



Christians at work in Luton



St Mary's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation seeks to promote peace and reconciliation, while empowering people to live positively in multicultural and diverse communities. We seek to respond to needs in the community by developing creative and innovative interventions that build peace, develop understanding, and equip people and community with the required skills and aptitudes to live a peaceable life.

Our work is based at St Mary's Church in Luton town centre. We seek to work together with churches of all denominations across Luton, with the Muslim community and mosques, and other faith groups in Luton, with Luton Borough Council and Bedfordshire Police.

The Centre has evolved out of our experience of the past 15 years working for the peace of Luton, as well as work in the Middle East and elsewhere around the world.

At the heart of all we do is our strong belief that, as Christians, we are all called to work for the peace and wellbeing, the *shalom*, of our world. We do that confidently, yet with a desire to work with all people of goodwill seeking the blessing of our town, nation, and world.

The chrysalis of the work began when Rev. Nick Bell, the previous vicar of St Mary's, met Peter and Anne Adams and invited Peter to base his emerging work in community and civic mediation in the church. His words, "There will always be a need for you in Luton!" proved remarkably prophetic when, on March 10th, 2009, two years after they moved to Luton, the events leading to the formation of the English Defence League (EDL) began a period of seven years when Luton was regularly plagued by Far-Right protests.

A few years later, Peter was joined by his friend and former colleague Cathy Nobles, an American from Texas, who had been involved in field leadership of The Reconciliation Walk. Over four years, from 1995–1999, around 2,500 people walked through Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, and Israel/Palestine on the 900th anniversary of the First Crusade, offering an apology for the death and destruction brought to those lands by Western European Christians. Cathy's experience is vital for our work in Luton.

Finally, St Mary's present vicar, Rev. Mike Jones, brings to the Centre his understanding and experience in helping people with trauma find joy and peace. So much conflict is both driven by and results in trauma, thus perpetuating a vicious cycle. At one level, we could all benefit from finding joy and peace amidst the many challenging experiences in our lives. Yet at another level, it is our experience that much extremism emerges out of traumatic experiences that find a religious or ideological rationale, leading to conflict and, on occasions, to terror.



Protest in March 2009 opposite Luton Town Hall that led to the formation of the English Defence League (EDL).



Peter and Cathy along with Rev David Kesterton, vicar of All Saints Church, police and council colleagues showing solidarity with Muslim community over hate crime in 2018 over a call for an 'International Kill a Muslim Day.'

We seek a deep spirituality of peace at the heart of all we do. Psalm 85:10 speaks of "Mercy and Truth encountering one another, and Justice and Peace kissing." This is a beautiful picture of four themes central to both God's Old Testament covenant with Israel and the work of Christ on the cross, as well as the four components of real, sustainable reconciliation. We often seek to understand how these four elements can provide clues to a way forward in conflict. An important aspect of our work is our monthly Peace and Reconciliation service at St Marys.



"The Word became flesh and 'pitched his tent' among us, full of grace and truth." John 1.14

"Mercy and truth have encountered each other, justice and peace have kissed." Psalm 85.10

We have learned from and been inspired by many. Most importantly, we have learned from close relationships with what are often called the historic peace churches, especially the Anabaptist Mennonites. Along with this, we have been influenced by the models developed by Mediation Northern Ireland to sustain the 1998 Good Friday Agreement in a community deeply divided by sectarianism.

You can read about some of the Centre's activities on its blog, as well as its history and more about the team, at <https://stmaryscpr.squarespace.com/blog>. Please note we have had some issues with the site, so some links and emails may not work. For further information, please email pgmadams@gmail.com.

Watch the space

Would the community perceive the absence of your church or organisation? Chances are they would, considering the valuable ministries and services it offers. Stay tuned for further updates on the thriving church in Luton as it remains actively engaged with the community.