

**REFLECTION BY THE CO-PRESIDENTS OF PAX CHRISTI INTERNATIONAL
ON POPE FRANCIS 53rd WORLD DAY OF PEACE MESSAGE
1 JANUARY 2020**

Pope Francis' 52nd World Day of Peace message in the year 2019, invited us to reflect on the theme ***“Good politics is at the service of peace”***. The Pope's message was that politics, though essential to building human communities and institutions, can become a means of oppression, marginalization and even destruction when political life is not seen as a form of service to society as a whole. This year, 2020 Pope Francis's 53rd World Day of Peace theme is ***“Peace as a journey of hope: dialogue, reconciliation and ecological conversion”***. The reflection on this theme is captured in the following sections of his message (i) Peace, a journey of hope in the face of obstacles and trial. (2) Peace, a journey of listening based on memory, solidarity and fraternity. (3) Peace, a journey of reconciliation in fraternal communion. (4) Peace, a journey of ecological conversion.

In a world devastated by war and conflicts which often affect the marginalized and the vulnerable of our society, we are being invited to reflect on peace as the object of our hope and the aspiration of the entire human family. The virtue of hope inspires us and keeps us moving forward, even when obstacles seem overwhelming. The Pope discusses the different forms of violence that are tearing humanity apart and their true significance. He points out: ***“Every war is a form of fratricide that destroys the human family's innate vocation to brotherhood and [sisterhood]”***.

The message of Pope Francis is a very strong message, a vocational message. This vocation is that of children of God, brothers and sisters. But the Pope underlines ***“our inability to accept the diversity of others, which then fosters attitudes of ... domination born of selfishness and pride, hatred and the desire to caricature, exclude and even destroy the other”***. He emphasizes the fact that ***“war is fueled by a perversion of relationship, by hegemonic***

ambitions, by abuse of power, by fear of others and seeing diversity as an obstacle". On the contrary, in respecting, trusting others and seeing them as sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters, we can 'break the spirit of vengeance and set out on the journey of hope'.

Reflecting on this message, we have the opportunity to act against stereotypes and prejudices of others, cultural domination and cultural blindness and various forms of exclusion experienced in our communities, country, and the global world due to their race, gender, creed, ethnicity, status, orientation and age. More importantly, the Pope poses some critical questions to assist us to reflect on our lack of acceptance, mistrust and fear of others as individuals and/or community. "How do we undertake a journey of peace and mutual respect? How do we break the unhealthy mentality of threats and fears? How do we break the current dynamic of distrust?" Another important question to ask is: How do we deal with the divisions within a society, the increase of social inequalities and the refusal to employ the means of ensuring integral human development which endangers the pursuit of the common good? This calls for deep reflection and the prompting of the Holy Spirit who will enlighten us so that we respond positively by becoming artisans of justice and peace.

According to the Pope, the world develops a strange paradox, while seeking to guarantee peace "through a false sense of security sustained by a mentality of fear and mistrust, one that ends up poisoning relationships between peoples and obstructing any form of dialogue". The climate of fear reinforces the fragility of relationships and increases the risk of violence, creating vicious circles which never lead to a peaceful relationship. The Pope focuses in particular on the danger of nuclear deterrence "that can only produce an illusion of security". Reflecting on this, Pope Francis cautions against the illusion of thinking that we can "maintain stability in the world through the fear of annihilation" as opposed to protecting and preserving life and developing a "global ethic of solidarity and cooperation in the service of a future shaped by interdependence and shared responsibility in the whole human family of today and tomorrow". How inspiring is this insight of Pope Francis that violence in all its forms has never led to peace, including especially the use of weapons of mass destruction. Peace will never be attained through nuclear deterrence or any act of violence, on the contrary, "peace emerges from the depths of the human heart". We are called to live free from fear as we have a God who loves us despite our weakness and our needs as illustrated in the parable

of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-24). Therefore in our search for peace may we “find inspiration in the love that God has for each of us: a love that is liberating, limitless, gratuitous and tireless”. In order to break this dynamic of mistrust, we must therefore “pursue a genuine fraternity based on our common origin from God and exercised in dialogue and mutual trust. The desire for peace lies deep within the human heart, and we should not resign ourselves to seeking anything less than this”.

The Holy Father then speaks about peace as a “journey of listening based on memory, solidarity and fraternity”. Reflecting on the horror of the atomic bombs dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 and the memories of the *Hibakusha* (the survivors of the atomic bomb), Pope Francis exalts the importance of keeping and preserving the memory of past events. Such memories should not only be a reminder in order to prevent similar events happening but also to “enable memory as the fruit of experience, to serve as a basis and inspiration for present and future decisions to promote peace”. Keeping memories of victims alive kindles new hope in individuals and communities as opposed to seeking vengeance which tends to create more violence. In view of this, we invite each one of us to study our context and where applicable honour memories of victims so that their and our hope can be kindled in order to harness peace.

In the darkness of war and violence, a simple outstretched hand can sometimes spark new energies and rekindle new hope in individuals and communities. Opening and tracing the path of peace is a ‘complex’ challenge because the interests at stake in relationships are multiple and contradictory. We can only truly reach peace if we seek truth together “beyond ideologies and differing opinions”. Through dialogue and listening to one another, this “can lead to mutual understanding and esteem, and even to seeing in an enemy the face of a brother or sister”. The peace process is a long term commitment. The Pope insists that “the world does not need empty words but convinced witnesses, peacemakers, who are open to a dialogue that rejects exclusion and manipulation”. The Holy Father then develops the role of democracy which can be “a significant paradigm of this process”. He also warns against fractured societies where “the increase of social inequalities and the refusal to employ the means of integral human development endanger the pursuit of the common good”. It is up to the Church and its organisations to participate in the service of this common good through transmission of Christian values, moral teaching and social education works.

In the third part of his message, the Pope refers to the Bible where many passages show that the other must never be locked in what they have to say or do, but they must be considered according to the promise that they carry within them. Pope Francis invites us to respect, forgive, reconcile. He calls us to reflect on the power of forgiveness as taught by Jesus Christ (Mt 18, 21-22) – to forgive “seventy times seven”. We learn to live in forgiveness so that we can “grow in our capacity to become men and women of peace” and offer that peace to the men and women of our time.

The Holy Father invokes a fraternal communion in each area of existence, social, economic and political. In so doing we emulate Christ who was the first reconciler through his death on a cross “making peace through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20). In this World Day of Peace message, we are reminded that for those who follow Christ, the journey to peace is sustained by the sacrament of reconciliation which renews individuals and communities. This is a journey that calls for patience and trust, listening to one another and contemplating on the world that God has given to be our common home and that of generations to come.

In this message of peace, the Pope also invites us to reflect on ‘ecological conversion’ as a way to build peace. Thus, each one of us is challenged to examine our exploitative, domineering, abusive and selfish attitude towards the environment and the resources that our Creator has entrusted to us as the custodians. This is also a reflection on the way we treat others especially the marginalized and vulnerable. We are therefore invited to walk the journey of “ecological conversion” so that we respect and nurture the earth and all that lives in it, inclusive of the human life. Through ecological conversion we challenge ourselves and others to a new way of looking at life while appreciating God’s generosity to us for giving and sharing the earth with us. This calls for a change in attitude and transformation in the way we relate with the Creator, who is the origin and source of all life, with others and with God’s creation in all its rich variety. Thus, as the Pope points out, “We need to change the way we think and see things, and become more open to encountering others and accepting the gift of creation, which reflects the beauty and wisdom of its Creator”. Moreover, reflecting on the recent Pope’s visit to the Pan-Amazon Region and his reflection on this visit, the call to us is to endeavour to work towards peaceful relationship between communities and the land, between present and past, between experience and hope. Pope Francis also invites us to find

new ways of living together, celebrating and sharing life with others as well as respecting and appreciating the earth as our common home.

Finally, the Pope returns to the theme that opened the text, that of 'hope'. "Peace will not be obtained unless it is hoped for" emphasizes Pope Francis who designates patience and confidence as supports. He continues to expound on this. In the first place this means believing in the possibility of peace, believing that others need peace just as much as we do. Here we can find inspiration in the love that God has for each of us; love that is liberating, limitless, gratuitous and tireless.

May all of us across the five continents - old and young, women and men, all created in God's image and likeness "experience a life of peace and develop fully the promise of life and love dwelling in their heart". As we continue to serve in our different contexts and capacities; as we advance our Pax Christi International four focus areas: (1) Nonviolence as style for politics of peace. (2) The nuclear weapons ban treaty (3) Extractives in Latin America (4) Renewed Israel-Palestine peace process; and as we look forward to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Pax Christ International in May 2020 in Hiroshima, may the inspiration of this 2020 World Day of Peace message continue to be the impetus that drives us. May we continue to work for a world where all will experience equality and social justice; where 'the other' no longer is treated as an enemy but a friend, where swords will be turned into ploughshares, where God's creation will be nurtured and respected and all will come together in gratitude to the Creator of us all.

May the Creator of new beginnings walk gently with each one of you and bring peace to you and your family this New year 2020. As you create cultures of peace in your day to day living, may you experience peace, joy and hope.



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