

Writing about my National Service for a magazine has helped me review the problem of conflict. From early days 'digging for victory' with my good parents and surviving the blitz, to experiencing call-up, and now the work my wife and I engage in with various peace organisations and the United Nations.

The evil of war continues and violence does not defeat violence: 'The war to end war', they said! Teenagers get drafted and are taught to kill. My brother remembers sobs coming from the opposite bed on his first night of National Service. The record-breaking M*A*S*H series portrayed the horror of war and is still on TV. So what can Christians do about war and violence?

Prayer life is basic. Not simply the recital of verbal formulas, but having time each day with our loving God, who cares about everyone. That relationship can shape us in the way we treat others. Peace begins through the love we show. Violence of all kinds and at all levels can be countered.

We are called not only to be hearers of the Word, but doers of the Word, so action is necessary. Christians should not be idle. (Remember 'Faith without works'?) Each person, making use of his or her abilities, can and should contribute.

My wife, Patricia and I see good things, such as the Church of England Synod voting by 260 to 26 for H.M. Government to respond positively to the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Also, all main denominations in the UK have made statements against replacing our own and Pope Francis has declared the very possession of such weapons is wrong.

At a church 'Spring Harvest' event, we witnessed a man realising that the necessity to have a firm intention to use nuclear weapons (to try to make deterrence work) directly conflicts with the Commandment not to kill. As a Christian, he saw he should not carry murder in his heart.

We will shortly be remembering all the combatants who died in the Great War and in all the other wars. Even greater numbers of non-combatants have died because of war - something like nine times as many. Those people must never be forgotten either. Hopefully, with this special 100th anniversary, they will be particularly noted.

If only work to build peace could be anywhere near the huge efforts that people make in time of war! While war causes resentment and perpetuates enmity, love of one's neighbour, love of the stranger, love of 'the Other', creates friendship. War delivers suffering, grief, separation, and the displacement of populations. Imagine individual National Services being replaced by a constructive and magnanimous International Service!

Significant change is needed. Something we Christians can and should engender?

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