

Be Reconciled is a Gospel initiative to resource and empower the local Church in Northern Ireland in peacemaking.





# Introduction to the course

The Church has a role to play in cultivating a flourishing and peaceful society for everyone. Central to this vision is the life-changing message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ reconciling God to humanity, to each other, and the whole of creation. Our message is prophetic and disturbingly simple – Be Reconciled.

Be Reconciled is a Gospel initiative to resource and empower the local Church in Northern Ireland in peacemaking. It is a contextual response to our troubled communities centred on the reconciling message of the Gospel. At the heart of the Gospel is a gift of reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ.

For those who accept this gift, there is a responsibility to live in new and reconciled relationships, not only with God, but also with their neighbours and even their enemies. The Church in Northern Ireland must give context to the Gospel by playing its part in societal healing. In a culture emerging from conflict, death, and broken relationships, the local church points to the life changing message of the Gospel. It's a message of peace, life, and a new relationship with God and others enabled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Reconciliation is one of the biggest moral and social justice issues facing Northern Ireland today. In this part of the world, religion has often been unhelpfully conflated with politics. Sadly this has turned some people from Jesus. The heart of Be Reconciled is missional - Christians reclaiming their radical message and radical love for God, all people, and this place.

Reconciliation has increasingly become a contentious and politically loaded term. Be Reconciled is an attempt to give language, shape, and expression to a public theology of peacemaking. It is a Two-Corinthians-Five movement of Christ's ambassadors loyal to His Kingdom above all else. It is a reclaiming of the Biblical understanding of reconciliation that, if realised fully, could help enable greater social transformation.

Churches will continue to respond to this issue in the public sphere; this is proper and important. Be Reconciled is a complementary and pro-active initiative. It spans the denominations at the grassroots. It's about helping local Churches to become local peacemakers.

## Be Reconciled calls the local Church to:

### Look Up

to what God is calling the local church to do and to be led by the Holy Spirit and then to respond to God.

### Look In

to understand their present context.

### Look Out

into their community and call others to reconciliation with and through Jesus.

# How to use this resource

Being Reconciled may seem like an impossible task in the world we live in today. Ultimately it is only possible through the work of the Holy Spirit, but we believe that the Church and individual Christians also have a role to play.

Through six weeks of small group study this resource aims to inspire and equip the local church in peacemaking. It helps us to consider reconciliation more centrally as part of our witness, mission, and discipleship.

Be Reconciled can be run with a church leadership team or as a small group resource within your local church.

Each week the course follows a similar pattern of reading scripture, prayer and discussion. Each week short videos from local trusted Church leaders from across the denominations will guide the group along.

The course is written in a simple and accessible way. It is designed so that anyone can lead the discussion. The sessions can be restructured or emphasis placed on particular sections according to the needs of the group. The course is offered as a starting point for discussion, not a rigid formula.

However, it should be noted that given the context and the issues raised, some discussions may be difficult for some people. It would be wise to have a conversation with church leadership as appropriate before the course begins. Church leaders may wish to use this to teach more widely on some of the issues raised as a series in church.

It would also be advisable to raise these sensitivities with the group at the start and signpost participants to prayer ministry or further discreet pastoral conversations as appropriate.

Copies of this resource and all the videos can be downloaded at [www.bereconciled.co.uk](http://www.bereconciled.co.uk)

Be Reconciled has been created by local minister Catherine Simpson and developed in partnership with the Evangelical Alliance NI.



# SESSION 1 - A Reconciling Story

Understanding the need for reconciliation in the world and in Northern Ireland.

## WELCOME PRAY INTRODUCTION

**Watch Film 1a - The Context:** Peter Lynas (Director of Evangelical Alliance NI)  
*A brief history of the Troubles and a synopsis of NI society today.*

### DISCUSS

- Q. In what ways are the Troubles still affecting our land today?
- Q. How have the Troubles affected you?
- Q. What are your hopes and dreams for this place?
- Q. What role has the church played? Have you played?

### Read and Discuss - Jeremiah 29: 4-7

Jeremiah is writing a letter from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles. This is the product of a troubled time of trauma, disaster, and survival; and so Jeremiah came to the Israelites and instructed them to invest in the city, to pray for it, and to seek its peace and prosperity - its shalom. Don't miss the point that the people of this city were Israel's enemies; those who had kidnapped them, destroyed their land and their city. Amidst the strife and chaos of the world that surrounded them God called His people to be a blessing and to be peacemakers in their situation.

If this was true for those living in troubled times as exiles in Babylon, it is true for us today who live in a Babylonian-like world. In our time and place what does it mean to seek the shalom of our land? How is the church working to encourage the peace and prosperity of this place? In going about the 'ordinary' things of life are we seeking the welfare of the place where God has placed us? In Matthew 22:39 Jesus reminds us to love our neighbour as ourselves – What does this mean in a divided Northern Ireland today? How do we seek first His Kingdom as we serve our communities, focusing on the values of the city that is to come.

### Watch Film 1b - What is Reconciliation?

The Very Revd Dr Trevor Morrow (former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and Minister Emeritus of Lucan Presbyterian Church, County Dublin).

*A Biblical and socio-political understanding of reconciliation.*

### Read and Discuss - Ephesians 2: 11-22

Setting the context. Paul, a Jew, is saying to the church, made up of Jews and Gentiles, they will be God's people, pointing to God's Son as Messiah, and sharing His glory in the world.

- Q. With reconciliation in mind what struck you about the films or passage?
- Q. What words in this passage speak of division and what words speak of unity?

### PRAYER AND REFLECTION

#### CHALLENGE FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

As you go about your week observe the different ways that the Troubles have shaped our society. Think too across the generations, how has this changed? Remember that reconciliation is at the heart of Scripture and God's plan for His world.

# SESSION 2 - A Reconciling God

Understanding reconciliation as a key thread in the Biblical story from creation to the new heavens and new earth.

## WELCOME PRAY FEEDBACK FROM LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGE.

### Introduction

Reconciliation is not a modern political concept. It is an idea that has existed across human cultures throughout history, time and place, and is a thread that can be traced all the way through Scripture.

God is a reconciling God: he has modelled what true reconciliation looks like. In this session we will consider the overarching story of Scripture and follow the story of God's reconciliation with man from Genesis to Revelation.

### Watch Film 2a - Biblical Story - Creation, Corruption, Covenant:

Dr. Alan Wilson (Bible College tutor and former pastor with the Baptist Church in Ireland.)

*Tracing the thread of reconciliation from the Fall, and through the Old Testament.*

### DISCUSS

- Q. What is the root cause for the need of reconciliation?
- Q. What do we learn of God's character from his interactions with the people of Israel throughout the Old Testament?

### Watch Film 2b - Biblical Story - Christ, Church, Consummation:

The Right Revd Harold Miller (Bishop of the Church of Ireland Diocese of Down and Dromore)

*Christ the ultimate reconciler (Col 1), Christ the second Adam.*

*We are born anew into a new family, gifted with new identities and new relationships, and new purposes through the Spirit.*

### Read and Discuss- Colossians 1: 15-23

- Q. Why do you think Jesus is at the centre of this reconciliation story?
- Q. When Jesus comes again in what ways do you think the work of reconciliation will be completed?
- Q. Bishop Harold uses the phrase "from enemies to friends." What does this look like in your life and your community?

### PRAYER AND REFLECTION

#### CHALLENGE FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

As you read the Bible, attend church and listen to sermons this week, reflect on the story of reconciliation throughout Scripture and the reconciling nature of God. Have you been reconciled to Christ and are you living out your faith? Have you seen the fruit of reconciliation in your own life when enemies become friends? In the Scripture passages you read this week, can you identify this thread of reconciliation? Perhaps you wish to take a note of them and share them next week with your group.

# SESSION 3 - A Reconciling Mission

Understanding Christ's calling to be His ambassadors and reconcilers.

**WELCOME  
PRAY  
FEEDBACK ON LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGE.**

## Introduction

As Christians we have been reconciled to God through Christ, however this isn't the end of the story. Through our reconciliation to Christ he calls us to be his reconcilers in the world around us. This week we will consider Paul's second letter to the Corinthians and his imploring of the church to be reconciled and to seek reconciliation.

## Watch Film 3a - The Corinthian Context:

The Right Revd Bishop Ken Clarke (SAMS Mission Director and former Bishop of the Church of Ireland Diocese of Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh)

*Understanding the culture of Corinth and how the words of Paul will impact on the lives of the Corinthian Christians.*

## DISCUSS

- Q. In what ways do you see the cultural context of first century Corinth reflecting our own society?
- Q. Where do you see, or hope to see, the reconciling mission of God at work in the world around you?

## Watch Film 3b - Christ's Ambassadors:

Rick Hill (Discipleship Development Officer, Presbyterian Church in Ireland.)

*A deeper study of the 2 Corinthians 5 passage.  
An articulation of our role as Christ's ambassadors and reconcilers.*

## Read and Discuss - 2 Corinthians 5: 11-21

- Q. How do you understand the role of Christ in God's story of reconciliation?
- Q. Verse 17 is a familiar snippet of scripture often quoted in isolation from the context of this whole passage. How do you see the words of this verse fitting into the reconciling mission of God and our role in that mission?
- Q. Read verses 18 to 21 again. Where in your life do you see the outworking of your role as an ambassador for Christ?
- Q. How does your role as an ambassador for Christ affect your social, political, and cultural identity?
- Q. What do you understand as the righteousness of God? What is it based on?

## PRAYER AND REFLECTION

### CHALLENGE FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

As you go about your week, think about how your role as an ambassador is shaping each situation you find yourself in. In what specific situations can you be a reconciler of God's Grace?

# SESSION 4 - A Reconciling Church

A new vision of reconciliation within the church and amongst believers.

**WELCOME  
PRAY  
FEEDBACK ON LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGE.**

## Introduction

The first three weeks of this course has considered what reconciliation is and how it is outlined in the Biblical framework. Over the next three weeks we will reflect on how this works in practice and ask some hard questions about how we might shape and transform the world around us.

Firstly in this session we will consider what reconciliation looks like within our churches.

## Read and Discuss - John 13: 34-35

The night before Jesus is crucified, the twelve Apostles are eating with Him. Jesus has just said one will betray Him, and then He gives them a new commandment. Disciples of Jesus are marked as different, and Jesus gives a new way that everyone will identify them. What is it? Why? How does this work in our communities, our churches, our families?

## Watch Film 4a - A Reconciling Church:

The Revd Dr Heather Morris (Former President of the Methodist Church in Ireland and currently serving as Home Missions Secretary)

*Paul's letter to the Romans was written to explain the universality of Christ's death and resurrection for all people. The book of Romans is orientated both vertically and horizontally. Vertical reconciliation comes first and gives the follower of Jesus a Biblical imperative to seek reconciliation horizontally.*

## Read and discuss – Romans 5: 1-11

- Q. Romans 5 highlights what trusting in Jesus means. What does Paul say?
- Q. What attempts of reconciliation in the church have you been engaged with?
- Q. What factors do you think cause reconciliation between believers to succeed or fail?
- Q. In what ways can your church and the wider Christian community better live out the vertical and horizontal reconciliation found in Christ?

## PRAYER AND REFLECTION

### CHALLENGE FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

Is there any reconciliation that needs to happen between you and a fellow brother or sister? How can you be reconciled to them? How can your church corporately better witness to the reconciliation found in Christ?

# SESSION 5 - A Reconciling Community

A new vision of the Church's role in reconciling our communities.

## WELCOME PRAY FEEDBACK ON LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGE.

### Introduction

For centuries churches have been an integral and central part of their communities. Although the prominence of the church in community life may have diminished even in this generation, in situations of public tragedy the church is often where people turn to for transcendence. In this session we will consider what role the church can play in bringing about reconciliation in their community and help to deal with the issues that have stemmed from division in our society.

### Watch Film 5a – Outposts :

Jasper Rutherford (CYI, European Director)

### DISCUSS

*Churches in NI should be outposts for ambassadors of the Kingdom. Rather than acting as chaplains to one side or the other, churches should be shaping culture by bringing Kingdom-values to society as a whole.*

- Q. How does this new vision shape how the Church should engage with the community around issues of sectarianism, division, flags, parades, protests, etc.?
- Q. What good things are the churches of Northern Ireland already doing to bring about reconciliation and restoration in our communities?
- Q. Are there any ways that your church currently stands against sectarianism and division in your community?
- Q. Are there any ways that your church currently encourages or is complicit in sectarianism and division in your community?

### Read and Discuss – Matthew 5: 1-16

When Jesus speaks He is commanding that the aim of our lives should be to glorify God. We are engaged in displaying the glory of God by how we live beyond Sunday worship.

- Q. What attitudes for living does this passage suggest?

- Q. How should the church pursue the healing of a nation in a local context?

- Q. What allegiances or associations may distract your local church from being a peacemaker?

### Watch Film 5b - Who's side do you take?

David Smyth (Public Policy officer for the Evangelical Alliance NI) in conversation with Fr Martin Magill, (Roman Catholic Parish Priest, St John's Parish, Belfast)

### DISCUSS

- Q. How specifically have the Troubles impacted on your congregation? What internal and external factors have influenced the impact on the congregation and its response?
- Q. Has there been a tendency to distinguish the sins of 'our community' from the sins of others?
- Q. How can believers' experiences of suffering and loss become a blessing to those in the church and wider community?

### PRAYER AND REFLECTION

#### CHALLENGE FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

This week try to have a common ground conversation. How can your church begin to think of itself more in terms of an outpost of the Kingdom of heaven rather than a church bound to the culture around us?



# SESSION 6 - A Reconciling Land

A new vision of Northern Ireland and how Christians can work to bring about a reconciled land.

**WELCOME  
PRAY  
FEEDBACK ON LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGE.**

## **Introduction**

The events of the past shape our present. The events of the present will shape the future. This session will consider issues of the past, how we as people of faith can respond to them, and what our ultimate vision for this place is.

## **Read Acts 2: 42-47**

- Q. What is the role of the local church?
- Q. What could this look like in Northern Ireland today?

## **Film 6a – The Past:**

David Smyth (Public Policy officer for the Evangelical Alliance NI)

- Q. What do we mean by “dealing with the past”?
- Q. How do we deal with the past? How does God deal with our past?
- Q. Getting specific and practical, what role can the church play in dealing with the past in your local community?

## **Film 6b – The future:**

The Revd Catherine Simpson (Curate, Seapatrick Parish, Banbridge)

- Q. How can the Church be a catalyst for a transformed nation?

## **Read and Discuss - Revelation 21: 1-5**

- Q. What would you like Northern Ireland to look like for the next generation?
- Q. How can your church demonstrate the values of the coming age today?
- Q. What role should the Church play in creating a more reconciled Northern Ireland?

## **CHALLENGE**

Consider the last six sessions. We've looked at our past and we've looked forward to the future.

Now spend some time in reflection and prayer alone.

In your group discuss what has challenged and encouraged you..

What, if anything, will you say or do differently as a result of Be Reconciled?

How will your witness and discipleship change in light of the reconciliation offered through Jesus to God and others around us?

How will you live out your Christ-centred identity and your Christ-centred relationships in your community?

SESSION 1

NOTES

Lined area for Session 1 notes

SESSION 2

NOTES

Lined area for Session 2 notes

SESSION 3

NOTES

Lined area for Session 3 notes

SESSION 4

NOTES

Lined area for Session 4 notes

SESSION 5

NOTES

Lined area for Session 5 notes

SESSION 6

NOTES

Lined area for Session 6 notes



[www.bereconciled.co.uk](http://www.bereconciled.co.uk)

Created by the Revd Catherine Simpson in partnership with the Evangelical Alliance NI.



©All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be used beyond its designed purpose as a small group resource without written permission.

Design & Print: **GRAPHIC ANSWERS** - 028 3883 0677