

Message of the Holy Father Francis for the 55th World Peace Day 1 January 2022

Dialogue between generations, education and work: tools for building lasting peace

1. *“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace” (Is 52:7).*

The words of the prophet Isaiah speak of consolation; they voice the sigh of relief of a people in exile, weary of violence and oppression, exposed to indignity and death. The prophet Baruch had wondered: “Why is it, O Israel, why is it that you are in the land of your enemies, that you are growing old in a foreign country, that you are defiled with the dead, that you are counted among those in Hades?” (3:10-11). For the people of Israel, the coming of the *messenger of peace* meant the promise of a rebirth from the rubble of history, the beginning of a bright future.

Today the *path of peace*, which Saint Paul VI called by the new name of *integral development*,^[1] remains sadly distant from the real lives of many men and women and thus from our human family, which is now entirely interconnected. Despite numerous efforts aimed at constructive dialogue between nations, the deafening noise of war and conflict is intensifying. While diseases of pandemic proportions are spreading, the effects of climate change and environmental degradation are worsening, the tragedy of hunger and thirst is increasing, and an economic model based on individualism rather than on solidary sharing continues to prevail. As in the days of the prophets of old, so in our own day *the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth*^[2] constantly make themselves heard, pleading for justice and peace.

In every age, peace is both a gift from on high and the fruit of a shared commitment. Indeed, we can speak of an “architecture” of peace, to which different institutions of society contribute, and an “art” of peace that directly involves each one of us.^[3] All can work together to build a more peaceful world, starting from the hearts of individuals and relationships in the family, then within society and with the environment, and all the way up to relationships between peoples and nations.

Here I wish to propose *three paths* for building a lasting peace. First, *dialogue between generations* as the basis for the realization of shared projects. Second, *education* as a factor of freedom, responsibility and development. Finally, *labour* as a means for the full realization of human dignity. These are three indispensable elements for “making possible the creation of a social covenant”,^[4] without which every project of peace turns out to be insubstantial.

2. *Dialogue between generations to build peace*

In a world still gripped by the pandemic that has created untold problems, “some people attempt to flee from reality, taking refuge in their own little world; others react to it with destructive violence. Yet between selfish indifference and violent protest there is always another possible option: that of dialogue. Dialogue between generations”.^[5]

All honest dialogue, in addition to a correct and positive exchange of views, demands basic trust between the participants. We need to learn how to regain this mutual trust. The current health crisis has increased our sense of isolation and a tendency to self-absorption. The loneliness of the

elderly is matched in the young by a sense of helplessness and a lack of a shared vision about the future. The crisis has indeed been painful, but it has also helped to bring out the best in people. Indeed, during the pandemic we encountered generous examples of compassion, sharing and solidarity in every part of the world.

Dialogue entails listening to one another, sharing different views, coming to agreement and walking together. Promoting such dialogue between generations involves breaking up the hard and barren soil of conflict and indifference in order to sow the seeds of a lasting and shared peace.

Although technological and economic development has tended to create a divide between generations, our current crises show the urgent need for an intergenerational partnership. Young people need the wisdom and experience of the elderly, while those who are older need the support, affection, creativity and dynamism of the young.

Great social challenges and peace processes necessarily call for dialogue between the keepers of memory – the elderly – and those who move history forward – the young. Each must be willing to make room for others and not to insist on monopolizing the entire scene by pursuing their own immediate interests, as if there were no past and future. The global crisis we are experiencing makes it clear that encounter and dialogue between generations should be the driving force behind a healthy politics, that is not content to manage the present “with piecemeal solutions or quick fixes”,^[6] but views itself as an outstanding form of love for others,^[7] in the search for shared and sustainable projects for the future.

If, amid difficulties, we can practise this kind of intergenerational dialogue, “we can be firmly rooted in the present, and from here, revisit the past and look to the future. To revisit the past in order to learn from history and heal old wounds that at times still trouble us. To look to the future in order to nourish our enthusiasm, cause dreams to emerge, awaken prophecies and enable hope to blossom. Together, we can learn from one another”.^[8] For without roots, how can trees grow and bear fruit?

We need only think of care for our common home. The environment, in fact, “is on loan to each generation, which must then hand it on to the next”.^[9] We ought to esteem and encourage all those young people who work for a more just world, one that is careful to safeguard the creation entrusted to our stewardship. They go about this with restlessness, enthusiasm and most of all a sense of responsibility before the urgent change of direction^[10] required by the challenges emerging from the present ethical and socio-environmental crisis.^[11]

On the other hand, the opportunity to build paths of peace together cannot ignore education and labour, which are privileged settings and contexts for intergenerational dialogue. Education provides the grammar for dialogue between generations, and in the experience of labour men and women of different generations find themselves able to cooperate and to share expertise, experiences and skills in view of the common good.

3. Teaching and education as drivers of peace

In recent years, there has been a significant reduction worldwide in funding for education and training; these have been seen more as expenditures than investments. Yet they are the primary

means of promoting integral human development; they make individuals more free and responsible, and they are essential for the defence and promotion of peace. In a word, teaching and education are the foundations of a cohesive civil society capable of generating hope, prosperity and progress.

Military expenditures, on the other hand, have increased beyond the levels at the end of the Cold War and they seem certain to grow exorbitantly.^[12]

It is high time, then, that governments develop economic policies aimed at inverting the proportion of public funds spent on education and on weaponry. The pursuit of a genuine process of international disarmament can only prove beneficial for the development of peoples and nations, freeing up financial resources better used for health care, schools, infrastructure, care of the land and so forth.

It is my hope that investment in education will also be accompanied by greater efforts to promote the culture of care,^[13] which, in the face of social divisions and unresponsive institutions, could become a common language working to break down barriers and build bridges. “A country flourishes when constructive dialogue occurs between its many rich cultural components: popular culture, university culture, youth culture, artistic culture, technological culture, economic culture, family culture and media culture”.^[14] It is essential, then, to forge a new cultural paradigm through “a global pact on education for and with future generations, one that commits families, communities, schools, universities, institutions, religions, governments and the entire human family to the training of mature men and women”.^[15] A compact that can promote education in integral ecology, according to a cultural model of peace, development and sustainability centred on fraternity and the covenant between human beings and the environment.^[16]

By investing in the education and training of younger generations, we can help them – through a focused programme of formation – to take their rightful place in the labour market.^[17]

4. Creating and ensuring labour builds peace

Labour is an indispensable factor in building and keeping peace. It is an expression of ourselves and our gifts, but also of our commitment, self-investment and cooperation with others, since we always work *with* or *for* someone. Seen in this clearly social perspective, the workplace enables us to learn to make our contribution towards a more habitable and beautiful world.

The Covid-19 pandemic has negatively affected the labour market, which was already facing multiple challenges. Millions of economic and productive activities have failed; short-term workers are increasingly vulnerable; many of those who provide essential services have an even lower public and political profile; and in many cases, distance teaching has led to a deficit in learning and delays in completing programmes of study. Furthermore, young people entering the job market and recently unemployed adults presently face bleak prospects.

In a particular way, the impact of the crisis on the informal economy, which often involves migrant workers, has been devastating. Many of the latter are not even recognized by national legislation; it is as though they did not exist. They and their families live in highly precarious conditions, prey to various forms of slavery and with no system of welfare to protect them. Currently only one third of the world’s population of working age enjoys a system of social

protection, or benefit from it only in limited ways. Violence and organized crime are on the increase in many countries, impinging on people's freedom and dignity, poisoning the economy and hampering the development of the common good. The only answer to this is an expansion of dignified employment opportunities.

Labour, in fact, is the foundation on which to build justice and solidarity in every community. For this reason, our aim should not be "that technological progress increasingly replace human work, for this would be detrimental to humanity. Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfilment".^[18] We need to combine our ideas and efforts in order to create the solutions and conditions that can provide everyone of working age with the opportunity, through their work, to contribute to the lives of their families and of society as a whole.

It is more urgent than ever to promote, throughout our world, decent and dignified working conditions, oriented to the common good and to the safeguarding of creation. The freedom of entrepreneurial initiatives needs to be ensured and supported; at the same time, efforts must be made to encourage a renewed sense of social responsibility, so that profit will not be the sole guiding criterion.

In light of this, there is a need to promote, welcome and support initiatives that, on all levels, urge companies to respect the fundamental human rights of workers, raising awareness not only on the part of institutions, but also among consumers, civil society and entrepreneurial entities. As the latter become more and more conscious of their role in society, the more they will become places where human dignity is respected. In this way, they will contribute to building peace. Here, politics is called to play an active role by promoting a fair balance between economic freedom and social justice. All who work in this field, starting with Catholic workers and entrepreneurs, can find sure guidelines in the Church's social doctrine.

Dear brothers and sisters, as we seek to combine our efforts in order to emerge from the pandemic, I renew my thanks to all those who continue to work with generosity and responsibility in the areas of education, safety and protection of rights, in supplying medical care, in facilitating meetings between family members and the sick, and in providing economic support to the needy and those who have lost their jobs. I continue to remember the victims and their families in my prayers.

To government leaders and to all those charged with political and social responsibilities, to priests and pastoral workers, and to all men and women of good will, I make this appeal: let us walk together with courage and creativity on the path of intergenerational dialogue, education, and work. May more and more men and women strive daily, with quiet humility and courage, to be artisans of peace. And may they be ever inspired and accompanied by the blessings of the God of peace!

 *Francis*