Building a community of peace.

Do you know the old saying ‘It takes more than 43 muscles to frown, but only 17 to smile?’ I think it’s an old wives tail, and scientifically probably not at all correct, but I like the sentiment, because actually smiling at someone, especially someone who is different to you, isn’t always that easy.

So today, as we gather here to remember those who have lost their lives in conflict and hate, in particular today, the trauma, brutality and unimaginable loss of the Great War...the war to end all wars...we have to admit together that, in reality, it didn’t end all wars and no war since ever has.

US pacifist AJ Muste said: “There is no way to peace, peace is the way” and I firmly believe that peace really can start with a smile. Think about smiling at someone you don’t know, someone who looks different from you, who talks different from you, who eats different, or dresses different. Who knows what might come from that smile?

After the arena bombing, Manchester stood together in the face of Hate and I think this was possible, because for years and years, the people of Manchester had already been smiling at each other, they have been talking to each other across their differences, working together, eating together, laughing together and on that day, they were able to cry together. The people of Manchester didn’t have to suddenly try to make peace, because they had already been working at keeping and growing peace.

And what about Levenshulme? There’s so many examples I could pick on, but the one that springs instantly to mind is of how a young Gay man described, on the local community facebook page, his experience of a hate incident as he walked up the A6 through Levenshulme. And Levenshulme’s response? The wonderful Levy Pride. A fantastic example of more peace keepers at work.

What better way to honour each life lost in conflict and hate then by living a life of peace. When churches and mosques, and community centres and schools, and community organisations and neighbours start smiling at each other, talking together and working together, just as we are doing today, then we are making peace together; building a community of peace.

And it really does start with a smile – so go on get smiling.