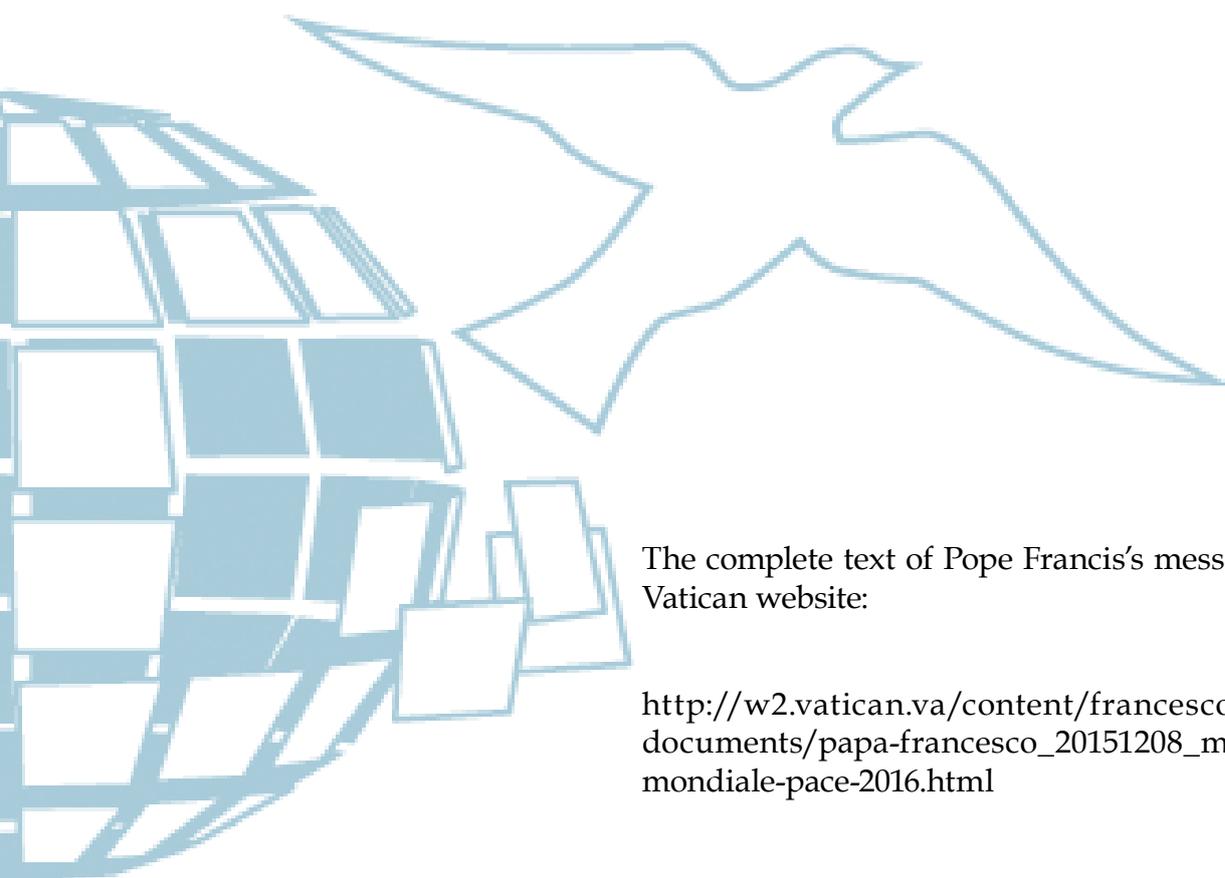


ACSJC Discussion Guide: World Day of Peace Message 2016

The World Day of Peace is celebrated on 1 January each year. On this day a papal message to Christians and all people of the world has been given each year since 1968.

The theme of Pope Francis's 2016 Message is: *Overcome Indifference and Win 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 Francis's message can be found at the Vatican website:

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20151208_messaggio-xlix-giornata-mondiale-pace-2016.html

OVERCOME INDIFFERENCE AND WIN PEACE

God is not indifferent! God cares about mankind! God does not abandon us!

These are the opening words of this year's Message of Pope Francis for the World Day of Peace (January 1) 2016. That first sentence is infused with the passion and commitment that is the trademark of all Pope Francis' writing. Later in the first paragraph he says:

Peace is both God's gift and a human achievement. As a gift of God, it is entrusted to all men and women, who are called to attain it. (#1)

Pope Francis' message is a heartfelt plea to us all to engage with the world around us, not to turn our backs on suffering and injustice, and 'not to lose hope in our human ability to conquer evil and to combat resignation and indifference' (#2).

He begins with an overview of the best and worst of the past year. On the one hand, he mourns the violence and brutality that 'have become so common as to constitute a real "third world war fought piecemeal"'. On the other, he sees great steps forward: the global climate negotiations in Paris, the Summit in Addis Ababa for funding worldwide sustainable development, and the adoption of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

He also recalls the great events that have been the foundation of the Church's expression of solidarity with the world. The year 2015 was the 50th anniversary of the Vatican II documents *Nostra Aetate* and *Gaudium et Spes*, which are 'emblematic of the new relationship of dialogue, solidarity and accompaniment which the Church sought to awaken within the human family'. (#2)

Since he became Pope, Francis has made the challenge of indifference a constant theme. His memorable phrase 'the globalisation of indifference' has been used more than once and reappears in this Message. For him, indifference takes many forms: indifference to God, leading to a 'false humanism' – the sense that 'we are the source and creator of ourselves' and that we 'owe nothing to anyone but ourselves'. Related to this is indifference to our neighbour: he speaks of 'the attitude of those who know, but keep their gaze, their thoughts and their actions focused on themselves' and 'simply content themselves with blaming the poor and the poor countries themselves for their troubles' (#3).

The Pope reminds us of his Message for this day a year ago, in which he wrote about the story of Cain and Abel. The Book of Genesis tells how Cain is called on by God to say where Abel is. But Cain denies his relationship with his brother:

Cain said he did not know what had happened to his brother, that he was not his brother's keeper. He did not feel responsible for his life, for his fate. He did not feel involved. He was indifferent to his brother, despite their common origin. How sad! What a sorry tale of brothers, of families, of human beings! This was the first display of indifference between brothers (#5).

Pope Francis shows us exactly the opposite of indifference in the engagement of God in our world and in the presence of God in Jesus himself. He gives the example of God speaking to Moses about the enslaved Hebrews:

I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

This, the Pope says, is a God who 'sees, hears, knows, comes down and delivers. God does not remain indifferent. He is attentive and he acts.'

Similarly, in his mission on Earth, Jesus 'was not content merely to teach the crowds, but he was concerned for their welfare, especially when he saw them hungry (cf. Mk 6:34-44) or without work (cf.

Mt 20:3) ... *He saw and embraced all of creation. But he did more than just see; he touched people's lives, he spoke to them, helped them and showed kindness to those in need. Not only this, but he felt strong emotions and he wept (cf. Jn 11:33-44). And he worked to put an end to suffering, sorrow, misery and death' (#5).*

This, then, is the context in which the Pope Francis reminds us of the purpose and potency of the Jubilee of Mercy he has proclaimed. '*All of us*', he says, '*are called ... to work concretely to improve the world around us, beginning with our families, neighbours and places of employment.*' (n. 8)

And we have responsibilities not simply as individuals but as a society. If we are to honour the spirit of this Jubilee of Mercy – and the presence of a God who cares about us and will not abandon us – we need to show genuine and practical concern for the most vulnerable among us. Pope Francis names three groups who deserve our special consideration – groups that we as Australians need to consider particularly.

The first of these groups is prisoners:

With regard to prisoners ... practical measures are urgently needed to improve their living conditions, with particular concern for those detained while awaiting trial. It must be kept in mind that penal sanctions have the aim of rehabilitation ... In this context, I would like once more to appeal to governmental authorities to abolish the death penalty where it is still in force, and to consider the possibility of an amnesty. (#8)

These words have special relevance to the Australian context. Recent research shows that the number of prisoners in Australia has more than doubled over the last 20 years. More than a quarter of our prisoners – 27 per cent – are now Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, even though Indigenous people make up only about three per cent of our population.

The second group the Pope reminds us of is migrants:

I would ask that legislation on migration be reviewed, so, while respecting reciprocal rights and responsibilities, it can reflect a readiness to welcome migrants and to facilitate their integration. Special concern should be paid to the conditions for legal residency, since having to live clandestinely can lead to criminal behaviour. (#8)

Those words again remind us of the 2016–17 Social Justice Statement from Australia's bishops, who mourn our harsh refugee policies and the panic and mistrust that are '*out of all proportion to the true scale of the issue in Australia*'. Since that Statement was launched, the time spent by asylum seekers in Australia's detention facilities has reached record levels and it seems there is no end in sight to the suffering of the men, women and children Australia has sent to Nauru and Manus Island.

Third, Pope Francis calls for justice for '*our brothers and sisters who suffer from the lack of 'labour, land and lodging*' – the unemployed, the homeless and those on the fringes of society with no real means of earning a living. The mention of land might remind Australians of the continuing struggle of our Indigenous brothers and sisters for land rights and for the right to live in the remote communities that are their ancestral homes.

Finally, Pope Francis sets out a vision for peace in the world:

With this in mind, I would like to make a threefold appeal to the leaders of nations: to refrain from drawing other peoples into conflicts or wars which destroy not only their material, cultural and social legacy, but also – and in the long term – their moral and spiritual integrity; to forgive or manage in a sustainable way the international debt of the poorer nations; and to adopt policies of cooperation which, instead of bowing before the dictatorship of certain ideologies, will respect the values of local populations and, in any case, not prove detrimental to the fundamental and inalienable right to life of the unborn.

FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Pope Francis calls our attention to signs of hope: the international summit and agreement on to combat climate change, a new agenda on sustainable development, the anniversary two important church documents and the declaration of the Year of Mercy. Find out more about these signs of hope. *What other signs of hope do you see?*

Pope Francis names structures and systems that entrench inequality, such as deplorable economic policies which breed injustice, division and violence. *What are these structures and systems in Australia today? How can they be changed?*

In his message, Pope Francis links indifference to God, with indifference to one's neighbour and to the environment. He also says that 'indifference shows itself in lack of concern for what is happening around us, especially if it does not touch us directly. Some people prefer not to ask questions or seek answers; they lead lives of comfort, deaf to the cry of those who suffer. (#3)

Where is there indifference in your life? How can you move beyond indifference?

building
social justice
networks

researching
policy

educating
on issues

presenting
Catholic teaching

promoting
a spirituality of
justice

advocating
change

RESOURCES

The text of Pope Francis' message can be found at the Vatican website:

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Social Justice Statements on prisoners, migrants and asylum seekers can be found on the ACSJC website: <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/publications/social-justice-statements>

PRAYER

Without openness to the transcendent, human beings easily become prey to relativism and find it difficult to act justly and to work for peace. As I am reminded of this by Pope Francis, I come before you O God, with growing awareness of my place in the universe, in relationship with you, with all my brothers and sisters and with all creatures and all of creation.

Restore and sustain our hope so that in solidarity with all who share this common home, we may move beyond indifference to make compassion, love, mercy and solidarity a true way of life, a rule of conduct in our relationships with one another. (#5)

Amen

Australian Catholic Social Justice Council

Phone 02 8306 3499

Fax 02 8306 3498

Email admin@acsjc.org.au

Website www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au

PO Box 7246 Alexandria NSW 2015

