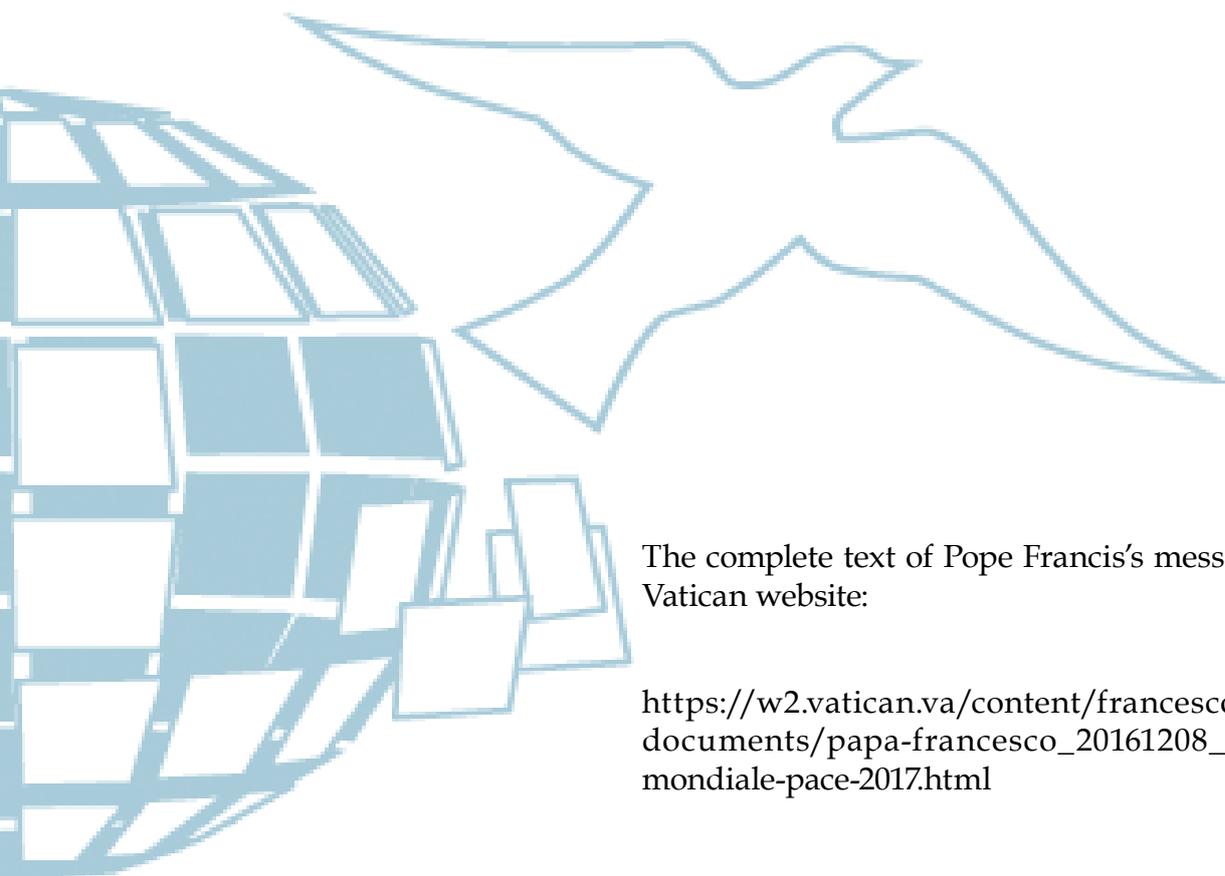


# ACSJC Discussion Guide: World Day of Peace Message 2017

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: *Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for 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:

[https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco\\_20161208\\_messaggio-l-giornata-mondiale-pace-2017.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20161208_messaggio-l-giornata-mondiale-pace-2017.html)

## NONVIOLENCE: A STYLE OF POLITICS FOR PEACE

In this, the 50th Message for the World Day of Peace, Pope Francis has issued an uncompromising call for nonviolence as a means to secure justice and peace in the world. He reminds us of the clear words and courageous actions of his predecessors and of many individuals, Christian and non-Christian, who have striven for justice through 'the sense and love of peace founded upon truth, justice, freedom and love', to quote St John XXIII.

The Pope draws a grim picture of our present situation. Today, he says, 'we find ourselves engaged in a horrifying world war fought piecemeal'. This piecemeal violence includes:

*... wars in different countries and continents; terrorism, organised crime and unforeseen acts of violence; the abuses suffered by migrants and victims of human trafficking; and the devastation of the environment. Where does this lead? Can violence achieve any goal of lasting value? Or does it merely lead to retaliation and a cycle of deadly conflicts that benefit only a few 'warlords'? [n 2]*

Violence, the Pope insists, 'is not the cure for our broken world'.

*Countering violence with violence leads at best to forced migrations and enormous suffering, because vast amounts of resources are diverted to military ends and away from the everyday needs of young people, families experiencing hardship, the elderly, the infirm and the great majority of people in our world. At worst, it can lead to the death, physical and spiritual, of many people, if not of all. [n 2]*

### THE GOOD NEWS

Against the culture of violence, Pope Francis gives us the model of Jesus himself.

*Christ's message in this regard offers a radically positive approach. He unfailingly preached God's unconditional love, which welcomes and forgives. He taught his disciples to love their enemies (cf. Mt 5:44) and to turn the other cheek (cf. Mt 5:39). When he stopped her accusers from stoning the woman caught in adultery (cf. Jn 8:1-11), and when, on the night before he died, he told Peter to put away his sword (cf. Mt 26:52), Jesus marked out the path of nonviolence. He walked that path to the very end, to the cross, whereby he became our peace and put an end to hostility (cf. Eph 2:14-16). Whoever accepts the Good News of Jesus is able to acknowledge the violence within and be healed by God's mercy, becoming in turn an instrument of reconciliation. [n 3]*

Pope Francis then proceeds to the core of this Message. 'To be true followers of Jesus today', he says, 'also includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence'.

*As my predecessor Benedict XVI observed, that teaching 'is realistic because it takes into account that in the world there is too much violence, too much injustice, and therefore that this situation cannot be overcome except by countering it with more love, with more goodness. This "more" comes from God'. [n 3]*

### MORE POWERFUL THAN VIOLENCE

Pope Francis emphasises that nonviolence is not equivalent to 'surrender, lack of involvement and passivity' [n 4]. The opposite is the case. His prime example is that of St Teresa of Calcutta, whom he had canonised in September 2016.

*... she made her voice heard before the powers of this world, so that they might recognise their guilt for the crimes – the crimes! – of poverty they created. [n 4]*

Mother Teresa is not the only example of heroic nonviolence whom Pope Francis recalls. Some of these great figures are well known to us, while others should be much better known. They include Mahatma Gandhi and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan in the struggle for the liberation of India; civil rights campaigner and clergyman Dr Martin Luther King; and Leymah Gbowee,

who led thousands of women in prayer and nonviolent protest to bring about an end to the second civil war in Liberia.

The Pope also reminds us of the nonviolent campaign in Europe that led to the fall of the Communist regimes there, and he pays tribute to the contributions made by Christian communities 'by their insistent prayer and courageous action'.

*Particularly influential were the ministry and teaching of Saint John Paul II. Reflecting on the events of 1989 in his 1991 Encyclical Centesimus Annus, my predecessor highlighted the fact that momentous change in the lives of people, nations and states had come about 'by means of peaceful protest, using only the weapons of truth and justice'. This peaceful political transition was made possible in part 'by the non-violent commitment of people who, while always refusing to yield to the force of power, succeeded time after time in finding effective ways of bearing witness to the truth'. [n 4]*

Pope Francis emphasises that it is not just the Catholic Church that is campaigning for peace and justice:

*Such efforts on behalf of the victims of injustice and violence are not the legacy of the Catholic Church alone, but are typical of many religious traditions, for which 'compassion and nonviolence are essential elements pointing to the way of life'. I emphatically reaffirm that 'no religion is terrorist'. Violence profanes the name of God. Let us never tire of repeating: 'The name of God cannot be used to justify violence. Peace alone is holy. Peace alone is holy, not war!' [n 4]*

#### THE DOMESTIC ROOTS OF A POLITICS OF NONVIOLENCE

Pope Francis emphasises that though violence 'has its roots in the human heart', it is fundamental 'that nonviolence be practised before all else within families.'

*The family is the indispensable crucible in which spouses, parents and children, brothers and sisters, learn to communicate and to show generous concern for one another, and in which frictions and even conflicts have to be resolved not by force but by dialogue, respect, concern for the good of the other, mercy and forgiveness. From within families, the joy of love spills out into the world and radiates to the whole of society. [n 5]*

The ethic of 'fraternity and peaceful coexistence', which the Pope holds up to us, leads him to plead for a renunciation of violence both domestic and international:

*I plead for disarmament and for the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons: nuclear deterrence and the threat of mutual assured destruction are incapable of grounding such an ethics. I plead with equal urgency for an end to domestic violence and to the abuse of women and children. [n 5]*

Finally, Pope Francis reminds us of the 'manual' for peacebuilding that Jesus gave us – the Beatitudes, which bless the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers, those who are pure in heart, and those who hunger and thirst for justice. Francis invites all people, including leaders in politics, religion, international institutions, business and media 'to apply the Beatitudes in the exercise of their respective responsibilities'. He pledges the Church to 'build peace through active and creative nonviolence'. He mentions those for whom he has special concern:

*... migrants, those in need, the sick, the excluded and marginalised, the imprisoned and the unemployed, as well as victims of armed conflict, natural disasters, and all forms of slavery and torture. Every such response, however modest, helps to build a world free of violence, the first step towards justice and peace. [n 6]*

Pope Francis closes his Message by reflecting on Mary, God's mother and the Queen of Peace, and on the power of prayer.

*Nothing is impossible if we turn to God in prayer. Everyone can be an artisan of peace. [n 7]*

### FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

What examples does Pope Francis offer of nonviolence in the Scriptures?  
Can you think of others?

Who are some other people who have inspired you or others by their commitment to change through nonviolence?

Pope Francis mentions people from different cultural and religious backgrounds. Why do you think he did this?

Pope Francis refers to violence within families and relates it to violence in the wider society. Can you think of ways in which this might be true in Australia?

Pope Francis mentions the environment as something that suffers in a culture of violence. As Australians, how might our attitude to environmental issues be changed in the light of this Message?

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's Message can be found at the Vatican website:

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Resources on peacebuilding from the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council can be found on the ACSJC Website:

<http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/social-teaching/issues/155-peacebuilding>

### PRAYER

God of Peace, your Son walked among us on a mission of eternal love, and his life showed us the mighty power of peace.

*Help us to remember* that 'whoever accepts the Good News of Jesus is able to acknowledge the violence within and be healed by God's mercy, becoming in turn an instrument of reconciliation'.

*Help us to live* the example of your loving Mother, who is a vessel for peace and love for every family.

*Help us to build* peace every day of our lives, through even the smallest of gestures and acts, and to become 'artisans of peace' through Jesus Christ, your Son.

Amen

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