

# Paper I

The United Reformed Church and  
the centenary of the First World  
War 2014-18:  
How do we respond?  
Mission Committee

Church 2014  
**United**  
Church **Reformed**  
**Church** Church 2014

# Paper I



## Mission Committee: The United Reformed Church and the centenary of the First World War 2014-18: How do we respond?

### Basic Information

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<b>Action required</b>	Discussion
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>Alternative options to consider, if any</b>	None

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To consider how the URC acknowledges the anniversary of the First World War
<b>Main points</b>	During the next 4-5 years our thoughts as a nation will turn often to the events of the First World War. A vigorous debate about how it should be remembered is already under way and historians, politicians and many others are offering their interpretation of events and suggesting how – and why – we should call them to mind. Churches, faith communities and individual believers will also be involved in the ‘commemoration’. What can and should our local churches do during the period of remembering? What can and should we say as the United Reformed Church? This paper attempts to explore some of the basic issues around these questions and suggest possible ways forward.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	None
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Mission Committee

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	Covered by Mission Committee budget
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	There will be opportunities for working ecumenically and on an inter-faith basis, but also occasions where the URC may feel it should ‘go it alone’

# The United Reformed Church and the centenary of the First World War 2014-18: How do we respond?

## 1 Introduction

1.1 During the next 4-5 years our thoughts as a nation will turn often to the events of a hundred years ago, that moment in our history we know as the Great War or First World War.

1.2 The ‘whys’ and ‘wherefores’ of that event are still hotly debated, so it is no surprise that a vigorous debate about how it should be remembered is already under way. Historians, politicians, military figures, journalists, writers, comedians, all are offering their interpretation of events and suggesting how – and why – we should call them to mind.

1.3 Churches, faith communities and individual believers will also be involved in the ‘commemoration’. Local congregations and ministers will be organising or invited to participate in civic events, and churches and faith leaders nationally will be expected to contribute to public discussion and thinking. What can and should our local churches do during the period of remembering? What can and should we say as the United Reformed Church? This paper attempts to explore some of the basic issues around these questions and suggest possible ways forward.

## 2 Local church action

2.1 It is likely that in most villages, towns and cities plans for commemorative events are well in hand. A number of Christian denominations, organisations and coalitions – for example, Bible Society, HOPE, Youth for Christ, ‘churches together’ networks – are producing resources for individual churches or groups of churches to use, including prayers, worship material and study guides. In terms of helping churches to think ahead, a short paper produced by Capt Jim Currin of the Churches Group for Evangelisation, circulated by Churches Together in England in December 2013 (at Appendix B), contains a useful summary of the issues churches might consider, together with ten helpful ‘pointers’ to enable churches do some concrete planning. We might want to ensure that this paper is circulated among our churches, together with a list of websites offering background material and worship resources. We may also wish to prepare worship resources of our own.

2.2 Some churches will be holding special services or other events on Remembrance Day this year (and perhaps in future years): for example, churches in Merseyside are opening their doors on 11 November specifically to invite people in to pray for ‘peace’ in all its aspects, and we will want to encourage other churches to consider doing likewise. While many churches will be used to working with forces organisations such as the British Legion to plan annual services of remembrance, it is possible that ministers or churches will be asked to host extra – or different kinds of – events during the centenary years, and we may feel it wise to remind them of this in advance so that they can prepare their responses.

2.3 While there are no longer any soldiers who fought in the War still alive there will be, within many families, strong memories of those who fell or were injured or bereaved. We may therefore wish to underline, in any communications with local churches and ministers, the ‘pastoral’ dimension to this period of remembrance.

### 3 Speaking out as the United Reformed Church

3.1 We need to think carefully about how we respond ‘institutionally’ to the challenges and opportunities presented by this anniversary. As a rule churches should speak publicly only when they have something worthwhile and distinctive to say, not because it is expected that they will speak; and they will want to avoid merely repeating what others are saying, whether from a religious or non-religious perspective. This having been said, as followers of One called the ‘Prince of Peace’ who are ourselves called to be ‘peacemakers’, it would be odd, if not a denial of our calling, if as a Church we did not feel we had anything to contribute at this time. More positively, we might want to see this as a God-given opportunity to offer distinctively ‘Christian’ insights to the nation at a time when many are reflecting in a particular way upon matters of life, death, sacrifice, courage and solidarity.

3.2 Assuming that we do want to speak publicly, what should our contribution look like? Should we adopt a ‘line’ and stick to it, or be open to fresh interpretations and insights as we go? What principles, theological and other, should we consider when speaking as a Church into the public square on an issue such as this?

3.3 Good public theology includes the following.

3.3.1 being well-informed about the issue – which in this case is not easy, given both the complexity and contested nature of the narrative. Unlike the Second World War, there is little consensus among scholars as to the cause of the War (or even whether it had ‘a cause’), nor regarding responsibility for the unspeakable bloodshed and slaughter it generated. It would be well for churches and members to reacquaint themselves with the origins and history of the War, but they are unlikely to come to a ‘common mind’ on any aspect of it.

An important point that historians are making is the need to distinguish between the myths that have grown up about the War and differing interpretations of events. As Professor Margaret MacMillan of Oxford University has recently written,

there is a key difference between myths, which can be disproved by evidence, and interpretations, which take the evidence into account... The trouble in this debate... is that one person’s myth is another one’s incontrovertible truth.’ (The Guardian, 10 January 2014)

We should also be wary of judging decisions made in vastly different contexts according to criteria appropriate for today. As Professor Sir Richard J Evans of Cambridge University reminds us, a hundred years ago war was generally viewed as ‘positive’, ‘cleansing’ and ‘an assertion of masculine honour’, and colonial expansion was much less negatively perceived than it is today (‘Before the war’, *The New Statesman*, 17-23 January 2014, pp. 25, 27). This is not to suggest that the virtues of conflict resolution, co-operation, restorative justice, creative non-violence and peacemaking (as advocated by Jill Segger in her recent piece ‘What a Great War’, *Reform*, February 2014, pp. 31-2) should not be promoted at this time; rather it is to remember that, in an age in which duelling was still an accepted and common way of avenging slights to a man’s honour, war was seen as the ‘inevitable’ way to resolve disagreements more than it is today (Evans, p. 25).

3.3.2 being strategic in our approach and clear in our aims – which involves discerning when to speak and when to remain silent, when we might be saying too much and when we need to be more outspoken, and what we hope to achieve by our public contributions. We may wish to time our statements to coincide with days of remembrance, anniversaries of particular battles or other landmarks in the War (a calendar of main events over the next 5-6 years is included at Appendix C), or we may be attentive to significant moments in the church's year (or all of the above). We may want to suggest that it would be more appropriate for society to mark the end rather than the start of the conflict. We may want to draw attention to the extraordinary unofficial 'truce' that broke out during the first Christmas of the War, when soldiers on both sides exchanged food and souvenirs, conducted joint burial ceremonies, sang carols and played soccer. We shall need to decide when to speak on our own, and when joining with ecumenical and inter-faith partners (and 'secular' organisations) would have more impact. Our professional media and communications colleagues will provide advice and assistance in this respect.

3.3.3 rooting what we say in 'sound' theology – which will require serious, informed engagement with both the biblical text and current scholarship. It will also require much careful and prayerful groundwork, since it is imperative that we make clear, as a Christian body, the principles guiding our thinking and the basis upon which we claim our right to speak.

Among the questions we may wish to consider are how the teaching of Jesus about 'loving our enemies' and 'turning the other cheek' might have relevance to a period of reflection on an event like the First World War; how those references in the Hebrew Scriptures depicting YHWH sanctioning the wholesale slaughter of nations and peoples, or to the Psalmist calling down God's wrath upon his enemies, are to be understood; and how attention might be drawn to the enormity of the personal tragedy involved in the War, the fact that every one of the millions who died was made in the image of God and somebody's child, parent or spouse, without sounding pious, irrelevant or 'obvious'.

The Oxford theologian Nigel Biggar argued in a journal article last year that, when measured against 'just war' criteria, Britain's decision to go to war with Germany in 1914 was 'morally justified' ('Was Britain Right To Go To War In 1914?', *Standpoint*, September 2013): would we want to bring the Just War theory into play (others inevitably will) and make that kind of judgment, or rather, as David Tatem hints in his paper 'Commemorating World War 1' (at Appendix A), seek the 'de-legitimisation' of the concept of war in order to promote a fresh kind of dialogue for the future? Might we not even want to question the credibility of attempting to co-opt the Jesus we encounter in the New Testament in support of any endeavour that involved the taking of life, let alone the scale of killing seen in World War One, however 'morally defensible' the reason?

Good theology is often as much about promoting conversation and asking questions as providing ready answers (witness Jesus' response to many of the enquirers he entertained), and probing some of the 'deeper' issues around for example 'nationhood', 'sacrifice', 'duty', 'service' and so on may be a singular role the Church could adopt. Challenging received wisdom and 'accepted norms' also has a solid biblical precedent, and taking seriously the issues David Tatem raises in his paper about the language which will be used during the period of remembrance would seem to be vital. David encourages a profound questioning of the use of terminology like 'those who gave their lives' in the context of the anniversary of the War; and the specific adoption of Jesus' words in John 15.13, 'No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends' (NRSV) will also seem problematic to many. (We might note that the HOPE Christian network is building its whole programme to help churches remember the Great War around this verse, in the hope, as its executive director has said, that the Church will use it to point 'to the "Greater Love" Jesus has for us.')

would it look like, David asks, if those killed in World War One were described as ‘those who had their lives taken from them’? Even how the period 2014-18 is described – ‘celebration’, ‘commemoration’, ‘time of remembrance’ or whatever – is hugely important, as Jim Currin points out in his paper. There will be keen sensitivities around these issues, but David Tatem makes the important point that part of the responsibility of the church is to say that there are no boundaries beyond which it is not right to ask questions about causes and responsibilities and consequences.

3.3.4 being as wise as serpents as well as harmless as doves – which is linked to the points above and involves not being naïve to the potential this anniversary has to be an extremely ‘hot potato’. In this respect we might note the strong impulses coming from some politicians and sections of the press to see all who choose a career in the military as ‘heroes’, and the readiness of certain opinion-formers to denigrate those whose opinions they dislike as ‘haters of their country’. How comfortable are we that some £50m has been allocated for what the Prime Minister has called ‘truly national commemorations’ to mark this anniversary; or with Mr Cameron’s comparison of these events with the Diamond Jubilee celebrations; or with his indication that their aim will be to stress our ‘national spirit’? (Interestingly, the Peace Pledge Union, the pacifist organisation which promotes white poppies, has been given £95k of Heritage Lottery money to stage an event honouring conscientious objectors executed during the War.) How do we respond to the statement made by the Minister for the First World War Centenary, Helen Grant, that while the Government won’t be shying away from the fact that the outcome of the War was an absolutely vital victory for us that changed the course of world history in countless ways ... we won’t be ‘celebrating’ that fact or sounding triumphant fanfares... The tone has to be right – not four years of gloom and misery, but no dancing in the street either. (Helen Grant, ‘How we will honour the fallen...’, *The Lady*, 7 February 2014, p.19)?

What do we think about this anniversary being considered of sufficient moment to warrant its own Government minister? Could we ask whether similar respect will be accorded other significant anniversaries occurring during this period, such as the sealing of Magna Carta (2015), the Balfour Declaration (2017), and the Acts enfranchising women and permitting their election to Parliament (2018)?

While we will want to emphasize the need for lessons to be learnt from the events of 1914-18, we will also be alert to attempts to draw our memory of those events into current political debates, to interpret those events to suit the purposes of the present. While we will want to ‘remember’ (as we do every Remembrance Day), we will also want to be attentive, as David Tatem says, to the values which will be promoted alongside that remembering. As Jim Currin notes, already people in the churches are expressing discomfort with the idea that the anniversary might involve a celebration of ‘heroes’, and with the adoption of the language of ‘For God and Country’ in this context. A recent poll conducted by the think tank British Future found that 80% of people interviewed supported ‘a centenary focused on preserving peace through commemorating the sacrifice of those who lost lives.’ (Richard Woodall, ‘Greater Love’, *Idea Magazine*, Jan/Feb 2014). Jill Segger argues that we should not expect politicians to encourage a spirit of repentance and sorrow for what happened in past wars because power requires the people to be diverted into acquiescence by sentiment deformed into sentimentality, by the easy emotion of spectacle and tendentious rhetoric [and that] if this is to continue, each new generation must be recruited into complicity...’ (‘What a Great War’ Reform, February 2014, p. 32).

If we want to introduce the language of repentance and sorrow for what has gone before, or even suggest that these values should inform the tone of the whole ‘commemoration’,

this will not be easy. Finding language that will honour the fallen and the cause for which they believed they were fighting, while being authentic to the Gospel's radical avowal of 'shalom', will be a challenge. Knowing when and how to make a prophetic witness, to discern what 'must' be said in the cause of truth even when it is likely to provoke public ridicule and pillorying, has always called for deep spiritual wisdom and courage.

3.3.5 seeking to see that all are included, especially those likely to be marginalised or forgotten – including women, black and Asian people, and members of faith traditions other than Christianity. A list of websites giving information about combatants from the Caribbean, India, Africa and other parts of the world can be found via the Compton History link below (Appendix E), and Faiths Forum for London has co-launched a project called 'We Remember Too' to highlight the contribution of the millions of Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and people of other minority faiths who served in the British armed forces in both world wars (also see web link at Appendix E). Although it was largely men (and boys) who fought and died, we will want to ensure that the role of women is honoured too, including those who served in – and in some cases directed – medical units in parts of Europe and those who made an invaluable contribution at home.

3.3.6 ensuring we are understood – in other words, speaking authentically from a theological perspective but in a way that is comprehensible to the people we want to reach. This is not an excuse to drop the language of 'repentance', 'forgiveness', 'generosity of spirit', 'reconciliation' and so on, especially since there may be few outside of the churches and faith communities using it; rather it is to underline the importance of ensuring that the full radical import of those terms as they are rooted in our faith tradition, including the particular Judaeo-Christian meaning of 'peace', is communicated and understood.

## 4. Practical recommendations

4.1 In order to co-ordinate its response to the World War One anniversary the United Reformed Church, perhaps through the offices of the General Secretary or Mission Council, may wish to consider convening a small 'task group'. This group, which would be 'housed' within the Mission Committee, could meet in person and 'virtually' throughout the next four years to plan and oversee a strategy for the Church's engagement in the anniversary timetable. Among its terms of reference might be: to monitor developments in the media, Parliament, the churches and elsewhere; undertake theological reflection and historical study; collect relevant stories from around the world, particularly the 'forgotten stories', those of people drafted in from the colonies and of women; circulate material to, and gather material from, synods; help to resource and (as invited) advise local churches; and brief and prepare materials for the Moderators and other public spokespeople for the Church. Such a group might include people with specialist knowledge of history, theology, the media and public issues; a representative of the Church's Peace Fellowship; a military chaplain; and be chaired by a senior respected figure in the denomination. Some part-time administrative support may be necessary for this group.

4.2 Given the complexity of the issue and wide range of views that will be held among its members, the United Reformed Church might consider it advisable to consult its churches and membership to obtain a sense of the Church's mood and what members might expect their leaders to say on their behalf. Such a consultation could be one of the first exercises the 'task group' undertakes. The task group should also, in its early stages, ascertain what plans synods have made with respect to the anniversary.

## 5. Conclusion

5.1 Whether our images of the First World War come from half-forgotten history lessons, grainy newsreel footage in TV documentaries, the reminiscences of long-departed relatives or even the last series of *Blackadder*, the most abiding are always of suffering and death on an unimaginable scale carried out for a vaguely-definable end. Yet whatever we think of it, the War was a hugely significant event, not only on account of the many millions of (mostly young) lives it devoured, the ‘cream of a generation’, but its role in helping to redraw the political and social map of Europe and reshape cultural attitudes, including with respect to women. Despite being heralded as ‘the war to end all wars’ it also provided a seedbed for the 1939-45 conflict.

5.2 The planned commemoration of the War, spanning the next four or more years, provides an unprecedented opportunity to influence public thinking and, in particular, promote radical alternatives to violence, and the Gospel values of peace, forgiveness and reconciliation – values which are not only at the heart of our faith but which have proven practical worth. Unlike the Anglican Church – which may find itself to a degree restricted in what it can say on account of its role as our ‘state church’ (though the Falklands service of 1982 shows how its unique position can be used in counter-cultural ways) – the United Reformed Church has the freedom to speak when and as it feels appropriate. To capture the attention of the media and people generally it will need to be imaginative, credible, informed and clear in what it says. As it considers its key messages it may want to reflect, not only on the importance of being truthful about the past and of learning from it, but how it can help to ensure that this anniversary, coming as it does at a time of continuing international tension, is used as an opportunity to highlight the non-necessity of war and promote peace, harmony and international co-operation.



# APPENDICES

## A A paper David Tatem, October 2013 Commemorating World War 1

- 1 The concern I have developed regarding the forthcoming commemoration of the start of World War 1 was triggered by a letter from the government to faith communities inviting them to be involved. The letter specifically referred to a proposed event on August 4th in Westminster Abbey but of course by extension invited faith communities to be involved with the whole period of commemoration. This was placed on the agenda of the Free Churches Group meeting in April 2013 just after the letter was received.
- 2 Government initiatives have developed since then but the focus remains on encouraging as many parts of society as possible to join in the commemoration, including making it possible for school children to visit the battlefields. There are places where a museum exists including part of a trench still kept as it would have been along with collections of equipment, photographs and so on. On one level it is clear that children will have the chance to discover what being involved in the war was like and will be given the statistics of loss of life just as the rest of us are reminded year by year on Remembrance Sunday but what values will be promoted alongside this? The focus of the commemoration is not simply on the educational aspect for children however and from a rigorous Christian point of view it is surely essential that we approach the forthcoming period with great caution and rigorous theology.
- 3 There will, as I have said, be an emphasis on the terrible loss of life that was experienced, no one could get away with not acknowledging that but there will be a number of agendas focussed in a variety of ways on national pride and identity and down that path lay many temptations and dangers.
- 4 What I found myself focussing on very quickly was the importance of the use of language.
  - 4.1 Is this a commemoration and what does that mean? What about the language of victory or defeat and how might that become loaded with idea of one side right and the other wrong? What about the deeper meanings of peace, justice and reconciliation and how open are these terms and others to accidental or deliberate manipulation?
  - 4.2 The most obvious use that I have recognised so far and which I questioned at the meeting of the Free Churches Group was a use that has been common recently, the phrase ‘those who gave their lives’. Sometimes that is more neutrally put as ‘those who lost their lives’. But it is important to reflect on when ‘lost’ is used and when ‘gave’ is used and when a switch may reflect or may be intended to create a subtle shift in emphasis.
  - 4.3 A few years ago I watched a performance of ‘Oh! What a lovely War’ in which my son played General Haig and I remember being focussed on the thought that there were millions of young men who rather than giving their lives had actually had their lives taken away from them and I reflect that it was not popular then and is not popular now to put it that way. There are deeper question of how the whole thing might have been avoided and whose responsibility it was and of how it is possible to change a culture that allows politicians and military leaders to be able to think only in strategic terms, like a chess player who may sacrifice a pawn or two in order to win the game and there are those who would rather those who would rather those questions were not asked.

- 4.4 I will be surprised in the commemorations if we hear the phrase ‘lives taken away’ used rather than ‘lives lost’ or ‘lives given’ so the challenge for the church and for other faith groups is to do what the Churches eventually succeeded in doing with the abolition of slavery, to de-legitimise the use of certain terms and certain concepts.
- 4.5 I cannot help but reflect on what happened when Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire with the resulting of the legitimisation of certain concepts and the de-legitimisation of others. We must discuss the theology of the Just War and whether it is still fit for purpose as a legitimisation of the whole military culture of the present time. It is a question for deep and serious discussion with huge implications for the development of weapons technology among other things.
- 4.6 But I want to return to the question of language and the use of language. There is of course more to be said about it because there were many thousands of young men who enthusiastically signed up on a wave of patriotic fervour, spurred on by the language of the posters and politicians appealing to their patriotism. Perhaps the argument could be made that no one really grasped what kind of war it might become, neither in the villages and towns of Britain nor in the government offices of Westminster but that response is not good enough. There was plenty of experience around already of ‘modern’ warfare to know what kind of carnage it could produce and from a Christian perspective, just how difficult any application of Just War principles had already become. In popular culture, however, the idea of serving your country was and remains strong along with the strong sense of approval and love of country that goes with it and the approbation that goes with appearing to be disloyal. Recently we can see the attempts to describe Ralph Miliband as someone who hated the country that had given him sanctuary and the disreputable way in which this kind of language has been used. All of this ‘dynamic’ is used to take precedence over any careful theological or humanist reflection on the exercise of responsible power over people’s lives or deaths.
- 4.7 I am sure that there will be a good deal of careful use of language in the commemorations that will be engineered in certain quarters to create the desired balance of regret at the huge loss of life on the one hand but admiration for all those heroes who gave their lives in defence of their country on the other and deeper questions beyond certain boundaries will be discouraged. Surely part of the responsibility of the church is to say that there are no boundaries beyond which it is not right to ask questions about causes and responsibilities and consequences.
- 4.8 Change the language to ‘lives taken away’ and it becomes much more uncomfortable. Who took them away? Was it the enemy or the politicians and strategists who simply played with numbers and refused to see human beings, who were concerned with power politics and their own advantage or disadvantage and did not see themselves in any real sense as servants of ordinary people rather than being in control?
- 5 It is dangerously tempting to say that we have come a long way since 1914-1918 and made progress because in some senses we have. We no longer execute people for cowardice in battle. We understand the problems of post traumatic stress disorder but we still exclude disabled soldiers from victory parades in case it spoils the effect just as Margaret Thatcher did at the end of the Falklands campaign, just as Elizabeth I had done after the defeat of the Spanish Armada where the maimed and dying sailors were packed on the streets of the Plymouth Barbican while the partying went on up the hill and the priests gave thanks to God for the victory.

- 6 It would be good to believe that the Church has got better at choosing what to bless and what not to bless but it can be patchy. At the end of the Falklands campaign, though, the service in St Paul's reputedly infuriated Margaret Thatcher because it had a tone of reconciliation rather than victory and regretted the loss of life on both sides. Once again that was a lot to do with the use of language and again I want to say that the most important role that the churches can play in this period of commemoration will be to keep asking awkward questions about the use of language and the adequacy of the depth of discussion the language take us to. What do we mean by reconciliation and peace? Does it simply mean saying sorry and being able to live together again or does it actually mean understanding what created the conflict and violence in the first place and digging deep into issues of power, the sharing of resources, the dynamics of national identity and so on and properly understanding them and then making appropriate decisions that may cost us money or affect our lifestyle but won't in the end cost us untold lives or take us into a morality where we can shut our eyes to what we are doing because we are doing it using drones or getting our machines to fight our wars for us. Do we confine our reflection to the period of the war without applying it in our present time?
- 7 One of the results of the impact of the First World War has been for strategists and military technicians to work at creating means of delivering mayhem that do not mean that our side has to be brought home in body bags but at the same time not caring how many body bags the other side needs. We might say that the development of nuclear weapons is an example of that, especially as they were used at the end of the Second World War but that is such an exceptional example that it stands in a category of its own with a unique set of issues especially relating to the concept of deterrence. Better examples are the well known and currently hotly debated issue of the use of drones as weapons and not simply for reconnaissance. A less well known example is of the development of the BLU-82 daisy cutter bomb. This is an explosive device that explodes on a more or less two dimensional plain and will obliterate everything over a 600 yard diameter area. It was first used in Vietnam and has formed a significant component of the 'shock and awe' military philosophy. What can one say from a Christian point of view except, 'how in heavens name does such a weapon fit within the Just War concept' and 'so much for loving your enemy'?
- 8 It seems to me that as we prepare resources for this period, one of the things that is needed is a comprehensive overview of how all the relevant aspects interconnect and then from a Christian point of view, what the theological input is to the discussion.
- 9 I mentioned nationalism / national security / national identity as one of the factors and that is a high profile issue one way or the other these days and is a very good example of where the use of terms actually demands deep and careful understanding. I have sometimes wondered what future generations might look back on our time and say 'how could they possibly have seen that as important?' and I hope that one of the things they will say that about will be our obsession with national pride before our sense of being one race on one world.
- 10 We have a significant challenge and opportunity during the period that is approaching almost effectively to restate many of the core values of the Christian faith, to really be the salt for the world that Jesus told his followers they should be. If we do it properly we will not make ourselves popular but to be true to the gospel of peace and to the Prince of Peace, it is a challenge we must not shirk.

## **B Jim Currin's paper Remembering World War One: a feature paper from [www.cte.org.uk](http://www.cte.org.uk)**

This is a personal paper from Capt. Jim Currin, Church Army, the Secretary for Evangelisation, Churches Together in England. It is written to aid discussion, prayer and planning for local groups of churches.

- 1 2014-2018 is going to be a significant time for these islands as we remember and reflect on the First World War.
- 2 The Government are encouraging schools to research their local community history, while cities, towns and villages are beginning to plan events and renovate war memorials that are in need of repair. The main media companies plan many hours coverage of all the major events as each centenary date comes around. National publishers and local history societies are producing books and booklets in readiness for the interest anticipated from the beginning of next year.
- 3 The Bible Society is committed to producing material, and has been asking for stories associated with Bibles given to soldiers in WW1. Books about 'Woodbine Willie', 'Tubby Clayton', and Padres given the Victoria Cross have been also written. National denominations and 'Churches Together' are writing resources for individual and groups of churches to use 2014-2018 including prayers, liturgical resources and group discussion notes.
- 4 Some significant civic churches are planning a service on the date Britain declared war (August 4th) to reflect on the phrase, 'the lamps are going out all over Europe'. This is a date / theme many local churches may replicate.
- 5 HOPE ([www.hopetogether.org.uk](http://www.hopetogether.org.uk)) is collating a network of Christian agencies planning to provide resources which speak 'hope' in to the forthcoming moment of national history. There will be resources for churches, schools, and community groups from a variety of sources and traditions, as well as material on ([www.christianity.org.uk](http://www.christianity.org.uk)) for enquirers. It is anticipated that this time will raise questions about faith, conflict, suffering, and loss, as well as peace, reconciliation, hope and mutual respect.
- 6 This paper is intended to get local groups of churches thinking, praying and planning for what might be most appropriate locally. The resources mentioned above will be helpful later on in the in the process, but now is the time to start working on possibilities. There are many things which could be done over the 4 year period, so here is a suggested list of ten topics to stimulate discussion.
  - a Raise this subject at the next meeting of churches together and compare notes about any plans already being discussed, e.g. churches, schools, Council, Royal British Legion etc.
  - b Contact the leader of your Local Authority to compare notes and offer help as and when plans progress. Are Civic events planned or Memorials being renovated?
  - c Check with local schools if they have begun to think what they are planning – are there any visits to battlefield sites being organised yet?
  - d Ask any local history society what work they might be doing to tell the story of soldiers named on graves, war memorials, bell 'Peal' boards etc. Are booklets being written?
  - e Consider what issues are likely to arise, especially if you have a high profile

- presence like a military base nearby. Are there Cadets / ATC etc.? If so, discuss with the Chaplains.
- f Remember the pacifist response to World War I. The Quaker movement have produced a paper about this ([www.cte.org.uk/Articles/355647/Churches\\_Together\\_in/News\\_Events/News/Quaker\\_statements\\_re.aspx](http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/355647/Churches_Together_in/News_Events/News/Quaker_statements_re.aspx)). Discuss various Christian traditions reflected in your own locality.
  - g Become familiar with 'Just War' principles. Discuss these in relation to your own context, especially if you have soldiers killed recently and people asking ethical questions.
  - h Consider producing your own local resource which reflects on some of the above eg Bible Study course, leaflet, series of speakers (Chaplain / Quaker), newspaper article etc .
  - i Begin to pray for how the national and local community will remember World War I – especially in our own very different context. Consider how the local community might pray.
  - j Keep focussed on Christian perspectives – celebrating our diverse views – in the quest for peace and the 'common good'. Reference [www.christianity.org.uk](http://www.christianity.org.uk) on anything for enquirers.
- 7 Resources to help with all of the above will be coming, but now is the time to start praying and planning at a local level. Please note, a number of church leaders have suggested we avoid using the word 'Anniversary' and keep to 'Commemoration' or 'Remember and Reflect' as watch words for the process.
- 8 Let me end with an observation and two comments.
- 9 First, I have been struck by the strength of feeling many Christians have to avoid any celebration of 'heroes' and 'For God and Country', remembering that soldiers did not give their lives as much as have it taken from them.
- 10 Second, there is much to engage with 'the war to end all wars' in our current context, and we do well to help people reflect and pray for peace everywhere as we remember 1914-1918. This is one of those times to pray with the Bible in one hand a newspaper in the other.
- 11 Third, war is a relevant topic the churches have spoken in to in many ways before, from providing Bibles and Chaplains to being pacifists and offering hospitality. We have preached, produced art, written poetry, offered prayer and given practical help. How could / should we speak in to this issue, as Christians and churches together, again as we prepare for 2014-2018 today?

## C Key events and anniversaries, 2014-2020

### 2014

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| 15 May        | International Conscientious Objectors Day event at the Tavistock Square memorial  |
| 4 August      | Anniversary of Great Britain entering the war<br><br>service to recognize the Empire contribution to the War – Glasgow Cathedral<br><br>non-religious event of remembrance at St Symphorien, near Mons, Belgium<br><br>silent vigil by Christian peace groups, St Martin-in-the-Fields<br><br>candle-lit vigil in Westminster Abbey |
| 23 August     | Anniversary of the Battle of Mons   |
| 5-9 Sept      | Anniversary of the Battle of the Marne  |
| 12 Oct-11 Nov | Anniversary of the First Battle of Ypres  |
| 9 Nov         | Remembrance Sunday  |
| 25 December   | Anniversary of the unofficial Christmas ceasefire in ‘no man’s land’  |

### 2015

- |                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| 22 April-25 May | Anniversary of the Second Battle of Ypres                                       |
| 25 April        | Anniversary of the Gallipoli landing  |
| 17-22 Sept      | URC/Church of the Pfalz consultation (including ‘public day’ 20 Sept) Cambridge |
| 24 October      | 70th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations                          |
| 8 Nov           | Remembrance Sunday  |

## 2016

21 Feb	Anniversary of the Battle of Verdun
31 May	Anniversary of the Battle of Jutland
5 June	Anniversary of the death of Kitchener
1 July-13 Nov	Anniversary of the Battle of the Somme
13 Nov	Remembrance Sunday

## 2017

12 March	Anniversary of the Russian Revolution
6 April	Anniversary of the United States of America entering the war
31 July	Anniversary of the Third Battle of Ypres
Oct-Nov	Anniversary of Passchendaele
12 Nov	Remembrance Sunday

## 2018

3 March	Anniversary of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk
11 Nov	Remembrance Sunday / Anniversary of the signing of the Armistice by Germany

## 2019

18 Jan	Anniversary of the Paris Peace Conference
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## 2020

10 Aug	Anniversary of the first meeting of the League of Nations
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Network for Peace ([www.networkforpeace.org.uk](http://www.networkforpeace.org.uk)) is compiling an e-list of events organised by peace groups to coincide with the anniversary of WW1.

## D Further reading (some recent books on the First World War by reputable historians)

- Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (2013)
- Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (new ed., 2009)
- Martin Gilbert, *The First World War: A Complete History* (2000)
- Peter Hart, *The Great War: 1914-1918* (2013)
- Max Hastings, *Catastrophe: Europe Goes to War 1914* (2013)
- Adam Hochschild, *To End All Wars* (2011)
- Nigel Jones, *Peace and War: Britain in 1914* (2014)
- Margaret MacMillan, *The War that Ended Peace* (2013)
- Gary Sheffield, *The First World War in 100 Objects* (2013)
- Norman Stone, *World War One: A Short History* (2008)
- Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (2003)
- H. P. Wilmott, *World War 1* (2009)

Though dated, A J P Taylor's *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848-1918* (1954) is still considered a classic.

## E Useful websites

- URC Peace Fellowship: [www.urb.org.uk/mission/peace-fellowship.html](http://www.urb.org.uk/mission/peace-fellowship.html)
- Churches Together in England – a useful gateway to a range of resources and websites: [http://cte.churchinsight.com/Articles/363711/Churches\\_Together\\_in/Resources/News/News/Information\\_re\\_marking.aspx](http://cte.churchinsight.com/Articles/363711/Churches_Together_in/Resources/News/News/Information_re_marking.aspx)
- HOPE 'Greater Love' page: [www.hopetogether.org.uk/Groups/203992/HOPE/Mission\\_Moments/Remembrance/Remembrance.aspx#.Ut\\_fBbSznct](http://www.hopetogether.org.uk/Groups/203992/HOPE/Mission_Moments/Remembrance/Remembrance.aspx#.Ut_fBbSznct)
- Compton History – a list of websites giving information about Black and Asian combatants: [www.comptonhistory.com/ww1webresources1.htm](http://www.comptonhistory.com/ww1webresources1.htm)
- We Remember Too – resources relating to participation by people of non-Christian faith traditions: [www.faithsforum4london.org/2013/11/we-remember-too](http://www.faithsforum4london.org/2013/11/we-remember-too)
- Network for Peace: [www.networkforpeace.org.uk](http://www.networkforpeace.org.uk)
- Peace Pledge Union: [www.ppu.org.uk](http://www.ppu.org.uk)
- A Quaker paper remembering WW1 and the pacifist tradition: [http://cte.churchinsight.com/Articles/355647/Churches\\_Together\\_in/News\\_Events/News/Quaker\\_statements\\_re.aspx](http://cte.churchinsight.com/Articles/355647/Churches_Together_in/News_Events/News/Quaker_statements_re.aspx)
- Veterans for Peace: <http://veteransforpeace.org.uk>
- Fellowship of Reconciliation: [www.for.org.uk](http://www.for.org.uk)
- Government webpage resource: [www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/first-world-war-centenary](http://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/first-world-war-centenary)
- Government statement about plans to mark WW1: [www.gov.uk/government/news/maria-miller-sets-out-how-government-will-mark-first-world-war-centenary-in-2014](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/maria-miller-sets-out-how-government-will-mark-first-world-war-centenary-in-2014)
- No Glory in War 1914-18: <http://noglory.org>
- Battlefield information and timeline: [www.greatwar.co.uk/index.htm](http://www.greatwar.co.uk/index.htm)