

EDITORIAL

WILL ADAM

On 12 June 2018 President Donald Trump met Chairman Kim Jong Un, the leader of North Korea, for a summit in Singapore. This was, by any estimate, a historic moment. Only months before, the two leaders had been trading insults via social media and a descending spiral of military posturing and aggressive rhetoric was making the region, and the world, nervous. But then, out of the blue, came the idea for a summit that brought with it the prospect of the reduction of the threat of nuclear attacks and an improvement in the economic health of North Korea.

Reconciliation is a gospel imperative, but it is also necessary for the rebuilding of societies and the social and international order after times of conflict or disagreement. Professor Graham Duncan, in his article in this issue, refers back to the difficult times during and after apartheid in South Africa. In the aftermath of the seismic shift in South African society a quarter of a century ago it was via a Truth and Reconciliation Commission that those who were once at enmity with one another were able to move on in peace and justice. There are other parts of the world that remain in desperate need of proper reconciliation between factions, not least among them the new nation of South Sudan. A precursor to any process of reconciliation is the will to make a difference, which needs to be owned by both (or all) sides. Pride, intransigence and the pursuit of selfish gain derail reconciliation, and deliberate thwarting of agreements takes the whole process back to square one.

At a personal level, the Church has a long tradition of encouraging and enabling the reconciliation of the individual sinner with God. The call of Jesus to repentance echoes down the centuries and St John reassures us that ‘if we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness’ (1 John 1:9). The practice of individual auricular confession is less prevalent in the Church of England than in the Roman Catholic Church, but the *Book of Common Prayer* retained provision (in The Order for the Visitation of the Sick and in the first exhortation in The Order for Holy Communion) for penitents to seek out, if their conscience requires it, the ministry of a priest to hear their confession and absolve them; and the proviso to Canon 113 of 1603/4, commonly referred to as retaining the seal of the confessional, remains in force. The whole question of disclosure, privilege,

confidentiality and safeguarding as it affects auricular confession is currently the subject of intense debate. The Archbishops' Council of the Church of England set up a group to examine these issues that surround the seal and to recommend ways forward, but its report is yet to be published. It is clear that there is sharp disagreement on the extent of confidentiality in confession. It would be a bitter irony if disagreement on reconciliation leads to a need for reconciliation in the Church.