

## Manger of Conflict

After getting over the initial apprehension, our first thought for the Manger of Conflict was to give it a contemporary theme and to make the manger out of items you might find lying around in a modern conflict zone. We therefore decided to support the crib on crossed rifles with the basket made of chicken wire, although the first idea had been something representing half an oil drum, and with camouflage like material for the bedding. This repurposing of military materials reminded us of the passage from Isaiah (2:4) 'They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more', which coincidentally turned out to be in the Old Testament reading last Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> December.

From there the project seemed to develop a life of its own, leading us and our thoughts as it progressed rather than us having a final vision of how it would turn out or what it would say. Based on a Christmas card produced by 'Doctors of the World', an international medical charity helping care for people forced from home during war that showed a conventional nativity scene through a hole in the wall of a bombed building, we decided to place the crib in a damaged, shelled house for which we found the photo to use as a backdrop; this proved to be truly inspirational. There are no parental, Mary and Joseph-equivalent figures, which reminds us that so often in modern conflict, refugee children are orphaned or separated from their parents and end up with another child relative or sibling as their only family, represented by the girl on the swing.

But who today could be directed to the scene perhaps highlighted by an illumination flare as if a star and be the first to recognise this special child as the shepherds did originally, someone whose role is to save life? Therefore, the explosive detection dog and its handler who sits before the crib, as the light shining through the window in the photo appears to fall on the child; reminding us that Christ is the light of the world.

Finally, the girl on the swing looks toward the light as if in hope for a better future because of this infant.