

Promoting peace in the City

By Marcus Binney Architecture correspondent

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THE reopening of St Ethelburga's in Bishopsgate, bombed by the IRA in 1993, is the result of the inspiring vision of the Bishop of London that all the City churches should play a role in the life of the capital.

When it is formally reopened next Wednesday, St Ethelburga's will have a staff of four and a programme of events focused on a most pressing problem of our times: religious conflict and reconciliation. A new Centre for Reconciliation and Peace will give voice to the many religious communities working quietly but purposefully in places ravaged by conflict

The Bishop, the Right Rev Richard Chartres, says: "All religious bodies are familiar with the situation when animosity turns to lethal violence. The destruction of St Ethelburga's is a sign of what happens if we don't show energy 41 preventing and resolving conflict."

Roland Smith, Britain's former Ambassador in Kiev, who is the first director of the centre, says: "The churches in South Africa played a key role in the ending of apartheid; those in East Germany helped to ensure a peaceful transformation as the Berlin Wall fell. Faith communities are playing an important role in Sri Lanka, Angola and Mozambique In Kosovo and Bosnia they are working to try to reunite society and heal the wounds. We are providing a place where such people can meet people and tell their story."

The centre's first Fellow, Agus Wandu, is a Muslim human rights worker from Aceh in Indonesia.

The force of the IRA blast left a 15ft-deep crater in the street outside. Much of the Kentish ragstone used for the west front has been recovered and reused, as well as the oak timbers of the tower. Mark Hammond, of the architects Purcell Miller Tritton, says: "The aim has been to touch the building lightly. The new insertions can, in the future, be taken down without adverse effect on the historic fabric."

The church — which survived the Great Fire of London in 1666 and the Blitz — will be reconsecrated by the bishop at a special service on Tuesday. He says: "It remains a sacred place. The stones in front of the altar are those on which Henry Hudson stood when he took the sacrament on the day of his departure on his great voyage."

A donation of £1 million towards the cost of the work came from the Clothworkers' Guild, and more than half the City's 100 livery companies have contributed. So far, £3.3 million has been raised. "We are well on the way towards raising the first three years' running costs," says Andrew Dunnett, the project director.

The centre will hold its first seminar, "From Conflict to Conciliation", on November 14, and a series of lectures beginning on November 18.

The original weather vane from St Ethelburga's was replaced yesterday, completing the church's restoration after it was damaged by an IRA bomb in 1993

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