

The Manual of
The Community of the Cross of Nails (CCN)
North America
(Revised 2012)

Foreword

This manual of The Community of the Cross of Nails (CCN) is a response to those who have asked for guidelines and support materials to help them in their reconciliation ministries. It tells how one may join the CCN and outlines the Common Discipline and other practices that have long been encouraged for membership. Because differences exist among individuals and groups, the CCN offers this manual as a catalyst and not as a limitation.

For example, the Common Discipline may be revised according to particular needs and local custom, and should be supported by spiritual direction, retreats, and workshops. Further resources can be found at the back of the manual and at <http://www.crossofnails-na.org>

The Litany of Reconciliation

All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. (*Romans 3:23*)

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 labors of men and women 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 homeless and 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, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you. (*Ephesians 4:32*)

(This litany is based on the seven capital sins. It was written in 1959, and since that year it has been recited every Friday at noon before the Altar of Reconciliation in the sanctuary of the old Coventry Cathedral.)

Introduction

The Community of the Cross of Nails (CCN) is an international, ecumenical fellowship of individuals and groups who are committed to the ministry of reconciliation. This means reconciliation with oneself, one's family, the local community, the worldwide community, and God. The goal of the CCN is to bear witness to the power of forgiveness, to build new life out of the world's brokenness. By its nature as a community of reconciliation, the CCN is ecumenical in its composition, *i.e.*, inclusive of all Christian traditions and open to dialogue with all the great world religions. The original work of the CCN, the rebuilding of the bombed hospital in Dresden, Germany, linked the Anglican Cathedral of Coventry, England, with the Evangelical Church (Lutheran) in Germany. Later it was the CCN's association with the Benedictine Roman Catholic Monastery in Ottobeuren, Germany, that led to the use of the Benedictine Rule of Life for lay people as the basis for the Common Discipline. In work related to the ministry of reconciliation in Ireland, the CCN was associated with both Protestants and Catholics. While the dominant constituency of the CCN is found among Episcopalians, members also come from Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and United Church of Christ churches.

The CCN was founded by the Very Reverend H.C.N. (Bill) Williams, one-time Provost and Provost Emeritus of Coventry Cathedral. He worked tirelessly to show the world possibilities for peace and reconciliation. His life was a faithful witness to the theology of reconciliation and laid a solid foundation for the work of the CCN. The CCN promotes a disciplined spiritual life that couples prayer and study with active ministry. Much of its work is carried out by volunteers.

I. The Story of The Community of the Cross of Nails

The work of the CCN is linked to and inspired by the reconciliation between the English and the Germans, which took place after the bombing of Coventry in November, 1940, and the bombing of Dresden, Germany in 1945. However, as Provost Williams writes in *Order My Steps in Thy Way*, the beginning of the CCN can actually be found in 1326 when medieval craftsmen hammered into the oak beams of the roof of the ancient St. Michael's Church in Coventry, nails hand-forged by unknown medieval town smiths. In 1940 that ancient church, then a Cathedral, was burned in the anger and hatred of war. "Those 14th century nails were strewn amidst the remains of the Cathedral. As if to make a grave of the mound of destruction, the Cathedral's stonemason tied together two partly consumed beams into the shape of a

cross and placed it among the rubble; a local priest, with the same intuition of death, made a cross of three of the ancient nails. Inevitably, the Christian response to the devastation was the utterance of Jesus from the Cross: 'Father Forgive.' The new Cathedral, built next to the ruins, now grows like a limb from the old, and the heart of the Christian religion is proclaimed in the rhythm of 'Crucifixion-Resurrection through Forgiveness.' " Today, the Cross of Nails stands as a world-renowned ecumenical symbol of reconciliation and hope.

II. The Ministry of Reconciliation

Reconciliation is a vital ingredient in the intimate relationships between individuals, an essential in the maintenance of community, and an absolute necessity for the development of world understanding. Most of the work of reconciliation has to do with the creation of dialogue. Therefore, the CCN does not take sides in a conflict. Rather, the CCN sees itself called to enter the chaos, stand in the middle, and create "in-between space." People may meet one another in this space, find a safe place, and establish common ground so reconciliation can occur. Members of CCN are involved in reconciliation projects in their own communities that bring healing where needed and stand as a sign of Jesus' ministry to the world, showing that in Christ all things are made new. Members also recognize that they are more likely to breed a spirit of reconciliation among others when they seek to reconcile their own inner conflicts. In other words, they recognize the need to reconcile themselves with themselves before they can offer reconciliation to others. This spiritual framework of inner as well as outer reconciliation includes prayer, study, and spiritual friendship. The desired reconciliation extends from internal personal struggles to the hostility between nations.

III. CCN Membership

Membership in the CCN is open to all. Both individuals and groups may become members. Annual dues are encouraged to be payable by January 1 of each year.

Membership is a tangible way to support the goals of the network. All members agree to participate in a conscious ministry of reconciliation. Individual members may or may not be affiliated with a CCN Partner (formerly called a Center)

IV. Creating a Safe Place for Dialogue

Reconciliation has to do with creating a safe place for dialogue to find common ground, even when the issue itself seems insoluble. Taking sides in judgment is not the process of reconciliation. Rather, reconciliation involves the more frustrating and painful behavior of standing in the middle and making an “in-between space” for people to meet one another no matter how intractable their differences. Create this “in-between space” by observing these disciplines for dialogue:

- Stipulate that only one person speaks at a time.
- Recommend that listeners ask themselves, “Am I really listening, or am I using the time to formulate my rebuttal?”
- Do not allow name-calling.
- Focus on one subject at a time.
- Discourage the use of emotional language that diverts attention from the topic.
- Discourage listeners from holding untested assumptions of what the speaker said, and encourage them to ask frequently, “Did I hear you correctly? Is this what you said?”
- Discourage the use of language that demeans the listeners or the speakers.

V. The Common Discipline

The Community of the Cross of Nails has long been sustained by the Common Discipline, which is based on the Benedictine Rule of Life for lay persons. Outlined here, the Common Discipline is a means by which members may dispose themselves to God’s Grace in Christ, so that they will be open to transformation and become the people they are called to be.

Silence, Prayer, and Meditation: Members regularly devote time to silence and solitude. Such withdrawal from one’s world is a basic source for the spiritual life. Finding a rhythm for withdrawal and involvement is an individual responsibility. Time for prayer and meditation might be as little as ten minutes four times a week, or as much as an hour a day. A day a month for reflection, an annual retreat of several days, or a sabbatical leave of several months may also be part of this practice. Members also encouraged to follow the CCN (Coventry Cathedral) Cycle of Prayer for devotions.

Study and Theological Reflection: Members regularly are involved in study. They may seek the help of study or reading groups or a spiritual friend for this portion of the discipline. Study should involve understanding the text from the writer’s point of view, probing its meaning for oneself and one’s world, and evaluating the work overall

from a theological perspective. Such theological reflection allows members to change the way they see the world and to respond to its needs as God calls.

Relationships: Members regularly set aside the time, energy, and honesty necessary for close relationships, for it is within the openness of this kind of love that the transforming grace of God begins to show itself in change and growth. For those who are married, family members along with special friends and colleagues will be the focus for intimacy. For those who are single, an intimate circle may encompass a larger group of persons who touch their lives daily. One may also seek support from a small group or spiritual friend.

Community: Members involve themselves in the life of a community in order to become less self-centered, more self-giving, and open to the Spirit of God in all creation. The communities can begin small with a church, a Foyer Group, or a neighborhood, and widen into larger circles.

Worship: Members participate in the life of the church community, recognizing that personal prayer is fully realized only when it pours over into the corporate worship of a church. For those who are part of churches in Eucharist-centered traditions, members partake in the weekly communion that nurtures faith.

Service: Members respond to Christ's call to a ministry of 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 a ransom for many." (Mark 10:43-45) The local church is one place where members get in touch with outreach ministry and opportunities for reconciliation.

Developing a Daily Discipline

Devote 20 to 30 minutes a day to this practice.

Use any of the Daily Devotions on pages 137 and 140 in *The Book of Common Prayer* as a guide.

Read and meditate on the gospel for the day as appointed in the Daily Office Lectionary.

Follow one of the three classic ways to read scripture, namely, the Ignatian Reading, the Franciscan Reading, and the *Lectio Divina* Reading:

1. Ignatian Reading: Ignatius of Loyola commended the use of the five senses to stir our meditations as we read a Biblical narrative. He encouraged us to become one of the characters in the narrative and see how the story unfolds from the character's point of view. The ultimate aim is to help us perceive the

narrative from the viewpoint of Jesus. In this way, we may more fully participate in his mind, heart, and work, especially as he reaches out to forgive us, so that we can reconcile ourselves with ourselves.

2. Franciscan Reading: This is a more fluid method that invites us to enter personally into the text. For instance, if we were reflecting on Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross, the Franciscan method would invite us to take actions such as these: hold a crucifix in our hands and study the Lord's crucified body. We might sing the hymn, "O Sacred Head, Sore Wounded." We might look through today's newspapers to identify places where people are suffering. We might write a poem to capture what we are feeling for all suffering people. We would end our reflection by asking God to make us an instrument of peace in the lives of those who are suffering. We would wait for God to direct us to act out our reflection in witness to Christ's love for people.

3. *Lectio Divina* Reading: In the history of Christian spirituality, this is the best known approach to the Bible. The Latin name simply means "divine reading" and entails a fourfold approach:

Read slowly. Choose a short passage from the lectionary for the day and read meditatively, prayerfully. Watch for any phrase or word that jumps out at you and promises to have special meaning for you. Read with your own life and choices in view.

Meditate. Allow your special word or phrase to sink into your awareness. If, for instance, the word "my" of the phrase "the Lord in my shepherd" is your special word, you can meditate on the idea that God can be, and wants to be, your shepherd.

Pray the text. Formulate a prayer that expresses your response to the idea. You are engaging God in dialogue. You might recognize all the time that God had been your shepherd.

Contemplate. That is, rest in the beauty of the encounter with God and savor the moment of intimacy.

VI. Other Practices

Foyer Groups: Foyer Groups usually consist of eight to ten people who gather regularly in friendship to support each other in the work of reconciliation. They are not study groups or task groups, but instead are guided by the spirit of hospitality. They are "porches of welcome" where people come together in an open and receptive way. They often begin and end their meetings with prayer, including the Litany of Reconciliation, and share a light supper. Because they are gentle, non-judgmental gatherings, where one is not worried by "what shall we do" or "what do you think,"

Foyer Groups teach us the kind of openness necessary to be available to the grace of God.

Forging Connections: Members link with other CCN members through visits and correspondence. They build relationships through participation in gatherings, conferences, and student programs.

Responsible Living: Members care for their own health, consider the needs of others and share their burdens, take time for recreation, and live within their means.

Recommended Reading

The Sunflower by Simon Wiesenthal

Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed by The Rt. Rev. Bennett Sims

No Future Without Forgiveness by The Most. Rev. Desmond Tutu

To Forgive is Human: How to put your past in the past by Michael L. McCullough with Everett L. Worthington and Steven Sandhage

A Prayer for The Community of the Cross of Nails

Almighty God, you have committed to us the ministry of reconciliation of your son, Jesus Christ; give us the confidence in your power to forgive, as your son forgave humankind from the Cross. In his name, bless The Community of the Cross of Nails and enable us to be witnesses for your forgiveness at work where we live. Unite us in a sacred fellowship to heal the hostilities we see, and give us the grace to love another in the name of Jesus Christ and to rejoice in the eternal fellowship of his disciples.

Amen.

Prayer