and pondered its significance. The Cross of Nails and its corresponding Community are a symbol and international network of reconciliation and peace—one that the International Centre for Reconciliation based at Coventry Cathedral in England formed, in part, to memorialize the destruction of the Cathedral by German bombs in World War II.



As recorded by the Cathedral, whose official name is the Cathedral Church of Saint Michael:

On the night of 14th November, 1940, Coventry and its Cathedral endured a one-off, but relentless, bombing campaign. Overnight, the “Moonlight Sonata” offensive destroyed much of central Coventry, hundreds of its people and left its Cathedral in ruins. Only the outer shell of the walls and the tower remained standing.

In the days that followed, two enduring symbols emerged from the rubble: two charred roof-beams which had fallen in the shape of a cross were bound and placed at the site of the ruined altar, and three medieval roof nails were also formed into a cross, which became the original Cross of Nails (now located at the High Altar in the new Cathedral). Shortly after, the words “Father Forgive”—deliberately neutral in content—were inscribed on the wall of the ruined chancel, and Provost Dick Howard made a commitment not to seek revenge, but to strive for forgiveness and reconciliation with those responsible. During the *BBC* radio broadcast from the Cathedral ruins on Christmas Day 1940 he declared that when the war was over we should work with those who had been enemies “to build a kinder, more Christ-like world.”

The Cross of Nails quickly became a potent sign of friendship and hope in the post war years.

Today, more than 200 Cross of Nails partners—churches, charities, peace-building centers, and educational organizations—exist around the world, and Christ Church Cathedral earned membership into this reconciliation community in 2006 under the guidance of the Rev. Anne B. Stevenson, a priest serving Christ Church Cathedral at the time and a former president of the Community of the Cross of Nails (CCN)–North America. Christ Church has also hosted many guests under the banner of CCN, including the Rev. Canon David Porter, formerly Canon for Reconciliation at Coventry Cathedral and now Director for Reconciliation at Lambeth Palace, and the Most Rev. and Rt. Hon. Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, when he served as a canon at Coventry Cathedral.

What does our membership in the Community of the Cross of Nails mean? All members agree to participate in a conscious ministry of reconciliation. This participation may take the form of entering the chaos, standing in the middle, and creating an “in-between space” for dialogue; seeking sustenance by the Common Discipline (based on the Benedictine Rule of Life for lay persons); supporting each other in the work of reconciliation by means of foyer groups; and praying The Litany of Reconciliation (see back), which is recited every Friday at noon before the Altar of Reconciliation in the sanctuary of the old Coventry Cathedral ruins. –*W.B.*

If you are interested in helping to rekindle Christ Church Cathedral’s participation in the Community of the Cross of Nails, please speak with or contact Win Bassett at winbassett@gmail.com.

THE LITANY OF RECONCILIATION

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class,
Father forgive.

The covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own,
Father forgive.

The greed which exploits the work of human hands and lays waste the earth,
Father forgive.

Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others,
Father forgive.

Our indifference to the plight of the imprisoned, the homeless, the refugee,
Father forgive.

The lust which dishonors the bodies of men, women and children,
Father forgive.

The pride which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in God,
Father forgive.

Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Canon Joseph Poole wrote “The Litany of Reconciliation” in 1958, and today, it is prayed regularly by Cross of Nail members around the world. Framed around the seven deadly sins, it serves as a reminder that when we pray about the problems of the world around us, we need to begin by acknowledging the roots of these problems in our own hearts. The Litany is prayed, in a short ceremony taking at most ten minutes, at noon each weekday in Coventry Cathedral and in the Cathedral ruins on Fridays.



Coventry Cathedral ruins after the Coventry Blitz of World War II in 1940.