



2004 Social Justice Sunday Statement

Peace Be With You: Cultivating a Culture of Peace Teachers' Notes

In the New Testament peace is portrayed, not as the absence of war or conflict, but as the state of full and satisfying relationships with God, each other and the whole of creation. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the source of our rescue from everything which threatens or destroys that state.

The risen Christ greets the bewildered disciples with the statement that he is their peace: "Peace be with you." He breathes the Holy Spirit, the bringer of forgiveness and reconciliation, upon them. (John 20:21, 22.)

Violence, and injustice in all its forms, are in principle defeated, absorbed by "the One in whom God dwelt bodily" (Col. 2:9).

As Paul says succinctly: "He is our peace".

Let us all start where we can in cultivating a culture of peace.

1. Peace is Possible

When we are assaulted in our homes by televised images of violence and terror, our spirits are overwhelmed and we wonder; "What can I do?" That, especially, is when we need to recall what Pope John Paul II tells us, that **"peace is possible. Indeed the Church does not tire of repeating that peace is a duty."**

A culture of peace begins in our own hearts, then spreads to our families and the communities we live in. It is in the joys and difficulties of living together in a family that a culture of peace can start to be cultivated.

- Who is the peacemaker in your family?
- How can each one of us be an agent for peace in our families?
- In groups of four, the class could devise short plays showing peaceful reactions to difficult issues in a family or school situation.
- Does your school have a policy on coping with bullying? Is it effective? How could it be improved?

2. Cultivating a Culture of Life

A culture of peace means that we defend the sanctity of life in all its forms – the unborn, the sick and elderly, or the criminal sentenced to death. It means that we defend basic human rights – civil, political, cultural, economic and social rights, such as access to food, housing, health and education.

Are there any areas of Australian life where the sanctity of life is threatened?

What can we do to preserve the gift of life? Is it sometimes difficult to do this?

What human rights do you consider the most important? Why?

Do you know of any examples in Australia where people's rights are being neglected? What does this do to our efforts to cultivate peace?

3. Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Forgiveness is not the opposite of justice, but of the desire for revenge, for getting even. Christ crucified provides the supreme example of the forgiveness we are called on to develop. On the cross, condemned by the authorities and taunted by the crowd, He prayed, "Father forgive them; they know not what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

- Why is it difficult for one good person to forgive another for an injury or hurt?
- How do you feel when you forgive rather than retaliate?

The spirit of reconciliation will continue to be fostered in the development of a peaceful and equal relationship between Indigenous and other Australians. Indigenous Australians live with higher rates of early death, poverty, unemployment and poor education than other Australians.

- Can you find information about the unjust treatment in the past of the original Australians?
- What does the term “stolen generation” mean?
- How can we, personally and locally, help to bring about true reconciliation among Indigenous and other Australians?

4. Relations between Religions

There can be no peace among nations without peace among religions. The Catholic Church in Australia is committed to ecumenical and interfaith meeting and prayer. Churches hope in this way to break down attitudes that have, in the past, led to misunderstanding, conflict and violence.

For example, there are a number of groups of Catholic and Muslim women who meet for friendship and prayer. They find that getting to know people of other faiths breaks down the barriers of prejudice and misunderstanding.

- Are there students from different national backgrounds in your school?
- Do students from different national backgrounds mix in friendship, as well as on formal occasions?
- Do these students feel accepted, ignored, uncomfortable with people outside their own background? Why?

5. Spreading Democratic and Multicultural Values

Australia’s experience of the peaceful benefits of democracy should be shared with other societies.

While recognising the history and culture of other people, the claims of human rights and dignity and the right to non-violent political processes are universal.

Australian humanitarian values have been recognised by thousands of people who have migrated to our land. In official dealing with asylum seekers, the Catholic Church supports and encourages processes that embody these humanitarian values and recognise the dignity of every person.

- Do you know anyone who has arrived in Australia as a refugee?
- What were their experiences before and after they came to this country?
- Have someone who has visited a detention centre for asylum seekers speak to the class.

6. “ Development is the New Name for Peace”

When Pope Paul VI made this statement in 1967 he meant that more equitable distribution of the world’s resources and assistance is needed to help impoverished societies to help themselves to achieve economic and social development.

The fullness of the peace offered by Christ is diminished where many members of the human family suffer malnutrition, disease and high mortality, and where their societies are weakened by the lack of education and employment opportunities.

In Australia, a Senate inquiry revealed in March 2004 that over 20% of Australians live on less than the minimum wage.

- Find out the national Australian minimum wage; if your students live in an affluent neighbourhood, suggest that they discuss with their parents how to live on this amount of income.
- If they belong to a group which struggles financially, discuss solutions.

Education is the key to moving out of poverty.