



COVENTRY  
CATHEDRAL



# A COVENTRY WAY

*Reflections on  
the Common Discipline*

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and members of the Cathedral Community*



# Foreword

**T**his manual is offered as a resource for those who seek guidelines and support material to help them in their Christian discipleship and reconciliation ministry.

*It tells the story behind the Community of the Cross of Nails (CCN) and invites you to find out more. It outlines the Common Discipline as a Benedictine catalyst for today and not as a limitation.*

*It may therefore be revised in any way suitable for a particular individual or group. It is produced with the hope and prayer that many may be rekindled in their Christian faith, built up in community and revitalised in their commitment to reconciliation, God's thumbprint on Coventry and its Cathedral.*

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# *The Community of the Cross of Nails*

The Community of the Cross of Nails (CCN) is a world-wide community of churches and groups who share a commitment to the ministry of reconciliation and a genuine intention to live a disciplined Christian life.

It springs directly from the united efforts of the community of Coventry Cathedral since the loss of the old Cathedral under enemy attack in 1940.

Reconciliation is at the heart of God's mission to the world. It concerns our relationship - with God, with ourselves, within our families and local communities, with peoples and nations and with the Earth.



# *Introduction to the Discipline*

Jesus said “ If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (*Luke 9 v 23*). He then lavishes on us the means to do so. Our lives are fulfilled when we respond to Him and find ourselves on the path to life forever. More than that, we become His means to transform the world in which we live, bringing light in its darkness and salt to preserve it from its own brokenness. (*Matthew 5v13 + 14*)

This double task of the struggle for obedience and the call to transform the whole world is possible because of God’s empowering Spirit, and because we are called to be in company with other Christians. Together we find power to stir up the apathetic, support the weak, heal the wounded, receive the outcast and above all love one another and the world around in practical service.

The question is “what should we do?” both individually and together. The needs of the world seem infinite and every Christian has to live their daily life, working, seeing friends, shopping, sleeping and being part of the world we seek to transform. Again, Jesus meets us in the busyness of our lives, and renews His call, “take up your cross and follow me”, in the middle of all that we do, converting the most everyday tasks to a holy work. In everything we are to work as for Him, and to be His ambassadors of reconciliation. (*2 Corinthians 5 v20*)

This elementary and simple rule of life is intended to help those associated with this ministry of reconciliation and any others who wish to make use of it. It is a successor to editions of what has been called “The Coventry Discipline”, going back to the 1950s.

# *The Spirit of the Discipline*

In the sixth century, St Benedict founded the Order which still carries his name.

He initiated a movement of reform which speaks clearly to our present day.



## **Benedict – the Reformer**

Benedict lived in the dark age that followed the break up of the Roman Empire and the fragmentation of western culture and civilisation. His movement recaptured a measure of stability and graciousness.

Today, western cultural, economic and political dominance is again in decline. One way forward lies in rediscovering a way of following Christ that is both relevant and radical.

## Benedict – Creator of a lay spirituality

In an age when the “religious” life was practiced largely by the heroically ascetic, Benedict devised a compassionate if still demanding rule for lay people, most of whom were of peasant stock. Today, we need to seek from God a new spirituality for the whole people of God.

- ◆ **In the Eleventh century**, a great Benedictine Abbey began to be constructed on the site occupied by the present Coventry Cathedral. This construction symbolises not only our continuity with the mainstream of Benedictine tradition but also our primary vocation to local and worldwide mission.
  
- ◆ **In the Sixteenth century**, this Abbey was destroyed as a consequence of the Reformation. The destruction symbolises a proper discontinuity with the Benedictine tradition and warns us against any sentimental attachment to the past. Like St Paul before him, Luther wrestled with law and rule and sounded the clarion call of “justification by faith”.

So we speak of and seek to enact not a common rule but a common “discipline” – a word which retains something of the strength of a rule but also something of the liberty of a way of life. Luther also married. Marriage radically refashions the traditional concepts of obedience, chastity and poverty into loyalty to our Lord, fidelity to our spouse and stewardship of our possessions. Our discipline seeks to reflect this refashioning.



- ◆ **In the twentieth century**, on the night of November 14<sup>th</sup> 1940, the beautiful medieval Cathedral was destroyed. The City of Coventry was bombed and amidst the carnage and terror, the ancient Cathedral burnt. The following morning Dick Howard, Provost of Coventry, stood in the smouldering ruins and prayed “Father Forgive”.

From that moment, in the years after World War II, a movement of reconciliation grew, first between the wartime enemies and then spreading throughout the world. Today there are more than 180 partners of reconciliation in over 28 countries, united by their commitment to reconciliation in their own sphere of operation. Each CCN partner has a copy of the distinctive Coventry Cross made from nails that fell from the burning beams of the old Coventry Cathedral.

- ◆ **Today**, the ministry of Reconciliation is as necessary as ever.
  - The ruins of the old Cathedral still stand as a sombre reminder of humanity’s capacity for self-destructiveness.
  - The Cross of Nails shows us the way to and the power of forgiveness. We can be reconciled with God and with others.
  - Alongside the ruins, the new Cathedral demonstrates the Resurrection and the hope of restoration.

# *The Practice of the Discipline*

A Coventry Way is a common discipline which is intended to be a structure to help us love God, one another and the world. These common factors should characterise all Christian people. It does not require of those who share it anything harsh or additional to what should be normal honest Christian belief and behaviour. However, the particular yeast that permeates each discipline is Reconciliation.

It is a basis to which can be added variations and details according to the circumstances and preferences of each member.

A Coventry Way calls for seven personal commitments. These may be summed up in the seven "S"s.

They can be practiced daily or assigned particularly one to each day of the week.

- i) Scripture
- ii) Supplication
- iii) Silence
- iv) Study
- v) Service
- vi) Sharing
- vii) Stewardship

Each of them should be explored and lived out under the particular banner of Reconciliation. Let us take each in turn:

## i) Scripture

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” – *2 Timothy 3v16+17*

Following A Coventry Way involves commitment to the devotional reading of scripture and response in prayer. How this will happen must vary according to the circumstances of life. Those commuting to work, or with young children keeping them awake at night, or retired or even ill, will all find different routines. The essence of the commitment is regularity.

The devotional reading of Scripture is more than studying the bible. It is the process of listening to what God says to us through it. To do this we need to read systematically, either using our own scheme or one someone suggests, spend time reflecting on the passage and then seek to apply its truths to our lives and our world.

### **PRACTICAL TIPS**

- Many people who commute read the bible and pray on the way to work. One person goes to a Benedictine monastery for the week-end before Lent. Another wakes in the night and prays for an hour before going back to sleep. It is all a matter of what each person can manage, given their lifestyle.
- If possible use a system for reading the bible, published by someone like the Bible Reading Fellowship or Scripture Union, or on the Internet.

## ii) Supplication

“Ask and it will be given you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.” – *Matthew 7v7*

Reading the Scriptures will always lead to and intermingle with prayer. This will usually start with praise and thanksgiving. It may lead to confession but it should include supplication.

Supplication is a form of prayer bringing specific requests to God. This should cover not only our own circumstances and people around us, but take in items on the news and situations far away. It may be based around a formal book of prayer or be spontaneous and impromptu.

All Christians should also be encouraged to seek one person with whom they can meet and pray. This may be a sentence of prayer with a spouse before sleep or a regular meeting with a friend.

- Be short.
- Excessive ambition is the enemy of prayer.
- Read a little. Talk a little. Pray a little.

Some may want to seek out those who can guide or direct us spiritually, perhaps meeting with them every few months.

Above all be thankful for the reconciliation that we have through Christ, whatever we have done, whenever we turn back to Him in repentance. In the knowledge and experience of His forgiveness which we strengthen through Scripture and prayer, we become better equipped to forgive others.

### **PRACTICAL TIPS**

- Make and use a list of items for prayer.
- A church may be a good place for a half day of quiet and prayer.

### iii) Silence

“Be still and know that I am God” – *Psalm 46v10*

To “hush the spirit” (as the Quakers say) is an indispensable part of the disciplined life. Without this deliberate withdrawal, one is buffeted by the pressures which demand immediate responses. The pressures are as frequent and varied as the people one meets, the news one reads and the situations with which one is confronted.

Do not be afraid of silence or of being alone. The regular practice of a period of silence will help a sound patient judgement to grow. We need to be people of peace if we are to bring peace to the world.

Quiet and retreat, if only perhaps a two day retreat once a year, are also essential for reflection and renewal. Quiet may come from spending time (perhaps just an hour, perhaps a day) regularly alone with God, perhaps using a journal, perhaps just praying, perhaps thinking about issues with Him. Retreat may often be arranged and guided by the local church or to somewhere that makes a longer period of reflection possible.

Love solitude but loathe isolation.

#### **PRACTICAL TIPS**

- Find a quiet place and determine to be silent there for 10 - 50 minutes on a regular basis.
- Try a silent retreat

#### iv) Study

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” –

*Psalm 119 v 105*

A Coventry Way commits us to study the Scriptures, the Christian faith and to study and reflect on the world around; to discern vocation to and practice of a life of reconciliation. Christians need to be well informed, ready always to answer with graciousness and respect questions that are put to them about the hope that they have in Christ. (*1 Peter 3v15*) This may be organised in small groups, but ought also to be important for each person.

The nature of study will vary according to circumstances, resources and the needs of each person. Study can be a threatening word bringing to mind scholars and libraries. The wisdom books of the Old Testament paint a different picture. Study in this case is the process of reflecting on the world and its problems, and on their relation to God.

Each should be aiming to study in at least three areas:

- God
- How to live in the culture and place in which we find ourselves
- Reconciliation

#### **PRACTICAL TIPS**

- Read a serious newspaper once a week, or listen to a radio programme on current affairs, or go to hear someone speak who knows about an area of controversy or interest.
- When you have read or listened, pray, look at the bible and think about what a Christian response might be. Research what other Christians have said on the subject. Remember that Christian leaders can be prejudiced and mislead.
- In any case think about how reconciliation might be related to the issue.

## v) Service

“Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many” – *Mark 10 v 43 – 45*

Our Lord calls us to a ministry of service. Within the Community of the Cross of Nails, we all seek to share in some aspect of service either to the community or by the community to the needy of the world.



*The Practice of the Discipline*

### **PRACTICAL TIPS**

- Take time to decide how you might serve others.
- Review this commitment regularly.

## vi) Sharing

“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” – *Hebrews 13v16*

A Ministry of Reconciliation commits us to a life of sharing:

### a) Sharing the home

All Christian virtues must first be honestly worked out in the home. Never allow a day to end with a quarrel unhealed by reconciliation through Christ's forgiveness.

No matter how busy one is in one's work, it is required of us that we witness daily to our love for one another in our homes.

If married, we should try to spend some time each day in relaxed fellowship and recreation with members of our family and not neglect our family under pressure of work.

If unmarried, we should recognise our obligations towards members of our household.

“We are members one of another” and must always be mindful of each other's needs and isolation.

Hospitality has always been a key ingredient in Christian discipleship. Anyone committed to A Coventry Way will want to use their home for Christ by sharing it with others as appropriate.



## b) Sharing skills

*1 Corinthians 12*

All of us have gifts, talents and skills. We can use them for ourselves or for others. In our common discipline, we seek as far as possible to use our gifts for the benefit of others

## c) Sharing possessions

*2 Corinthians 8 and 9*

However poor, each of us has some possessions. Those committed to A Coventry Way are also committed to sharing their possessions with others.

## d) Sharing the faith

*1 Peter 3v15*

All of us should commit to sharing our Christian faith with others.

The basis of all reconciliation is reconciliation with God. Christians are called to share the good news of Jesus Christ, so that others may find faith in God through Him, but at the same time to do so as reconcilers, with respect and grace.

## **PRACTICAL TIPS**

- It is helpful to think through how you explain what being a Christian means to you, in simple and unreligious terms. We should be ready to explain why it is so important, if asked.
- Practice telling your story of forgiveness through Christ and the way He has transformed your life.

## e) Sharing our lives together as Christians

Acts 2 v 42

Christians belong to the family of God. As such, they should seek to meet together for worship and fellowship. Personal prayer is only fully realised when it pours over into the corporate prayer of the Church. All should belong to a local Church and will meet with fellow believers on a regular basis.

Although belonging to a local church is vital, it is difficult to know and be known amongst the large numbers in most church communities. A Coventry Way encourages us also to be committed to Small Groups.

Through a commitment to meeting in a small group, we seek to develop the disciplines of reconciliation and ministry to others.

Each of us is called by the love of God to know and serve Christ, but also to serve Him in serving one another. This is the command of Jesus. Part of our personal commitment to Christ is thus a commitment to other Christians, not neglecting to meet them both in small groups and in worship together. The small group is where we develop the skills of listening to each other, supporting each other and seeking to learn from each other, not merely convince the other of our own opinion.

*The Practice of the Discipline*

### **PRACTICAL TIPS**

- Decide to join with others in a small group of some sort to study and pray together regularly.

## vii) Stewardship

“The one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” –  
*2 Corinthians 9v6*

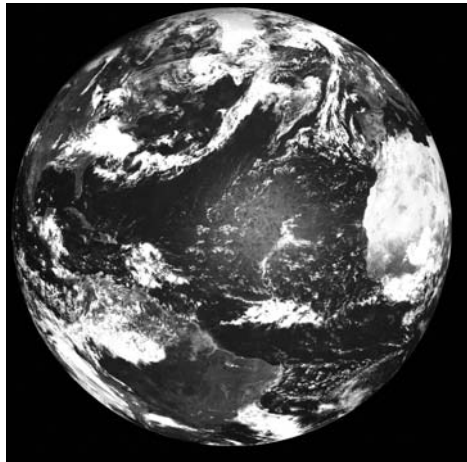
Disciples of Jesus should be careful to live within their means and to control their income and expenditure with discipline.

They recognise that all they have comes from God and that they are but stewards of His possessions.

They give generously, sacrificially and cheerfully to the work of God’s church.

They seek to live a simpler lifestyle.

They are committed to caring for God’s planet.



*The Practice of the Discipline*

### **PRACTICAL TIPS**

- Make an annual budget of your income and expenditure.
- Plan to give a tithe to your local Christian community.
- What else might you give?
- Take active steps to recycle goods you use.
- Be involved in some eco-friendly activity.

# *The Litany of Reconciliation*

The Litany of Reconciliation is an acknowledgement of our need for forgiveness. It is based on the seven deadly sins and uses the refrain first scratched on the wall behind the altar of the ruined cathedral – “Father forgive”. It is used each week day at 12.00 noon in Coventry Cathedral.

Being part of the Community of the Cross of Nails involves a commitment to reflect upon these sins and our need for forgiveness and to praying the litany on a regular basis.



## **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 dishonours the bodies of men,  
women and children

**Father forgive**

The pride which leads 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.**

# *CCN Membership*

Joining the CCN is open to any church or group committed to its mission, who wishes to enter a fellowship with others throughout the world.

The Community of the Cross of Nails is a Christian network of Churches and organisations who, drawn together by the story of Coventry Cathedral, share a common commitment to work and pray for peace, justice and reconciliation.

Inquiries about membership and any correspondence should be addressed to:

**The Canon for Reconciliation Ministry**

Coventry Cathedral

1 Hill Top

Coventry CV1 5AB

UK

or e-mailed to: [ccn@coventrycathedral.org.uk](mailto:ccn@coventrycathedral.org.uk)

**Partners** are those organisations which have been recognised by the presentation of a Cross of Nails. These are usually groups which have been long established. There are now about 180 such partners all over the world and the number is growing.

## **Administration**

Administratively, the Community is directly under the authority of the Dean of Coventry and run centrally from the Cathedral.

*The Community of the Cross of Nails*

*Growing together in Hope*

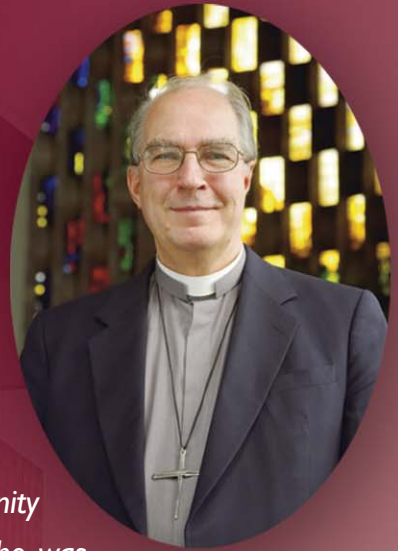
## *Resources*

The CCN website

**[www.crossofnails.org.uk](http://www.crossofnails.org.uk)**

Coventry Cathedral website

**[www.coventrycathedral.org.uk](http://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk)**



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*He led the first church plant from Holy Trinity Brompton to St Barnabas, Kensington where he was vicar for sixteen years. He became Dean of Coventry and Dean of the Community of the Cross of Nails in 2001.*

*He is married to Andrea and they have four children.*

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