

# Diocese of Bath & Wells Peacebuilding Network

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## The Peaceful Parish - a futures approach to addressing parish conflict

1. Christians are called to be peacemakers. Christian communities can reflect the Kingdom of God, displaying to the world the miracle of unity in diversity and the fruits of the spirit - love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
2. In reality things are not always harmonious. Anxieties about change, unresolved differences or interpersonal animosities can give rise to quarrels in which the primary Christian duties of love and forgiveness are forgotten. A community which becomes a “house divided” can be an uncomfortable place of anger, blame and pain.
3. The central idea behind the Peaceful Parish is to frame a parish conflict as a desire to restore Christian community rather than as a problem to be solved. This recognises the multi-layered nature of most parish conflicts, which often invoke complex histories of hurt and misunderstanding, and may not easily be remedied just through traditional processes of dialogue or mediation.
4. The Peaceful Parish seeks to help a parish transcend a conflict rather than (re)solve it. It rests on the belief that Christian scripture and teaching contain a vision of harmony and peaceful co-existence which can be realised through prayer, honest conversation, humility and forgiveness.
5. The Peaceful Parish offers a simple process with four main elements:
  - a. **Dwelling in the word** - reflecting on scriptural guidance on peaceful community (e.g. Romans 12, Galatians 5:22).
  - b. **Private acknowledgment** - that I, and my community, community falls short my understanding of Christian peacefulness.
  - c. **Re-envisaging** - what our parish would look like if it were more peaceful using biblical hallmarks of Christian peace.
  - d. **Movement** - identifying simple personal and collective actions that will begin to move the community in the direction of its vision as a peaceful parish. Small acts of kindness can have transformative effects.
  - e. **Community conversation** - what is important to us now?
6. The Peaceful Parish is about articulating shared aspirations and nurturing a willingness to travel together towards a more peaceful Christian future, rather than a specific plan or goal to be reached. Small changes can have big effects. It focusses peoples’ attention on moving into the future together, building on their strengths, rather than returning to some kind of idealised status quo.