

# ACSJC Discussion Guide: World Day of Peace Message 2009

On New Year's day, the Holy Father delivered his World Day of Peace Message. A papal message to Christians and all people of the world has been given each year since 1968.

The theme of Pope Benedict XVI's 2009 Message for Peace is *Fighting Poverty to Build Peace*.

Each year, the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council issues a brief discussion guide to help promote the 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\\_20081208\\_xlii-world-day-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20081208_xlii-world-day-peace_en.html)

# FIGHTING POVERTY TO BUILD PEACE

The World Day of Peace Message for 2009 deals with the challenge that world poverty presents to the developed world. The growing gap between rich and poor is a problem that the conscience of humanity cannot ignore and the roots of poverty lie in 'a lack of respect for the transcendent dignity of the human person'.

Material poverty, Pope Benedict emphasises, is not the only form of poverty. There are also non-material forms of poverty that do not arise from material deprivation.

*For example, in advanced wealthy societies, there is evidence of marginalization, as well as affective, moral and spiritual poverty ... (n 2)*

The contrast is between what is known as 'moral underdevelopment' on the one hand and, on the other, the negative consequences of 'superdevelopment'.

## CHILDREN

*When poverty strikes a family, the children prove to be the most vulnerable victims: almost half of those living in absolute poverty today are children. (n 5)*

Taking the side of children, the Pope says, means giving priority to the issues that affect them most directly.

*... caring for mothers, commitment to education, access to vaccines, medical care and drinking water, safeguarding the environment, and above all, commitment to defence of the family and the stability of relations within it. (n 5)*

'If the dignity of women and mothers is not protected', he continues, 'it is the children who are affected most.'

## POPULATION, HEALTH AND THE FOOD CRISIS

The Pope also emphasises the danger of reducing the fight against poverty to a campaign to reduce population. In 1981, he says, 40 per cent of the world's population lived in absolute poverty; 'today that percentage has been reduced by as much as a half, and whole peoples have escaped from poverty despite experiencing substantial demographic growth'. (n 3)

The battle against pandemic diseases, too, can be hampered by 'those who make economic aid conditional upon the implementation of anti-life policies'.

Pope Benedict also turns to the food crisis, which does not reflect a world shortage of food so much as difficulty in gaining access to it because of 'a structural lack of political and economic institutions capable of addressing needs and emergencies'. (n 7)

## DISARMAMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

A major contributor to world poverty is military expenditure, which has diverted resources from development projects, especially for those who need aid most.

*This state of affairs does nothing to promote, and indeed seriously impedes, attainment of the ambitious development targets of the international community. What is more, an excessive increase in military expenditure risks accelerating the arms race, producing pockets of underdevelopment and desperation, so that it can paradoxically become a cause of instability, tension and conflict. (n 6)*

Instead of pouring more and more money into the development and production of weapons of mass destruction, the nations of the world are encouraged to 'reflect seriously on the underlying

reasons for conflicts, often provoked by injustice, and to practice courageous self-criticism'. He says that the possibility of improved international relations promises reduced expenditure on arms.

*The resources saved could then be earmarked for development projects to assist the poorest and most needy individuals and peoples: efforts expended in this way would be efforts for peace within the human family. (n 6)*

## GLOBALISATION AND TRADE JUSTICE

The Pope proposes a vision for globalisation that is directed 'towards the interests of the whole human family'.

*In order to govern globalization, however, there needs to be a strong sense of global solidarity between rich and poor countries, as well as within individual countries, including affluent ones. A 'common code of ethics' is also needed, consisting of norms based not upon mere consensus, but rooted in the natural law inscribed by the Creator on the conscience of every human being ... (n 8)*

He points out that the current model of globalisation 'is able to eliminate certain barriers, but is still able to build new ones'. The fact that it brings people together does not mean that we have the conditions for 'true communion and authentic peace'.

Global trade and finance developments, he says, empower some people and benefit some countries (especially those already rich) but work against the interests of others, 'dividing and marginalizing peoples, and creating dangerous situations that can erupt into wars and conflicts'. This is especially true of those countries dependent on commodity markets.

*Here I should like to renew an appeal for all countries to be given equal opportunities of access to the world market, without exclusion or marginalization. (n 9)*

The Pope then turns to the issue of ethics and economics.

*If the poor are to be given priority, then there has to be enough room for an ethical approach to economics on the part of those active in the international market, an ethical approach to politics on the part of those in public office, and an ethical approach to participation capable of harnessing the contributions of civil society at local and international levels. (n 12)*

Globalisation is a force that can have both good and bad effects and needs to be managed prudently.

*This will include giving priority to the needs of the world's poor, and overcoming the scandal of the imbalance between the problems of poverty and the measures which have been adopted in order to address them ... (n 13)*

## OPTION FOR THE POOR

We need to reconsider our attitude to the poor. As Pope John Paul II pointed out, they are not 'irksome intruders trying to consume what others have produced'.

*It is increasingly evident that peace can be built only if everyone is assured the possibility of reasonable growth: sooner or later, the distortions produced by unjust systems have to be paid for by everyone. (n 14)*

The Pope reminds us of the Church's continuing call for a 'preferential love for the poor'. He reminds us of Christ's words to the Disciples: 'Give them something to eat yourselves' (Lk 9:13).

The Church's fight against poverty continues through acts of 'creative solidarity', not only through 'giving of one's surplus' but above all, in the words of Pope John XXIII, by

*a change of life-styles, of models of production and consumption, and of the established structures of power which today govern societies. (n 15)*

## FOR REFLECTION

*Effective means to redress the marginalization of the world's poor through globalization will only be found if people everywhere feel personally outraged by the injustices in the world and by the concomitant violations of human rights. (n 8)*

*What the fight against poverty really needs are men and women who live in a profoundly fraternal way and are able to accompany individuals, families and communities on journeys of authentic human development. (n 13)*

## FOR DISCUSSION

The Church is a 'sign and instrument of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race'. Therefore, the Church will 'continue to offer her contribution so that injustices and misunderstandings may be resolved, leading to a world of greater peace and solidarity'. (n 8)

As members of the Church, what role do we have in identifying injustices and misunderstandings and bringing the peace of Christ? Where do we see poverty, discord and suffering in our communities and around the world? What initiatives and groups in our parish and diocese help us to fight poverty and build peace? How can these be supported and developed?

## RESOURCES

In their most recent Social Justice Sunday Statements, the Australian Catholic Bishops address the same issues raised by Pope Benedict in this World Day of Peace Message.

The 2007 Statement is entitled *Who Is My Neighbour? Australia's role as a global citizen*. The 2008 Statement is *A Rich Young Nation – The challenge of affluence and poverty in Australia*. In both, the Bishops provide further information and make suggestions for individual and community action.

These statements can be downloaded from the ACSJC website at: <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au>

## LET US PRAY

Creator God, Your image is alive in every human person  
giving to each of us an inviolable dignity.

Create in us a desire to act in solidarity, the ability to work together,  
and a willingness to share with others  
our time, our energy, our skills and talents and our wealth.

As we share and enjoy the fruits of your creation,  
restore in us your vision of a world made whole,  
and inspire us to commit ourselves to the common good.

Gracious God, give us ears to hear, eyes to see and hearts to love,  
so that we reflect you in our way of life,  
and in our choices, words and actions.

Jesus is the good news to the poor.  
As his followers, may we recognise the call to be the same. Amen.

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social justice  
networks

**researching**  
policy

**educating**  
on issues

**presenting**  
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a spirituality of  
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