



# World Day of Peace Message 2020

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

Pope Francis' Message for the 53rd World Day of Peace is titled *Peace as a Journey of Hope: Dialogue, Reconciliation, and Ecological Conversion*. The full text runs to approximately 2,500 words and can be downloaded [here](#)

There are a number of significant concepts in this relatively short Message. They are all interconnected in a number of different ways resulting in a rich web of interrelated lines of thought. This may be frustrating for those who are more comfortable with a singular straight-line logic, however it honours the complex, multifactorial and multi-directional nature of social relationships.

Francis affirms peace as the hope and aspiration of the whole human family, and explores the importance of dialogue, reconciliation and ecological conversion in the journey towards peace. Journey and hope – both key themes in Francis' broader teachings – are the central concepts in the Message. Hope inspires and sustains us as we keep moving purposefully towards peace.

The Message is worth reading slowly a number of times. Stop frequently to meditate on the points being made in each section. Then consider the overarching messages and interconnections.

### A Journey of Hope

The first section introduces peace as a journey of hope in the face of obstacles and trials. Among the causes of conflict, violence and war, Francis notes:

- Exploitation and corruption
- Inability to accept the diversity of others
- Selfishness and pride
- Hatred and the desire to caricature, exclude and even destroy the 'other'
- Hegemonic ambitions
- Abuses of power
- Fear of others.

Recalling his apostolic journey to Japan, Pope Francis observes that:

*peace and international stability are incompatible with attempts to build upon the fear of mutual destruction or the threat of total annihilation ... Mistrust and fear weaken relationships and increase the risk of violence, creating a vicious circle that can never lead to a relationship of peace. Even nuclear deterrence can only produce the illusion of security.*

### A Journey of Dialogue

The second section addresses the concept of dialogue in the Message's subtitle. The section heading *Peace, a journey of listening* based on memory, solidarity and fraternity, spells out the dynamics of dialogue. Notice the emphasis on listening rather than speaking.

The journey towards peace is not abstract or ahistorical. Memory holds up the experience of victims of violence and 'keeps alive the flame of collective conscience' as the Message puts it. Memory can help us to avoid the mistakes of the past, and it can also provide inspiration.

This is important because, as Pope Francis says, 'political will must always be renewed so that new ways can be found to reconcile and unite individuals and communities.' On the other hand, memory can also lead to harbouring grudges and the desire for revenge. This is why we need to listen to one another in order to understand the experiences remembered so that they can help us to journey towards peace together as sisters and brothers.

### **A Journey of Reconciliation**

As people of the Covenant we are called to renounce 'our desire to dominate others' and learn 'to see one another as persons, sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters.' It is a call to forgiveness and reconciliation that also affects all dimensions of our life in common, including politics and the economy. In this third section, Pope Francis emphasises that 'there can be no true peace unless we show ourselves capable of developing a more just economic system.' Economic activity should be marked by a logic of communion, not only exchange.

### **A Journey of Ecological Conversion**

The fourth section notes that the quest for peace goes beyond relationships between people and communities to embrace the whole of creation. This calls for a new way of thinking, of seeing things, and of living. It calls for a change of heart and mind – a conversion. As Pope Francis says, 'this conversion must be understood in an integral way, as a transformation of how we relate to our sisters and brothers, to other living beings, to creation in all its rich variety and to the Creator who is the origin and source of all life.'

### **Obtaining What We Hope For**

The fifth and concluding section reminds us that we will not obtain peace unless we hope for it and believe it to be possible. The source of peace is God's unconditional love and we are sustained in our journey towards peace 'by the sacrament of Reconciliation, given by the Lord for the remission of sins.'

#### **Discussion Starters**

1. What do you think are the major obstacles to peace in your community, in Australia, and in the world?
2. How can listening and memory help us in Australia to address the violence in our past and avoid further violence?
3. Can you think of examples of how memory has not been at the service of peace? How can these situations be changed?
4. Did you know that the language of reconciliation was introduced into political discussion of a just and proper settlement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by the churches? How might we continue along a journey of reconciliation in Australia today?
5. What impact might an 'ecological conversion' have on our spirituality? How might that be expressed in our relationship with the world around us?
6. How does the Message connect with our contemporary experience here in Australia?
7. How might this Message be received by people in other countries?
8. Do you think that some points made in the Message might be directed to particular contexts?
9. In what ways can you personally respond to this Message?
10. What changes might your parish, school or local community make in response to the Message?