

Editorial: Christmas and the miracle of peace

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One of the greatest demonstrations of spontaneous peace occurred 101 years ago this Christmas. May it shine a ray of hope into our violent, contentious world today.



Marv Knox In early December of 1914, just a few months after the outbreak of what came to be known as World War I, Pope Benedict XV called upon the combatants—most of whom claimed to be Christians—to observe a Christmas truce. While their countries and commanders refused, troops on the Western Front took matters into their own hands.

The short-term tranquility began on Christmas Eve. German and British troops took turns singing Christmas carols. (To see a video and read a History Channel article on this event, [click here](#).)

On Christmas morning, the German troops entered no-man's land, shouting "Merry Christmas" in English. When the Allied troops realized their adversaries were unarmed, they met them between their trenches for an impromptu Christmas celebration. They exchanged gifts—cigarettes and plum pudding—sang carols and even took up a game of soccer. Some also retrieved the bodies of comrades who had fallen between the encampments.

For a few hours, carnage and bloodshed ceased. War took a hiatus. Peace prevailed.

Wonderful story, but ...

The Christmas Truce of 1914 is a wonderful story to remember amidst all the violence, war, hatred, genocide, xenophobia and sheer insanity that pervades our world at Christmastime 2015.

Of course, a couple of logical thoughts invade the peace.

First, the truce did not hold. The next day, Germans and Brits started shelling and shooting each other again. The war expanded, eventually costing the lives of 11 million military personnel and seven million civilians. And that war did not “end all wars,” but planted the seeds of World War II, which claimed more than 50 million lives.

Second, many adversaries today do not share common faith. A “Christmas truce” would not resonate between Christians and Muslims.

Still, as we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace, we can—we must—pray and advocate for peace. Peace against all odds. Peace we cannot reasonably expect. Peace that would shock us if it ever occurred.

While we may long for world peace, the place to begin is here at home, in America. As followers of the Prince of Peace, one way we honor the name Christian—literally, “little Christ”—is demanding and then arbitrating peace.

Wage peace

Where do we start? With so much strife, any place is a great place to get going. We can:

- Declare politicians who seek to manipulate us by preying on fear and

appealing to hate do so at their own peril. Then we back it up with how we vote.

- Stand with victims of hate in our communities and state. This means overtly, visibly extending care and compassion to people who may be very much unlike us—Muslims, citizens of other countries, members of other political parties and homosexuals, for starters. We must demonstrate Christian love does not require agreement or similarity.
- Right wrongs, offer apologies and extend forgiveness for breaches of fellowship within our congregations or between fellow believers in the past year. Jesus prayed we would demonstrate our faith in him by the way we treat each other. A living witness is a powerful testimony.
- Celebrate a loving, peaceful, harmonious Christmas as we gather with family in the coming week. This challenge hits closest to home and may be, for many Christians, the hardest to attain. But what better place to start than among our own kin?

This Christmas, let's exhibit the faith of those German Christian soldiers from a century ago. Let's step out of our foxholes and extend the peace of Jesus to others who desperately need it.