

Message to Young Catholics on

Social Justice



Commission for Justice and Peace
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the year 2010-2011 as “International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding” to encourage youth participation in carrying

out the Millennium objectives for development. This proclamation and the celebration of World Youth Day 2011 in Madrid have been two defining moments for young people throughout the world.

“In justice work, you encounter people in situations where it seems like life couldn’t be any darker, yet love and joy dwell here too. It makes me realize that life is much bigger than we think and that life is much stronger than death. It is in these moments that I see Jesus.”

- Thomas McKay,
student at
St. Thomas More College,
Saskatoon and
member of the Canadian
Catholic Students’
Association

In the wake of these events we, the Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, encourage you as young Catholics to commit yourselves to building a more just and joyful society. We also wish to thank and congratulate you for your generosity and perseverance as you undertake this mission in various sectors of our society.

"No matter where you are from, no matter who you are, we are all God's children. I think it is so powerful that we are all brothers and sisters. We are all in this together. Together we can build a world of justice."

- Michelle McDonell,
student at
King's University College
at the University of
Western Ontario, London,
and member of the
Canadian Catholic
Students' Association

"I am involved in Development and Peace because it brings about change by working in partnerships with people in the Global South. Development and Peace shows that everyday people around the world have in their own hands the power to improve their lives, and I believe that God wants people to love their life and live in happiness."

- Justine Correia,
Vernon, BC

The Catholic Church shares all of humanity's common quest for peace and happiness, and supports the efforts of individuals and groups working to eradicate poverty, illness, injustice, inequality, human rights violations, and environmental exploitation. This witness of solidarity flows from God's love for humanity as revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

In the face of so many challenges, you may be tempted to give way to discouragement and to take refuge in personal comfort. However, the Bible is a constant source of encouragement in difficult moments. We see there many examples of struggle against injustice, such as the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist, and the Virgin Mary who as a young woman welcomed Jesus, the One sent by the Father to bring good news to the poor (*Matthew 11.5; Luke 1.46-56, 4.17-21*). In a passage from the First Letter of John, the author says, "I write to you, young people, because you are strong and God's word remains in you, and you have overcome the evil one" (*1 John 2.14*).

“Having the opportunity to be a youth leader for Development and Peace has helped me to become more passionate about my belief in working towards a more peaceful world. I know I have support from all the young leaders behind me, and today we support each other on the same global issues and we learn from each other. Being involved with Development and Peace allows me to share my faith and my voice with others of many different backgrounds and beliefs. All of us working together under different circumstances provides me with hope that one day everyone will be living in an equal and peaceful world.”

- Sarah Cavan,
Antigonish, NS

Inspired by Scripture, you can use your courage and energy to overcome obstacles that may appear insurmountable. As Pope Benedict XVI remarked in an address to young people: “You too are rich in talents, energy, dreams, and hopes. These are resources which you have in abundance! Your age itself is a great treasure, not only for yourselves but for others too, for the Church and for the world” (Message for the 25th World Youth Day, 28 March 2010).

In a society heavily focussed on consumption and the accumulation of material wealth, it is important to remember the Gospel values of simplicity, generosity, and justice for all. The Holy Father’s message for World Youth Day 2011 noted that Western culture “tends to exclude God, and to consider faith a purely private issue without relevance for the life of society.”

However, for those who live in communion with Jesus Christ, what matters most is “faith working through love” (*Galatians 5.6*). The personal and social dimensions of faith are indissoluble. Commitment to social justice is a concrete way to devote ourselves

fully to our faith and love as witnesses of “Christian hope all over the world” (Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the 26th World Youth Day, 2011).

“When I see men and women around me who are suffering and living without hope – believing that there is nothing better for them in life – or even when they do not want to live anymore, I must respond. I know that Jesus is the solution to all suffering. It is with certitude that I work to repair injustices against men, women and children at home and around the world. In all that I do, I offer the joy of Jesus, his mercy and his power to heal and save.”

– Gabriel Lindor,
Catholic Christian Outreach,
Ottawa

To that end, we invite you as young Catholics to be witnesses of Christ’s love in the world, and to raise awareness of global issues in light of the Church’s social teaching – through involvement in various Catholic social justice agencies and as active members of your parishes, student associations and other movements. We also thank all those who encourage you to be involved in promoting social justice.

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