



Coventry Cathedral

A Prayer Space / Reflection Area for Schools

Aim: The aim of this space is to enable children/young people, of all faiths and none, to explore life's questions, experiences, spirituality, and faith in a safe, creative, reflective and interactive way.

The area is a safe space for all, where responses are anonymous and correct spelling does not matter and nothing is marked.

Set up: A room full of stations or activities to help pupils, in small groups, to reflect on life. Pupil responses are often displayed on ribbons, pegged on strings, on fake trees or bunting. Fairy lights, tents, cushions, fake candles etc. can be used as decoration and to make it an inviting and inspirational experience.

Each activity station needs an explanatory card and some resources. You can choose to do all, some or just a few of the activities listed below, in any order.

Ask a group of church or community volunteers, parents/grandparents or retired teachers to help set up the room and help monitor the space.

Find out more about prayer spaces in schools and look at photographs to inspire you at www.prayerspacesinschools.com/about-us/.

Pupils will need some simple background facts about Coventry Cathedral (see below) before visiting the activities and need to be given a few instructions e.g. responses are anonymous.

Coventry Cathedral Background: On 14th-15th November 1940, during World War II, Coventry was bombed by the Germans. Rev. Richard Howard went on the roof of the cathedral to try to save it but when many bombs fell he had no choice but to retreat to his air raid shelter.

The bombing lasted 10 hours and 554 people were killed. 865 were seriously injured. The old Coventry Cathedral was largely destroyed and a third of the city's houses were made uninhabitable.

Basil Spence was the architect who was chosen to design a new cathedral, after winning a competition. John Laing's building company built the new cathedral.



1. A Safe Place

Introduction

During the bombing of Coventry Cathedral during WWII Rev. Richard Howard bravely went up on the roof of the cathedral to try to save it, but when too many bombs fell, he had no choice but to go to safety in an air raid shelter.

Activity

Sit quietly and think for a few minutes about what makes you feel safe? A person? A place? An activity? A pet? A friend? Something else?

Write down what makes you feel safe on a thank you card. Peg your card on a ribbon.

Equipment

Create a pleasant small space – perhaps battery-operated fairy lights/candles, cushions, soft music, a plant/flowers etc, thank you cards, pens, pegs, a clothes rail with ribbons hanging from it.



2. A Kinder World

Introduction

During World War II, Coventry was bombed by the Germans. The cathedral was hit and largely destroyed.

Standing in the rubble the next day Rev. Richard Howard said, “We are going to try to make a kinder world.”

Activity

How could we try to make a kinder world? Write your response on the torn-up cardboard and add it to the pile of rubble.

Equipment

Some rubble or bricks with battery operated fairy lights, pieces of torn up cardboard, pens, photos of the bombed cathedral.





3. War and Peace

Introduction

The old Coventry cathedral was bombed and largely destroyed in November 1940, during World War II.

There has never been a year in recorded world history with no wars or conflicts. There are still many wars in today's world.

Activity

Take a moment to reflect. Then write down your thoughts, prayers, wishes or hopes for world peace on the doves. Attach your doves to the camouflage netting.

Equipment

Dove shapes, hole puncher, thin ribbon, camouflage netting, pens, flags of the world bunting globe/a map of the world.



4. Homelessness

Introduction

A third of the Coventry's houses were made uninhabitable during the WWII bombing of Coventry.

John Laing's building company built thousands of houses after the war all over the UK, to help rehouse people.

Sadly, many people across the world are homeless today.

Activity

How would you help people who are homeless or try to solve the crisis?

What message of hope would you send to homeless people?

Write your ideas on the cardboard shelter.

Equipment

A large cardboard box shelter, felt pens, a blanket or sleeping bag, shopping bag of clothes, takeaway coffee cup.





5. Forgiveness

Introduction

During World War II, Coventry cathedral was bombed. The cathedral was hit and largely destroyed. Standing in the rubble the next day Rev. Richard Howard said, “We are trying to banish all thoughts of revenge.”

He is remembered for encouraging forgiveness and reconciliation. He had 'Father Forgive' written on the burnt wall behind the altar of the old cathedral. A prayer for forgiveness is said every Friday in the cathedral.

Coventry Cathedral has since become a centre for peace, forgiveness and reconciliation in our world.

Activity

Is there anyone you need to forgive? Spend a few moments thinking of them and place a glass pebble gently into the bowl of water. You might like to say quietly, “May I be kind to others, tender-hearted and forgiving” as you place the pebbles.

Equipment

A bowl of water, some glass pebbles, “May I be kind to others, tender-hearted and forgiving” on coloured card strips in a basket - to take away, if pupils wish.



6. An Impossible Dream?

Introduction

In 1944 during World War II Basil Spence was dug in near the beaches of Normandy in France. Just before he fell asleep an army friend asked him what his ambition in life was. Basil Spence said, “I want to build a cathedral.”

Activity

No cathedral had been built for 300 years. It seemed an impossible dream.

Make a flag.

What is your dream? Write it on your flag and stick it in the sand.

Equipment

A builder's tray of sand, flags (lollipop sticks, Sellotape, paper, scissors) pens.





7. Inspiration

Introduction

The rules of the competition to design the new cathedral stated that “The cathedral is to speak to us and to generations to come of the majesty, the Eternity and the Glory of God.”

Basil Spence felt his design was inspired by his faith in God and a picture of the magnified eye of a fly inspired the ceiling design for the nave. He also passed out in a dentist’s chair and had a dream of his design for the cathedral!

Activity

What or who inspires you? Write the name of the person/thing on a star. Hang it on the tree.

Equipment

Pens, a twig tree, fairy lights, star shapes, ribbons, pictures of the eye of a fly, stained glass and other aspects of the cathedral, light up stars.



8. Good News!

Introduction

Basil Spence gave his design in for the cathedral on the last day of the competition, he even thought about not handing it in. He did not expect to win. He said, “I can say with truth I did not have the faintest hope of success.”

He got a phone call telling him he had won when he was in a meeting. He was so shocked the other people in the meeting thought he had received bad news!

He stammered, “It is the best news I have ever had. I have won the competition for the new Coventry Cathedral.” He later reflected, “My life’s wish has been granted.”

Activity

What is the best news you have ever received? Write it on a piece of newspaper.

Equipment

Pieces of newspaper, thick felt pens that don’t mark the table, a place to display the responses, Blu Tack.





9. Plans



Introduction

Basil Spence was an architect. He designed Coventry Cathedral and drew detailed plans of the building. The cathedral was to represent trust, faith and hope in the future.

Activity

What are your plans/hopes for your life? Write them on a piece of paper, roll it up and place it in a hole in the 'wall'.

Equipment

Pens, paper, life size wooden bricks with holes in e.g. <https://www.play-learn.co.uk/product/50-piece-giant-life-size-bricks/>. Optional: some architect's plans, brick wallpaper for decoration.

10. Cruel Comments



Introduction

Basil Spence's design for Coventry Cathedral was unusual. Some people did not like it. They wrote several letters a day complaining to the newspapers. They sent him abusive, insulting and critical letters. His wife was very cross about them, and she tried to read and destroy the letters before they got to him.

Activity

What is your advice to people coping with cruel comments in person or on social media? Write it on a phone shape and peg it on the line.

Equipment

Blank mobile phone card shapes, pens, pegs, a clothesline strung across the room.





11. Self Talk

Introduction

Basil Spence kept saying to himself, "It is going to be built. It is going to be built. It is going to be built" to get himself used to the idea.

In 1955 the foundations were laid by the Laing Company, five years after Basil Spence had won the competition.

The cathedral opened by Queen Elizabeth II in 1962.

Activity

What phrase could you say to yourself to encourage and reassure yourself in unsure times? Write your phrase on a heart-shaped sticky note and stick it on a mirror.

Equipment

Pens, a number of mirrors, heart shaped sticky notes.



12. Your Best

Introduction

Coventry Cathedral was the first Cathedral to be built for 300 years.

John Laing was honoured to be the chosen builder. He said it was a building that needed to last for 1000 years.

He wrote to each employee to ask them to do their best work for they were building a place of worship.

Activity

Think about whether you do your best?

Quietly reflect about situations where you feel you have not done your best?

When you are ready, add a pebble to the cairn (pile of stones). Let go of any regrets you may have.

Equipment

A few larger stones to start the cairn, some smaller pebbles (they can be oval shaped pre-cut cardboard pebbles) battery lit candles, cushions/beanbags/carpet squares, optional - small pop-up gazebo or garden umbrella.





13. Foundations

Introduction

John Laing knew digging deep foundations for any building is very important. Good foundations give a building its strength.

John Laing also believed that having good beliefs and values were important as the foundations for building a strong and good life. He found his values in his Christian faith.

Activity

Think about what values and beliefs are important to you. Write them on a lolly stick and plant it in the soil.

Equipment

Pens, lolly sticks, large pot of soil.

NB. See idea for making values Jenga set elsewhere in this project. These could be used here.



14. Difficulties

Introduction

The Laing Company built the new cathedral. It wasn't always easy. They found a plague pit with lots of skeletons and bones. The weather was awful and Laing had to use every heating device possible in order to keep the men warm and to try to complete the job on time. But The Laing company were seen were pleasant to work with, they were business like, superb craftsmen and they completed the work on time.

Activity

What might help you to cope well in difficult times? Write your ideas on the flames and add them to the fire.

Equipment

A circle of stones or a firepit, red card flames, battery run fairy lights or candles, pens.





15. Teamwork

Introduction

Basil Spence and John Laing's building company worked together to design and build Coventry cathedral.

Activity

What do you think are the values of working with others in teams?
Write your ideas on a shape. Display the shapes holding hands.

Equipment

Different coloured people shapes, pens, Blu Tack, wooden art models/figures for decoration.



16. Skip

Introduction

Builders always make a lot of mess and rubble. This was the case when Coventry Cathedral was built by The Laing Company.
Today builders put any rubbish that they want to get rid of into a skip.

Activity

Put on a builder's hat.
What feelings or actions you like to get rid of in your life? (e.g. anger, arguments, anxiety, fear, bullying etc.) Write it on a piece of paper, tear/screw it up and throw it in the 'skip'.

Equipment

'A skip' (a yellow plastic (toy) box?) or you could use a wheelbarrow, pieces of paper /thin cardboard, pens, hard builder's hats, high viz jackets.





17. Generosity



Introduction

The Laing Company decided to make no profit from building the cathedral, but this was kept secret at the time.

Activity

How can you be generous? Write down your ideas or what you could give to someone else (it does not have to be money).

Draw round your hand and cut it out.

Write your ideas on a handshape and place your hand in the offering bowl.

Equipment

A large bowl or basket, pens, thin coloured card, scissors.

18. Glory



Introduction

The rules of the competition to design the new cathedral stated that “The cathedral is to speak to us and to generations to come of the majesty, the Eternity and the Glory of God.”

Activity

Look around the cathedral or at photos of it. Do you think Basil Spence the architect who designed the building managed to convey the majesty, wonder, vastness, eternity and glory of God? Why? How? Where?

Write your answer – Yes/NO on a crown shape. Decorate the crown. Place your crown in the YES basket if you feel Basil Spence did create a cathedral that speaks of the glory of God or put your crown in the NO box/basket.

Equipment

A sparkly YES basket/box, a plainer NO box for voting, small crown shapes, pens, materials for decoration, glue sticks.

