

World Day of Peace

January 1, 2011



Religious Freedom, the Path to Peace, is the theme of Pope Benedict XVI's 2011 Message for the World Day of Peace, celebrated on January 1 each year. The Church teaches that religious freedom is grounded in the inherent dignity of the human person. The Holy Father's message affirms that all people have a duty and a right to seek religious truth and to practice religion in accordance with their conscience. Religious freedom allows deep and healthy relationships with God, oneself, others, and the world, and helps to form a society where peace can prevail, human development can occur, and the life and dignity of all can be respected.

The full text of the message is posted each year in mid-December at www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/index_en.htm

Religious Freedom in the Holy Land

The Holy Land is sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims, but a tragic, decades-old conflict has brought violence and suffering to its two peoples – Israelis and Palestinians – who yearn for a just peace. A just two-state peace agreement is essential for the future wellbeing of all the peoples of the Holy Land, including the Christian community, which is rapidly emigrating due to the difficult political and economic conditions imposed by the conflict.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Relief Services have worked for decades for justice and peace in the Holy Land, the place of Christ's birth and ministry.



Children in the West Bank express their desire for peace. David Snyder/CRS

Prayer for the Mother Church of Jerusalem

*For the peace of Jerusalem pray:
"May those who love you prosper!
May peace be within your ramparts,
prosperity within your towers."
For family and friends I say,
"May peace be yours."
For the house of the LORD, our God,
I pray, "May blessings be yours."
- Psalm 122:6-9*

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
3211 4th St., NE, Washington, DC 20017
www.usccb.org/globalpoverty
globalpoverty@usccb.org
202-541-3160

Catholic Relief Services
228 W. Lexington St., Baltimore, MD 21201
www.crs.org/globalpoverty
globalpoverty@crs.org
1-866-608-5978

Praying for Peace in Iraq

On October 31, a bombing of the Syrian Catholic cathedral in Baghdad killed 58 people and wounded 75. Shortly after, the U.S. bishops offered their prayers and expressed solidarity with the suffering Christians in Iraq.

Cardinal Francis George of Chicago, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), said as part of his message:

“We stand with the bishops, Church and people of Iraq in their urgent search for greater security, freedom and protection. We call upon the United States to take additional steps to help Iraq protect its citizens, especially the most vulnerable.”

Cardinal George also echoed Pope Benedict XVI's recent words: “Peace is possible. Peace is urgent. Peace is the indispensable condition for a life of dignity for individuals and society.”



Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Why does human dignity require respect for religious freedom?
2. What is the relationship between freedom to practice one's religion and “integral human development”?
3. How does respect for the religious freedom of all help create the conditions necessary for peace?

What You Can Do to Promote Peace through Religious Freedom

1. In mid-December, read the Holy Father's World Day of Peace message.
2. Visit Catholics Confront Global Poverty at www.usccb.org/sdwp/globalpoverty/ to learn about how conflict creates poverty, and poverty leads to conflict.
3. Visit www.usccb.org/holyland to:
 - **Pray** for peace in the Holy Land and see guidelines for pilgrimages.
 - **Learn** about the situation using the *Voices for Peace in the Holy Land* parish resource guide and other materials.
 - **Advocate** for U.S. leaders to exercise leadership for a just peace.
 - **Give** to support CRS programs in the Holy Land at <http://crs.org/Jerusalem/>.