



The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby's Reconciliation Ministry has launched its Difference programme for church youth groups, to help nurture and encourage a generation of peacemakers.

Difference, which already runs in churches and prisons, was launched for secondary schools at the National Education Conference earlier in the year and has now been developed for church youth groups. Difference draws deeply on the life and teachings of Christ and the wisdom of expert peacemakers. It aims to equip young people with three practical habits – Be Present, Be Curious and Reimagine – to transform and build good relationships with their peers and the world around them, whilst helping them to disagree well and cross divides.

Through a series of immersive sessions, young people engage in meaningful dialogue, practical exercises and reflective activities aimed at fostering empathy, understanding and resilience. It has been produced in collaboration with youth workers and education experts and was piloted in several churches across the country.

To celebrate the expansion of the course to church youth groups, Justin Welby hosted more than 400 guests in the gardens in Lambeth Palace on Wednesday 8 May, attended by young people, church leaders, pastors and educators for an evening of celebration and activities.



The sunny spring evening kicked off with an impactful procession by young people, each holding up homemade banners on which they had written where they see division in the world – from global conflicts and racism to bullying and online cancel culture. They then turned their banners round to share visions of the world they are hoping for instead. It was followed by a performance from the Christ’s Hospital choir, who treated guests to a rendition of Stormzy’s ‘Blinded By Your Grace’, before an introduction from the Archbishop and Kiera Phyo, Director of the Reconciling Leaders Network. Kiera thanked the young people and pilot groups for all they had contributed to the creation of the Difference resources for young people. After this, young people interviewed the Archbishop on stage, with prayers led by his reverse mentor, Debra Nelson.



Activities took place across the garden late into the evening, including football skills with the education and social inclusion charity, Football Beyond Borders. Guests were invited to write prayers for peace, experience some of the Difference materials, and explore an immersive 'prayer labyrinth – a walking meditation that focused on peace and reconciliation.



Find out more about running Difference with your school and youth group [here](#).

Read the Archbishop Justin's speech in full:

I remember when I was six or seven, lying in bed one night and I knew my dad had been drinking because I could hear him shouting and yelling through the thin wall. Many young people here will know that feeling. Many adults also know that feeling and how horrible it is. The thing that most kids want, in my experience, more than anything else, is security, stability and safety at home. They don't want raised voices. They don't want shouting. They want to know that the people they live with who look after them, love each other and care for each other. And even if they have disagreements, which almost everyone does, that they know how to turn them around and restore relationships.

It disturbs us when we find that there are rows and anger. But the nature of being human is that when we're living with others, we get together with those who are like us and we relate most easily to those who are like us. And it's much easier to be pleased with people who think the same way than it is to be with people who are different. But in our country at the moment, we're now the most diverse country on Earth - even more than the United States. Which means if you're here, you know there are vast numbers of people who are different.

And similarly with social media, people get together in like-minded groups. And in London and in other places around the country, they get together in gangs and they exclude those who aren't in the group. And being excluded for being different is really horrible. Whether it's for your ethnic background, your race, your age, your learning, your attitudes, your politics, your religion, your gender, your sexuality. Isolation is one of the major causes of mental illness. And that's just human isolation. And it's the opposite of what God makes us for. God makes us to be in community. And God makes us incredibly diverse. No two of us - not even identical twins - are really identical. We are all slightly different. Yet ambition, power-seeking, fear, insecurity drive us apart.

But God deals with that and transforms that by doing the most amazing and wonderful thing which is to become human. Jesus became human in a country full of conflict and war, was utterly rejected and died unjustly on a cross. And by his death, he broke down the separation between us and God, the exclusion and our isolation from God. And then God did something absurd. God made what, in human terms, is the most terrible mistake and that was to create the church. Because the church is not a place for people who become identical. It's the place where people meet who normally wouldn't be seen dead together because they're so different from one another. And yet God puts them together and says, 'Love one another, serve one another, wash one another's feet'. And when we experience the presence of God, he changes everything.

Last August, I was in a place called Kensington in the United States with a friend called Shane Claiborne. The pavements were literally five people deep with drug addicts shooting up. People with the 'heroin hunch', bent over because their muscles are giving way. There are dead bodies that

just lie there because nobody picks them up. The police don't police it. As Shane says, they just observe it. Shane does lots of things. He builds houses from derelict buildings and sells them at a price people can afford, rebuilding that whole derelict area. He works with every other organisation - all of which are Christian - in that area because every sort of other organisation has withdrawn. And there are gunshots the whole time, and so he has a huge bin outside their base, and people can come without telling anyone and can just chuck in their guns. And they have a forge and they have tools and they melt the guns down and they turn them into useful household tools. And when I was there, they got an AK 47, a really rather unpleasant submachine gun, and they turned it into crosses and he gave me three crosses. He said 'Here's one for you. That's gun metal.' And it's transformed into a cross, a symbol of God's love for us. Shane transforms houses, he transforms guns and he transforms people - or he would say God transforms people. It's amazing.

And we in the church, despite our arguments and bickering and failing and falling out, we are the people that God says are his agents of transformation in this world. And that's why we did the Difference course. Because we struggle with being with those with whom we differ. And God calls us to love, Jesus says to His disciples, 'Obey my commands and you'll know my love. Oh, and by the way, love your enemies as well.' And we've been working here at Lambeth on how we can help people to do that, because it's difficult.



The Difference course has a series of sessions. It comes from the Bible. It is life changing because it does what God asks. It values diversity because God made diversity. It seeks unity, not unanimity. It doesn't say you all have to think alike, it says you can be different because you are different. It's simple, and it's fun. We did it with some friends a couple of years ago to see if it worked and how it was, and it was just mesmerisingly helpful. And Difference doesn't oversimplify. The biggest mistake we can make in reconciliation is to simplify the complicated. Relationships are incredibly complicated, whether in a youth group or family, or between Israel and Palestine, or in Ukraine or in a civil war. They are incredibly complicated.

And conflict and difference are messy and difficult. And when you think of the last time you had a row with someone you were fond of, you fell out for a moment, and you got cross - what was the cause? Sometimes it's simple, but it's often a mixture of bad mood, accumulated annoyance, tiredness, not listening, not understanding, and you just get irritated with each other. Do you know the feeling? Does that ring a bell? Or am I the only person who ever gets cross with people? I can't believe it. We see family rows, we see Northern Ireland, we see the Middle East, we see climate in which the world is at war with the natural world. Don't oversimplify. So what does Difference do? The effort we put into winning a conflict needs to be outmatched by the effort we put into making peace with each other and spreading.

The Church Commissioners who have all the money for the Church of England recently found out that in the 18th century, their predecessors had been involved in slavery. So they didn't just say sorry. Over the next nine years, they're going to put 100 million pounds aside from church funds – not from parishes – and use it for healing, justice and repair. You can't put the past right, but you can change the future and that's what they'll do. What that shows is what the Difference course teaches.

In armed conflicts, two groups of people are essential to ending a quarrel or rebellion or a war: women and young people. Young people do the fighting and they can transform the fighting and bring reconciliation. The three habits Difference talks about are: Be Curious - find out and don't just shout, Be Present - stick around with people, and Reimagine - look for new ways. That's what the Church Commissioners are doing. They're not saying 'oh, well, that's just the past.' They're saying let's reimagine a different future. Let's do something about it.

And that's the appeal to you all and to people around this country.

Finally, a story of a young person who has inspired me. There's a young woman called Cathrine who's now a vicar in Kent and I met her 10 years ago when she was in her early 20s. She was originally from Zimbabwe. Her parents died when she was 10. Her sister was 12. Family members tried to kick them out of the house, put them on the street and sell the house for the money. They moved into a little shack at the bathroom in the garden, they kept hold of their house and rented it out to give them enough money to pay for their education. Cathrine then became the leader in southern Africa of the young people's anti-climate change movement and she spoke to all the leaders of the Anglican Communion around the world in Lusaka in 2015. She is absolutely inspiring. She then came to Lambeth and worked here for a year with our group of young

people and then went off to train for ministry. She's now a vicar in a village where there is no one from an ethnic minority. She's younger than any vicar they've had as far as they can tell in the last 600 years and she's a woman. And they just think she walks on water because she loves Jesus, she loves them, and they know it. And that whole place, like that cross being changed into something else, is fantastic.

This country can make two things in your lifetimes of being the most diverse country on Earth. It can be the most generous, amazing, caring, transformative, exciting place where diversity is celebrated and is a gift. Or we can turn into our little groups and miss out on what God wants for us. And it's not my lot that are going to make that difference, it's your lot – the young people who are here and those like them.

Thank you for being here. It's amazing that you are. And my challenge to you is that I believe God is calling you to put Jesus at the centre of your life, to change the way this world works. That is within our grasp. Let's make it happen. Thank you.

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