**What can APF bring to the Church today?**

**The Context**

A few of us recently came together to discuss the way APF communicates and could engage best with the Church in the future. These are just ideas and suggestions that I am feeding back to you today and hopefully it will be the start of a conversation between us all.

Seven years ago I undertook a Master’s degree in Peace and Reconciliation. For my dissertation I wrote about the Church of England and felt passionate about helping on issues related to Peace and Non-violence but I was not sure where to place this interest. Unlike many people interested in peace in the Church, I was lucky enough to find out about APF through a lecturer and so joined up a few years later.

I realized quickly that it was not common for someone of my age to join APF as Sue called me asking why I’d joined so young. However, this led to a great conversation about our passion for Church and its commitment to peace. As well as how things have changed for my generation and the different ways people tend to engage with issues and demonstrate commitment to a cause now. We also discussed how the context of war has changed and how this influences people’s beliefs.

I think it is very important to understand these issues when trying to work out how we best work with the Church in the future. So, I want to put our discussion in context and explain a bit about how things have changed.

Although they get lots of criticism, I do believe my generation care deeply about issues of war and peace. However, I also think they are saturated by so many other issues that they are encouraged to care about too, which tends to overwhelm people. In many ways we are so saturated by trying to ‘do the right thing’ on all issues such as politics, sexuality, religion, violence, how we bring up children, animal rights, human rights, the list goes on, that we find it hard to focus and commit to a passion like you all have. We are told that we always need to be doing the right thing, whilst not offending people and not getting too dogmatic. In that context it is hard to foster commitment and believe in anything as passionately as we should.

So, what about War? As you know, when wars were waged, when they were declared and when they won, those committed to peace had to choose the uncomfortable, I believe brave, choice to resist all violence.

But the definition is much more complex now. Wars are rarely declared and rarely won.

For example, the rise of civil wars, of terrorism, of the war on terrorism, the tremendous violence of Isis or Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab (my friend has just died in Somalia - is that a war/how do we respond to that) and of course we have the threat of nuclear war which frankly feels hopeless.

Also, because of news and social media, we are overwhelmed with knowledge about the violence in our world, and yet at the same time here in our pretty comfortable home in the UK, we can appear far removed from being part of that violence. That has definitely desensitised us and disempowered people on the subject.

In this context a lot of people tend believe they can totally avoid playing an ‘active’ role in war and peace and I believe they struggle to see what having a non-violent commitment today would look like, even if they care about these issues internally.

Bring the two issues together and you find that pacifism seems both irrelevant to many people today or perhaps too extreme and dogmatic.

Add to all this, the fact that the Church is by definition a place where many views can come together, ending up comfortable, but quite woolly. And obviously, being link to the state and seeped in historical links to violence doesn't help. Because of that, I don't think many people look to Church for guidance and involvement on issues of Peace. I mean I didn't. I sought out a secular course on Peace because I didn't see a place for what I believed within the Church.

To add to this, I thought I would share with you some facts from a survey I undertook when I was preaching a sermon on peace at my church. I decided to undertake a survey to see what people inside and outside the church thought about the Church’s influence on these issues.

* I asked what religion is the most peaceful?

Out of 48 people only 5 said Christianity.

The vast majority said Buddhism or felt that no religion could be viewed as peaceful.

But because that was quite a general statement I decided to get more specific, I asked,

Do you think the Church of England helps to promote peace in the UK today? Really important question for us!

55% Not sure

33% Yes

12% No

The more specific I got the more ambivalent the results seem to become. You add up the **no** and **don’t know** and you get 67% of these friends of mine unaware of peace making work our Church. Many of these are Church goers or people connected to the Peace movement.

So, this context is really important because we as a group know that if more people focused on non-violence, reconciliation and forgiveness, then we could have a big impact in the world and certainly within our own Church.

But we also need to understand that our passion, and more importantly perhaps, our experience and understanding of these issues, is likely to be greater than many others in the Church. Go back 12 years and I certainly didn’t know as much about peace and non-violence as I do now. But I was still as passionate, but I placed my passion in other places, such as running a fair-trade stall in the student union or talking to Christian Union's about issues of justice and peace.

And I believe there are many people, like me 12 years ago, who care deeply and are passionate, but lack the understanding and the belief in how they can actually make a difference. *Sometimes people simple don’t have the vocabulary to understand how peace and non-violence could actual work and it is in that space that I believe we could have a real place of influence!*

**In the light of all this, what is APF here for today?**

We know what APF were doing 100 years ago and 70 years ago, but what are we supposed to do today?

Well in the past the organisation did a brilliant job at supporting people in their commitment to peace during really challenging times, personally and socially. APF helped to give the vocabulary to Anglicans who wanted to follow a commitment to non-violence but were unsure of how to, and were afraid of the backlash. In many ways we have the same role now. We have a role to engage with many people in the Church who care about the world, its people and bringing peace, but don’t have the confidence in it, in themselves or any experience of how it could make a difference.

Another thing that stands out for all of us is the way APF has become part of our identity. Peace and non-violence has become part of who we are and being a member of APF is a way of demonstrating and living out that element of our identity.

I also believe there are people in the Anglican Communion who share peace as a part of their identity. It may not be as obvious as ours, (remember we have a great deal of time and experience.) They are probably quite overwhelmed by the extent of violence in the world and disheartened by the lack of ways to challenge it, but what’s important is that they still care deeply about wanting change. I believe we need to work with that element of their identity, that focuses on the desire for change, and help to encourage it out.

For example, we need to be recognising that in people like me running a fair-trade stall at 19 there was attempts in me to live out part of my identity that I didn’t fully realise, but wanted an outlet for. We need to be seeking people like that and helping to develop their passions.

Tilly helpful expressed it like this; *‘We need to offer people a piece of ground to stand on.’* There is likely to be many people in the Church who would not have clue who to stand with when it comes to their belief in peace and non-violence. Like me, they are unlikely to find it in their local church, but they could find it in APF.

However, the key thing here is recognising that people who want a piece of ground to stand on may still be in different stages in their beliefs and understanding about these issues. *We need to make this space comfortable enough for people to engage with, and challenging enough to grow a commitment in.*

I also think it is really important that we start demonstrating more how we are similar to others.

In the peace movement it is often a lot easier to show how we are different from others (for example telling them what decisions with disagree with, challenging behaviours and decisions, telling them they are reading the bible wrong etc) but perhaps what we are not so great at is expressing similarity. And this is an important issue when working within the Church, because it seems to me that for many years Peace organisations have almost been fighting against the Church and standing apart from it. And in some cases, that was the right thing to do, but we must remember that we are a part of the Church and we do care about many issues that others within the Church also do.

There are many ways we could demonstrate similarities, for example, celebrating the good that’s is happening on local levels in Churches. It’s a lesson for me running the blog to have more uplifting stories of simple peace-making.

But I don’t want you to think this means letting go of the strength of our commitment, it’s really doesn’t have to. It is about enabling people to develop that part of their identity in a safe and encouraging space.

*And I truly believe that in that space we will have a greater chance to develop and grow people interest in peace and pacifism than if they were standing on separate ground.*

**So what practical could we do, what can we actual bring to the Church?** And these are just some ideas and I hope in a minute you will contribute your own thoughts and suggestions.

We could develop a Peacemakers Movement within APF that attempts to bring all these thoughts together. It could be fully branded and focused in on as something like ‘The Anglican Peacemakers’. In that way we will be promoting ourselves as the Peace-making organisation within the Anglican Communion, stressing our place and influence on the Church. In some ways we are doing this already, our blog is called 'The Peacemaker' and we have TAP, but it might be time to formalising these ideas into a structure that specially focuses us on engaging and developing peacemakers from within the Church.

What about if APF were 'a place where people with a committed to Peace-making within the Anglican Church can engage.’? It would give us a chance to engage with people we would perhaps not have been engaging with previously.

I think it could work as it would acknowledge that things have changed, but that there is still an interest and passion within the Anglican Church. It would also recognise that people feel scared and often doubt the idea of being pacifist but can imagine something of what being a peacemaker might look like.

Practically, our aim for the movement would be to both seek out peacemakers and then equip and educate them (and hopefully in turn, others across the Church.)

So how would we seek people out?

It is very important to actively seek out people who have this interest and help them express their identity. We can’t expect people to easily come across APF.

Social media, blog, online resources would be a key way but also, leaflets, presence at conferences. Things we have already started doing.

Through the diocese and church’s, in fact, perhaps we need to directly be engaging with churches by running competitions to celebrate everyday peace-making.

Talking to vicars and offering them help and resources.

Directly, engaging with students at universities – (what about if I had been contacted when I was studying?) via chaplaincies.

When we are confident on what we have to offer these groups, then we might feel more capable of connecting with them.

Equipping is also really important. We cannot just expect people to come to us, we need to have more to offer them in support, resources and in friendship.

Many of these things we have started doing and can do more of;

* Packs for schools
* Support for Churches, Remembrance Day resources, lent courses, prayers at particularly difficult times. Create prayer networks.
* Offer coverage and even perhaps rewards for everyday Peacemakers in the church, encouraging them to develop and grow their work.
* A key element is being positive and celebrating Anglican Peacemakers, even if they are not perfect, none of us are! We should write about the positives, acknowledging some of the good the work of people like, Archbishop Justin Welby. Much of what we write about it negative, instead, let’s engage with those who are doing good and celebrate it.

Much of this is about developing relationships with people and helping them flourish in what God has or could put on their heart. Most people are very relational and it is important to engage with that. I also know this from years of experience in fundraising, that engaging in a genuine way with people, helping to appeal to their identity and building relationships, is the best way to gain sustainable support and interest.