

## Seeking Reconciliation

Reconciliation is the healing of broken, wounded or distrustful relationships, in honest recognition of past hurts. Our society has many such relationships at all levels, such as polarised politics, divisions centred on wealth, class and culture, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, family, health and disability, and conflicting responses to controversial issues such as the environmental crisis, immigration, or crime. All of these affect schools. So, can schools be places where reconciliation can be learned and practised? They have daily opportunities to attempt to do so.

Christians trust that God is a God of peace in the fullest sense, far more than the absence of war and conflict, and that there are resources for peace-making and peacebuilding in both Christian and other traditions – religious and non-religious. A healthily plural school is where both staff and children are learning to put energy, thought and imagination into forming a culture of reconciliation. Be reconcilers! is an imperative for all.

A Christian understanding of reconciliation first of all hopes in God, and in Jesus as embodying peace – with God, within ourselves, with others, and with creation. Our first response is to trust that this peace has the last word – this is the good news. So we can face and repent of our own part in alienation, conflict and bad relationships. Then we can wholeheartedly be reconcilers.

School leaders need to face difficult questions, and work out with staff, children, parents and other stakeholders how best to tackle them. How are deeply held yet historically-divided identities to be treated in school? Leaders can work out ways in which deep divisions and related conflicts can become occasions for resolving some of them, improving the quality of our disagreements about others, and learning how to be a community where we live in mutual respect, understanding and peace. A school that does that is making one of the most important of all contributions to its members and to society.

1. What are the key issues or relationships in your community that are in need of reconciliation? What is your first move towards this?
2. To what extent does faith/religion help us think about ideas of reconciliation and inclusion, when it may have a historical reputation for reinforcing or contributing to social division and conflict?
3. What would it mean for your school to become a 'beacon of restoration, filled with peace-seeking, environment-saving, community-loving activists'?
4. What part does humility and authenticity play in facilitating reconciliation in a community?

