

BISHOP THANKS CHRISTIAN CHARITY FOR 100 YEARS OF PEACE WORK

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Rt Reverend David Walker, Bishop of Manchester, addressed a congregation gathered to celebrate the centenary of Christian peace charity, the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FoR) at St Mary's University Church, Oxford, on Saturday 17th January.

Bishop David urged those present to address the causes of war, not merely the symptoms, and suggested that in the future wars would be fought over increasingly scarce natural resources.

He was keen to stress human impacts of war, and spoke movingly of the effect fighting in WWI had on his grandfather's mental health. He emphasised the part that education has to play in preventing conflict, explaining how in his schooldays, *"When we came to study WWI we paid no attention to the dates and places of battle, nor to the generals who commanded and their tactics. Instead we learned the songs of protest and lament that the men in the trenches composed and sang."*

Given current austerity, high military spending and opportunist military recruitment, his comments about social issues and war were highly pertinent: *"Today, as it was 100 years ago, most young people don't join up because they want to kill and maim ... They come from the poorest communities, where the life choices are the most limited. Military service offers them the potential of a way out."*

Readings were chosen to highlight the Biblical basis for Christian peacemaking. Readers included FoR member Norman Kember, who was taken hostage in Iraq in 2005. Oxford-based social justice choir The Sea Green Singers performed Holly Near's *Foolish Notion*, which challenges the cyclic nature of war – *"why do we kill people who are killing people to show that killing people is wrong?"*

Hilary Topp, vice chair of FoR, spoke of the need to support FoR's continuing work and invited the congregation to make a financial contribution so our children grow up in a more peaceful world. Bishop David stressed the importance of the work of FoR and of the need for witness to Christ's nonviolent love, and thanked members of FoR their part in this:

"Thank you for what you are, thank you for what you do, and thank you for having done it consistently for 100 years, often in the teeth of public opinion. A radically pacifist approach has never been at the mainstream of British public life, and may never be so, but you hold an important part of the debate. You keep all of us thinking about both the impact of conflict and the urgency of making peace"

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

The Fellowship of Reconciliation is a Christian peace charity. It was formed in 1914 to support people who held a belief that war and its preparation is morally wrong.

Today FoR works to support grassroots peacemakers in areas of conflict through its International Peacemakers' Fund and equips its members to campaign, act and pray for peace.

FoR in England is part of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. www.for.org.uk