



Interpreting Modern Martyrs: secondary teachers' guide

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Introduction

This guide, produced by Westminster Abbey, contains key information about the modern martyrs at Westminster Abbey, to support the delivery of Religious Education within your classroom.

Westminster Abbey has a distinctive role within the Church of England, which is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion. It is neither a cathedral nor a parish church, and it stands outside the normal jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London. It is instead a 'Royal Peculiar', which was a status granted to it in 1560 by Elizabeth I, under which the Dean and Chapter are directly answerable to the Sovereign. Building upon its origins as a monastery and the Benedictine importance placed on education, Westminster Abbey today strives to be a school of the Lord's service.

All Bible references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

Jesus' sacrifice

For Christians, the greatest sacrifice was made by Jesus Christ, who offered His life as an atonement for the sins of the world. Jesus Christ and all 10 modern martyrs sacrificed their lives for others.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (John 3:16)

For more information about Jesus' sacrifice to share with your class, read one or more of the following guides:

- [Jesus Christ: secondary teachers' guide](#)
- [Salvation: secondary teachers' guide](#)

To extend your own learning, you might also find it useful to look at the full [Christian beliefs collection](#).

Discussing modern martyrs

Once students understand the fundamentals of sacrifice and that, for Christians, the greatest sacrifice was made by Jesus Christ it can be helpful to explore modern martyrs. Whilst we may think of people dying for their faith as something that happened in the past, modern martyrdom shows that there are still places across the world where people are punished for their faith. From these modern martyrs, lessons can be learnt about why it is important that we remember those who stood up for what they

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Learning



believe. We can learn about and share the lives of martyrs, as well as listening to the beliefs of all people of faith and those who have none.

Background to the modern martyrs

In 1998, 10 statues were carved above the Great West Door at Westminster Abbey. These 10 statues are known as the modern martyrs because they represent 10 Christians who lived during the 20th century who died because of their beliefs.



The modern martyrs are 10 men and women, selected from around the world, who died for their Christian beliefs. They are: St Maximilian Kolbe (Poland); Manche Masemola (South Africa); Janani Luwum (Uganda); Grand Duchess Elizabeth (Russia); Dr Martin Luther King Jr (USA); St Oscar Romero (El Salvador); Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Germany); Esther John (Pakistan); Lucian Tapiedi (Papua New Guinea); and Wang Zhiming (China).





Activities

With an understanding of Jesus' sacrifice, pupils can use the 10 modern martyr activity sheets to compare and contrast His martyrdom to modern examples.

Before introducing the modern martyrs, discuss with your class the meaning of sacrifice – to give up something which has a value for the sake of others. Sacrifices can be about giving up something small, such as giving someone the last of something you wanted. Sacrifices don't have to be physical. You could sacrifice your time by helping others. What would your class sacrifice to help others? Encourage them to share examples of when they have sacrificed things in the past and what sacrifices they could make in the future.

There are eight resources aimed at secondary students, which were produced in collaboration with a group of Year 10 and Year 12 students in 2022. We asked them to produce a creative response, such as a poem, artwork or documentary-style commentary, about one or more of the 10 modern martyrs statues. Each "perspective" includes: a short video and transcript of the creative response featuring the student; an independent reflection task; a question for discussion; an essay-style question; links to further information on the Westminster Abbey website; and prompts for your students to produce their own creative responses.

These resources could be used in lessons on martyrdom and sacrifice, relating Jesus' experience to these 20th century examples.

Links to resources

[Anjani's perspective – a short documentary about Dietrich Bonhoeffer](#)

[Barney's perspective – a short documentary about Janani Luwum](#)

[Esther & Peonia's perspective – a short documentary about Esther John & St Oscar Romero](#)

[Joel's perspective – a poem about Manche Masemola](#)

[Josiah's perspective – a train analogy about martyrdom](#)

[Tobi's perspective – a poem from the perspective of the statue of Dietrich Bonhoeffer](#)

[Yvette & Miu Miu's perspective – a short documentary comparing traditional and modern martyrs](#)

Christianity in 10 objects

As an extension or another lesson, you could explore the '[Modern Christian martyr maquette](#)' webpage, containing detailed images, further activities and video story, as part of [Christianity in 10 objects](#).

Further information

For more information about the modern martyrs, pitched at adults, explore [these Westminster Abbey webpages](#).