

ACSJC Discussion Guide: World Day of Peace Message 2008

On 1 January 2008, Pope Benedict XVI delivered his third World Day of Peace message. This year marks the 40th anniversary of the first World Day of Peace, celebrated by Pope Paul VI.

The theme of this World Day of Peace Message is *The Human Family, A Community of Peace*.

Each year, the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council issues a brief discussion guide to help promote the Pope's message. This guide consists of a brief summary of the message, some points for reflection and discussion, and prayer.



The complete text of Pope Benedict's message can be found at the Vatican website:

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20071208_xli-world-day-peace_en.html.

THE HUMAN FAMILY, A COMMUNITY OF PEACE

The World Day of Peace Message for 2008 emphasises the family as the basis of peaceful and constructive relationships between peoples and nations. The family is ‘the first natural society’ – ‘a divine institution that stands at the foundation of life of the human person as the prototype of every social order’ (Par.2). Our earliest experiences as members of a family give us strength and teach us our basic lessons in relationships. Larger social groups, including nations, can also be seen as members of a family.

Indeed, in a healthy family life we experience some of the fundamental elements of peace: justice and love between brothers and sisters, the role of authority expressed by parents, loving concern for the members who are weaker because of youth, sickness or old age, mutual help in the necessities of life, readiness to accept others and, if necessary, to forgive them. (Par.3)

In fact, in the family we first have the true experience of peace. ‘The language of the family is a language of peace; we must always draw from it, lest we lose the “vocabulary” of peace’ (Par.3). This aspect of the family makes it an indispensable part of society as a whole.

When public policy is not committed to supporting family life, the family’s role as an agent of peace is undermined and society is weakened.

The family needs to have a home, employment and a just recognition of the domestic activity of parents, the possibility of schooling for children, and basic health care for all. When society and public policy are not committed to assisting the family in these areas, they deprive themselves of an essential resource in the service of peace. (Par.5)

The family, the human community and the environment

A family needs a home – and the home of the human family is the earth itself. The world and its natural systems have been entrusted to us ‘to be protected and cultivated with responsible freedom’, for the good of us all. The earth is ‘our common home’ (Par.8).

So the challenge of caring for the earth is to ensure that others have the opportunity to benefit from the earth’s goods and to have a say in their responsible use. Those others include future generations – and the poor, who are so often excluded from the earth’s riches, which God intended for the good of all mankind.

One special challenge is the need for responsible stewardship of the earth’s energy resources. ‘The problems looming on the horizon are complex and time is short’ (Par.8). The technologically advanced countries face two great tasks: to reassess the rate at which they are consuming energy, and to work harder to find alternative sources of energy and efficient ways of using it.

The emerging countries are hungry for energy, but sometimes this need is met in a way that is unjust to the world’s poorest nations, who are forced to undersell their energy resources, sometimes at the cost of their own political freedom.

Family, human community and economy

Peace requires that everyone’s needs are met: that the earth’s goods are shared without waste or extravagance. There is a need for a world economy ‘capable of responding effectively to the requirements of a common good which is now planetary in scope’. In particular, there is

a need for a way of distributing aid to poor countries based on sound economic principles, without wasteful bureaucratic structures or an economy 'governed solely by the ruthless laws of instant profit, which can prove inhumane' (Par.10).

The family, the human community and the moral law

Just as a family lives in peace when its members adhere to a set of commonly-held standards, so does the international community. These standards are what prevents selfish individualism and brings people together.

For the sake of peace, a common law is needed, one which would foster true freedom rather than blind caprice, and protect the weak from oppression by the strong. (Par.11)

However, there are many cases where the weak – both individuals and states – are forced to submit 'not to the demands of justice, but to the naked power of those stronger than themselves' (Par.11).

It bears repeating: power must always be disciplined by law, and this applies also to relations between sovereign States. (Par.11)

The basis of that law is in its moral foundations – the natural law that 'enables human beings to come to a common understanding regarding the most important aspects of good and evil, justice and injustice'. We need to go back to this law, 'not letting ourselves be discouraged by mistakes and misunderstandings' (Par.13).

Overcoming conflicts and working towards disarmament

Today's world is torn by conflict: civil wars in Africa; the conflicts in the Middle East, which threaten to engulf other nations and regions; and the arms race, which involves a growing number of states – even developing nations with scarce resources.

At a time when the process of nuclear non-proliferation is at a stand-still, I feel bound to entreat those in authority to resume with greater determination negotiations for a progressive and mutually agreed dismantling of existing nuclear weapons. In renewing this appeal, I know that I am echoing the desire of all those concerned for the future of humanity. (Par.14)

The year 2008 marks a number of important anniversaries. It is 60 years since the United Nations issued the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

With that document, the human family reacted against the horrors of the Second World War by acknowledging its own unity, based on the equal dignity of all men and women, and by putting respect for the fundamental rights of individuals and peoples at the centre of human coexistence. (Par.15)

It is also 25 years since the Holy See adopted the Charter of the Rights of the Family and 40 years since the celebration of the first World Day of Peace.

In the light of these significant anniversaries, I invite every man and woman to have a more lively sense of belonging to the one human family, and to strive to make human coexistence increasingly reflect this conviction, which is essential for the establishment of true and lasting peace. I likewise invite believers to implore tirelessly from God the great gift of peace. (Par.15)

For reflection

The first form of communion between persons is that born of the love of a man and a woman who decide to enter a stable union in order to build together a new family. But the peoples of the earth, too, are called to build relationships of solidarity and cooperation among themselves, as befits members of the one human family. (Par.1)

The family community, in order to prosper, needs the generous consent of all its members. This realisation also needs to become a shared conviction on the part of all those called to form the common human family. We need to say our own 'yes' to this vocation which God has inscribed in our very nature. (Par.6)

**building
social justice networks**

For discussion

Pope Benedict XVI says that the roots of peace in the world are found in the model of the family. When we accept a stranger into our community, what family values might we be drawing on?

The Pope says that the family needs a home, and that as members of the human family, our home is the earth. If we think of the earth as our home, how might our attitude to it change? What might we be doing differently for the sake of the environment?

If the family is the basic unit of society, 'the prototype of every social order' (Par.2), what can we do in parishes, neighbourhoods or communities to help the families around us – particularly those in need?

**researching
policy**

**educating
on issues**

**presenting
Catholic social teaching**

**promoting
a spirituality of
justice**

**advocating
change**

Let us pray

May the Lord make his face shine upon us, and be gracious to us and bless us.

May we never tire of seeking his face and may we never give in to the temptation of discouragement and doubt.

May we experience the power of his love and his mercy as we always remain anchored to him among the many difficulties we encounter.

May the fragile Child who today the Virgin shows to the world make us peacemakers and witnesses to the Prince of Peace. Amen

Based on Pope Benedict XVI's homily on the World Day of Peace, 6 January 2008

Other resources

- The 2004 Social Justice Sunday Statement, *Peace Be With You*, speaks of the importance of families to achieving peace. www.acsjc.org.au/content/PDF/SJSS2004pdf.pdf
- Anglicare's 'State of the Family' reports: www.anglicare.asn.au/reports/stateoffamily/stateoffamily.shtml
- The Australian Catholic Marriage and Family Council: www.acbc.catholic.org.au/councils/fwg/index.asp
- Catholic agencies providing family services around Australia: <http://www.catholicsocialservices.org.au/services/find/Family%2Bservices>

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