

International Conscientious Objectors' Day



Introduction [Slide 1]

Each year on 15 May we celebrate International Conscientious Objectors' Day; a day when people all over the world pay tribute to those who refuse to co-operate with war.

Historically, stories of conscientious objection often are stories of men who have refused to fight.

[Slide 2] Men such as Bert Brocklesby who refused to fight in the trenches of the first world war, arguing that "God did not put me on Earth to go destroying His own children"

[Slide 3] This year the focus of commemorations shifts to the role of women war resisters as we mark the centenary of a remarkable event that took place in 1915 as war raged throughout Europe.

Opening Prayer [Slide 4]

Heavenly Father, you have endowed us with the wonderful gifts of reason and free will. Help us to use these in distinguishing between good and evil in today's world. Remind us that the only obedience required of us is to your Word, however unpopular the consequences may be.

We ask this through Christ our Lord

Amen

Story: International Congress of Women [Slide 5]

On 28 April 1915 a group of over 1000 women gathered in The Hague, Netherlands, for a remarkable meeting.

Undeterred by the difficulties of travel in war-ravaged Europe, these women travelled from 12 different countries, both warring and neutral nations, to protest against that war and suggest a pathway to peace.

Overview

15 May each year is designated International Conscientious Objectors' Day. A day when people all over the world pay tribute to those who have resisted—and continue to resist—war.

100 years after the International Congress of Women in The Hague, the focus of commemorations in 2015 is on the role of women war resisters.

This assembly reflects on the story of the women peacemakers who assembled in The Hague a century ago, reflects on their efforts to bring an end to the carnage of the First World War, and invites students to think about how they can work for peace today.

[Slide 6] Travelling was not easy—and the authorities were not always helpful. Of 180 women who planned to make the trip from Britain only 25 were given passports to travel and even then the British government suspended all shipping making travel impossible. Only three British women made it to The Hague.

[Slide 7] In a letter signed by 100 suffragists around that time, Emily Hobhouse said, "**The brunt of modern war falls upon non-combatants, and the conscience of the world cannot bear the sight ... Do not humanity and common sense alike prompt us to join hands with the women of neutral countries, and urge our rulers to stay further bloodshed?**"

[Slide 8] An international team of women was sent from this congress to 14 nations to present their plan for peace. They met with prime ministers, foreign secretaries, presidents, royalty, and even the Pope.

It is likely that this visit to Rome influenced Pope Benedict and his own call for peace and an end to the bloodshed in his *Peace Note* of 1917.

[Slide 9] At this congress in the Hague, WILPF, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, were founded. They continue to work tirelessly for peace and an end to war to this day.



Reading: From the WILPF Centenary Manifesto [Slide 10]

Violence is not inevitable. It is a choice. We choose non-violence, as means and as end. We will liberate the strength of women and, in partnership with likeminded men, bring to birth a just and harmonious world.

We will implement peace, which we believe to be a human right.

Bidding Prayers [Slides 11—14]

The women gathered in The Hague protested against the madness and horror of war.... may we be people of peace, speaking out against violence in all of its forms.
Lord in your mercy... **Hear our prayer**

The women in the Hague saw international co-operation and understanding as crucial to the building of a lasting peace... may we be people of peace, willing to listen to those we disagree with.
Lord in your mercy... **Hear our prayer**

The women gathered at The Hague were determined to do their bit to build a just and lasting peace... may we be people of peace, giving our time and energy willingly to help others.
Lord in your mercy... **Hear our prayer**

And we pray as Jesus taught us...
Our Father, who art in heaven...

Concluding Prayer [Slide 15]

Lord, you are the Prince of Peace,
you are the light of the world.
In you we find peace,
and in the doing of your will is our peace.

Grant us your peace in our hearts,
and may this peace go out from us to inspire others.

Fill us with a passion for righteousness
and a zeal to serve where there is need.

Fill us with a purpose that is holy, and right, and just.
Amen



Supporting Resources

These Dangerous Women

Film telling the story of the women who met in The Hague in 1915 and their efforts to stop the First World War
<https://youtu.be/0a2xYvXwGiw>

With more time some or all of this film could be shown in place of the story of the 1915 Congress.

WILPF in 3 Minutes

Film giving a brief history of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom—founded out of the 1915 Hague Congress
http://www.womenstopwar.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WILPF-video.mp4?_=1

Prayer (of St Francis)

Can replace any of the prayers in the assembly or used as a classroom prayer.

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life.

Other resources on Conscientious Objection

Pax Christi lesson, *Should Christians fight in wars?*
<http://paxchristi.org.uk/peace-education/general-re/>
(Lesson 3 in Pax Christi's General RE Peace Syllabus)

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) <http://www.wilpf.org.uk/>

Women's Power to Stop War (A WILPF centenary project)
<http://www.womenstopwar.org/>

No More War
<http://nomorewar.org.uk>



A ceremony to mark International Conscientious Objectors' Day

Is held at the Conscientious Objectors' Commemorative Stone, Tavistock Square, London WC1 on Friday 15 May at 12 noon.

Shelia Triggs of WILPF and Mia Tamarin, an Israeli Conscientious Objector, are the speakers.

Fundraise for Pax Christi

Consider making Pax Christi the focus of your school's fundraising activities and help support our work for peace and reconciliation