



World Day of Prayer for Peace Message 2021

DISCUSSION GUIDE

A Culture of Care as a Path to Peace

Pope Francis begins his [World Day of Peace Message for 2021](#) by observing that COVID-19 is a massive global health crisis which is “aggravating deeply interrelated crises like those of the climate, food, the economy, and migration” (n 1). The suffering and loss that have been caused have been met with generous, self-sacrificing responses on the part of many, which Francis calls “testimonies of love and solidarity”, but also with “various forms of nationalism, racism and xenophobia, and wars and conflicts that bring only death and destruction” (n 1).

The events of the last year show “how important it is to care for one another and for creation” (n 1). Pope Francis proposes a culture of care “as a way to combat the culture of indifference, waste and confrontation so prevalent in our time” (n 1).

The Creator Models Care

Like many other religious traditions, Christianity tells the story of the origin of humanity, our relationship with the Creator, with the world, and with other people. Recalling the familiar story of Genesis, Pope Francis highlights the way in which care and protection permeate the narrative. God entrusts the garden of Eden to the care of human beings, who were to ‘till and keep it’ (Gen 2:15) – that is, to care for it (n 2). The relationship between the siblings Cain and Able is also framed in the context of protection, reminding us that we are indeed our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers. The genesis account shows God as a Creator who cares for all creation. Even the wrongdoer Cain is given a mark of protection so that his life would be spared. The story reminds us that “everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationship with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others” (n 2).

The institution of the Sabbath, and the Jubilee laws are also expressions of care for creation and for the poor.

- What “testimonies of love and solidarity” did you witness in the past year?
- What responses to the challenges of 2020 that “bring only death and destruction” did you witness?
- Where in your own life do you acknowledge the presence of or temptation to indifference, waste, and confrontation?
- How might our local communities and society as a whole turn away from indifference, waste, and confrontation?

In the Hebrew Scriptures we also see that the prophets continually call for justice for the poor, and that God hears the cry of the poor and watches over them. God cares for the little ones.

- What has been your dominant image of God in the Hebrew Scriptures?
- Reflecting now on the relationship between God, human beings, and the rest of creation in the Hebrew Scriptures, where can you see a narrative of care and protection?

Care in the Ministry of Jesus

Love and compassion are at the heart of Jesus' life and ministry. Jesus is sent by the Father in an outpouring of love. He becomes human, draws near to those who are sick in body or spirit, and to sinners. Jesus brings healing and a new life. Pope Francis points to "the ultimate proof" of Jesus' care for us "by offering himself on the cross to set us free from the slavery of sin and death" (n 4).

Jesus invites us to follow him, to care for one another, and for the whole of creation.

A Culture of Care in the Early Church

The first generation of Christians tried to care like Jesus through what have become known as the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Pope Francis points out that they "strove to make their community a welcoming home, concerned for every human need and ready to care for those most in need" (n 5).

After the persecutions of the first centuries, the Church was freer to act more publicly, and tried to inspire society and to have an impact on its culture. The Church's work for the poor became more organized and institutions such as hospitals, poor houses and orphanages were established.

Catholic Social Teaching & a Culture of Care

The loving service that marked the first generations of Christians was enriched over time by the theological reflection of Church leaders. This care, expressed in the active love of many witnesses over the centuries, "became the beating heart of the Church's social doctrine" (n 6).

Pope Francis says that this social teaching "can serve as a 'grammar' of care" and he highlights four principles that can act as a compass pointing the way forward (n 6):

1. Care as promotion of the dignity and rights of each person
2. Care for the common good
3. Care through solidarity
4. Care and protection of creation.

These are not separate directions but function together to point the way. As Pope Francis says, "peace, justice and care for creation are three inherently connected questions which cannot be separated in such a way as to be treated individually" (n 6).

"Constant and attentive listening" to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor will lead us to "effective care for the earth, our common home, and for our brothers and

- What are some ways in which we can care like Jesus?
- Who and what might become the special focus of our care and compassion if we loved like Jesus?

- How can we recapture the zealous care of the first Christians through our social service, health, development and educational organizations?
- Are our parish communities and organizations "a welcoming home concerned for every human need"?

sisters in need" Pope Francis says (n 6). Furthermore, a deep sense of communion with the rest of creation or with one another is not possible "if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings" (n 6).

- Pope Francis refers to "the beating heart" of Catholic social teaching. Do you associate this teaching more with the head or the heart? How does Francis' focus on care affirm or challenge this perception?
- What practices help you, your parish, group, or organization, to listen attentively to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor?
- Have you encountered activists whose hearts lack tenderness and compassion? What difference does tenderness and compassion make to our action?

A Compass Pointing the Way

In the face of a culture of waste and growing inequalities, Pope Francis urges leaders in many sectors “to esteem the value and dignity of every person, to act together in solidarity for the common good, and to bring relief to those suffering poverty, disease, slavery, armed conflicts, and discrimination” (n 7). He asks us all to become prophetic witnesses of the culture of care in order to overcome inequalities. He stresses that this “can only come about through the widespread and meaningful involvement of women” in the family and in “every social, political and institutional sphere” (n 7).

Pope Francis says that relationships between nations need to be “inspired by fraternity, respect, solidarity and the observance of international law” and he stresses the urgent need to respect humanitarian law (n 7).

Noting that while the many conflicts in the world have a variety of causes, the results are always destruction and humanitarian crises, Pope Francis asks us to “stop and ask ourselves what has led our world to see conflict as something normal, and how our hearts can be converted and our ways of thinking changed, in order to work for true peace in solidarity and fraternity” (n 7).

He questions the resources spent on weapons, especially nuclear weapons, and advocates the establishment of a “global fund with the money spent on weapons and other military expenditures, in order to permanently eliminate hunger and contribute to the development of the poorest countries” (n 7).

Educating for a Culture of Care

Pope Francis says that a culture of care requires a process of education which begins in the family and that schools, universities and even communications media share in responsibility for such education. He acknowledges that religions and religious leaders “can play an indispensable role” in transmitting “the values of solidarity, respect for differences, and concern for our brothers and sisters in need” (n 8).

- Pope Francis places a conversion of heart and new ways of thinking, rather than deterrence or a balance of power, at the centre of work for true peace. How might we work towards this?
- Pope Francis sees ensuring the safety of individuals, the promotion of peace and integral human development, the fight against poverty, and the provision of health care as more important priorities than weaponry. How might we encourage our governments to enact these priorities?

- What are some ways in which you learnt to care for others and for creation?
- How can we more effectively teach the value of solidarity and respect for differences?
- How might we form others in a culture of care?

No Peace Without a Culture of Care

Pope Francis concludes that a culture of care “calls for a common, supportive and inclusive commitment to protecting and promoting the dignity and good of all, a willingness to show care and compassion, to work for reconciliation and healing, and to advance mutual respect and acceptance” (n 9). He calls it a “privileged path to peace” (n 9).

Along with paths to peace, we need peacemakers who are “prepared to work boldly and creatively to initiate processes of healing and renewed encounter” (n 9). Hence Pope Francis appeals to us all not to “yield to the temptation to disregard others, especially those in greatest need, and to look the other way” but instead to “form a community composed of brothers and sisters who accept and care for one another” (n 9).

- What creative processes have you seen that have succeeded in initiating healing and encounter?
- What are some concrete and practical ways in which we can accept and care for each other and the whole of creation?
- Having reflected on this Message, how would you now describe a culture of care?

Access the full text of the [World Day of Peace Message 2021: A Culture of Care as a Path to Peace](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20201208_messaggio-54giornatamondiale-pace2021.html) here: http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20201208_messaggio-54giornatamondiale-pace2021.html

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