

NEWS

They're moving – but they are not being sent to Coventry

Dean Jamie Allen discusses the decision to take down the military hatchments which adorn Taranaki cathedral's walls.

The Taranaki Cathedral Church of St Mary's – New Zealand's oldest stone church – is poised to embody once again this truth: that peace and reconciliation are so often the fruits of loss and grief.

Anyone who has visited Coventry Cathedral in Britain has seen this kind of transformation fold in stone. The medieval cathedral of Coventry burned and

was all but destroyed by incendiary bombs during the blitz of 1940.

The rebuild was a work of grace and wisdom. The tattered ruin remains – it was never bulldozed and taken away. Two roof timbers which fell in the shape of a cross are bound together and stand above an altar of rubble, bearing the words, "Father Forgive".

As the visitor wanders through

the devastated remains into the bright, light-filled new construction – umbilically connected with a beautiful walkway – his or her heart sings with the song of costly resurrection.

Indeed, Coventry Cathedral is the inspiration behind many centres of peace and reconciliation throughout the world. I was ordained in that cathedral, and I know that the truths it expresses as a building which expresses reconciliation, apply equally to our beautiful cathedral, here on Vivian St. We have such a gift.

On March 3 at 11am, those gathered at St Mary's will be

witness to the unique sort of hope that comes through costly grace.

The military hatchments which adorn the cathedral were the work of the Archdeacon of Waitara at the turn of the century. Their presence has the same kind of potential as that spine-tingling Coventry atmosphere.

They pay tribute to the fallen in the Taranaki Wars. But in their present configuration, visitors often express the sense that they define the worship space, in a building dedicated to a Gospel of Peace.

I believe that the greatest mistake when it comes to history, is simply not to tell it. We may be

deeply regretful of parts of it, and delighted with others, but that's no excuse for missing out the uncomfortable parts. They are the very soil of growth and change.

When the hatchments are passed from hand to hand by a united congregation of Maori and Pakeha, it will be a Coventry moment. A moment which has been slowly journeyed towards for so many years.

In that respect it will, perhaps, call to mind a parallel at the stadium at Croke Park in Ireland. Remember the U2 song, *Sunday Bloody Sunday*.

Then you have heard of Croke Park, scene of an indiscriminate

shooting by the Royal Irish Constabulary before a football game in 1920. It took place on the afternoon of a never-to-be-forgotten day. A day which began with the assassination of a team of undercover British agents working and living in Dublin, by the IRA.

When the Queen visited Croke in 2011, generations of hurt and mistrust were set aside. It is not the end of the story, but it is a new beginning.

I believe that God is at work in communities, and in churches, to enable people to move, with grace, towards resurrection. I hope that many will gather on March 3, and

be participants in the superimposing of new memories of hope on memories of loss.

The hatchments will not be removed from the building – they must not be removed – for they need to go on telling their story. But they will be arrayed in two places, which will no longer oppressively dominate a place of sanctuary and prayer.

Once there, they will be accompanied by detailed historical information for the visitor or the local, telling the story of the cathedral's presence as a Centre of Peace and Reconciliation for Aotearoa New Zealand. Haere, haere, haere.