



# World Day of Peace Message 2008

## Discussion Guide

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### Summary

This year marks the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Holy See's *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, and the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first *World Day of Peace Message*, which was issued by Pope Paul VI.

Pope Benedict XVI brings all of these threads together in the theme for this year's message, *The Human Family, a Community of Peace*.

The full text of the Message can be accessed at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20071208\\_xli-world-day-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20071208_xli-world-day-peace_en.html)

### The Family & Peace

Healthy human families help us to learn how to live in peace with others. In the family children experience some of the fundamental elements of peace:

*"... justice and love between brothers and sisters, the role of authority expressed by parents, loving concern for the members who are weaker because of youth, sickness or old age, mutual help in the necessities of life, readiness to accept others and, if necessary, to forgive them." (n 3)*

Because of its important role as the first teacher of peace, violence in the family is particularly intolerable (n 3).

### The Family & Society

The family is the fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* recognizes this, and the Holy See has published its own *Charter of the Rights of the Family*.

If the institution of the family is undermined, peace in the entire community - national and international - is undermined:

*"The family needs to have a home, employment and a just recognition of the domestic activity of parents, the possibility of schooling for children, and basic healthcare for all. When society and public policy are not committed to assisting the family in these areas, they deprive themselves of an essential resource in the service of peace. The social communications media, in particular, because of their educational potential, have a*

*special responsibility for promoting respect for the family..." (n 5)*

### One Human Family

The whole of humanity is one great family and its flourishing requires the commitment of all:

*"We do not live alongside one another purely by chance; all of us are progressing along a common path as men and women, and thus as brothers and sisters. Consequently it is essential that we should all be committed to living our lives in an attitude of responsibility before God, acknowledging him as the deepest source of our own existence and that of others. By going back to this supreme principle we are able to perceive the unconditional worth of each human being, and thus to lay the premises for building a humanity at peace." (n 6)*

### Caring for Our Home

The home of the human family is the earth. We need to care for the environment, which God has entrusted to us, with responsible freedom, and with a view to the good of all:

*"Respecting the environment does not mean considering material or animal nature more important than man. Rather, it means not selfishly considering nature to be at the complete disposal of our own interests, for future generations also have a right to reap its benefits and to exhibit towards nature the same responsible freedom that we claim for ourselves. Nor must we overlook the poor, who are excluded in many cases from the goods of creation destined for all." (n 7)*

Agreement on a model of sustainable development that can ensure the well being of all while respecting environmental balances is needed. Any costs of protecting the environment should be shared justly and in solidarity with future generations.

Action to strengthen the covenant between human beings and the environment should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying (n 7).

Stewardship of our common home calls for dialogue and responsible cooperation rather than unilateral decisions. The problems are complex and our time is short – we need to act in harmony (n 8).

There is a particular need to “intensify dialogue between nations” in relation to the stewardship of the earth’s energy resources (n 8). Technologically advanced countries must “reassess the high levels of consumption due to the present model of development, and ... to invest sufficient resources in the search for alternative sources of energy and for greater energy efficiency.” (n 8) The emerging countries need energy too, but this demand is sometimes met in ways that are harmful to poor countries which are forced to undersell their resources:

*“At times, their very political freedom is compromised by forms of protectorate or, in any case, by forms of conditioning which appear clearly humiliating.” (n 8)*

### Sharing Values & Resources

Shared spiritual and ethical values provide a solid foundation for peace in families. The family experiences peace when no one lacks what is needed and the “family patrimony” is managed in a spirit of solidarity and without waste (n 9).

The human family also needs shared values and an economy which can effectively address the requirements of the common good at the planetary level (n 10).

Resources must be used prudently and distributed equitably. The waste associated with expensive bureaucracies is to be avoided and the economy should not be governed “solely by the ruthless laws of instant profit, which can prove inhumane (n 10).”

In families, and in wider communities, common standards are needed to foster real freedom and to protect the weak from oppression by the strong. Power should be disciplined by law, and so should relations between sovereign States (n 11).

Despite cultural differences, through the ‘law’ inscribed in nature itself, human beings can “come to a common understanding regarding the most important aspects of good and evil, justice and injustice (n 13)”

While such common understandings are present in an imperfect way in international agreements, universally recognized forms of authority, and in the principles of humanitarian law, there is an urgent need to encourage individual States to recognize fundamental human rights in their legislation (n 13).

### Conflicts & Disarmament

Many parts of the human family today are experiencing conflicts and division. The arms race continues to consume a significant portion of the domestic product of some developing countries while

industrialized countries “profit immensely” from the sale of arms, and ruling oligarchies in many poor countries retain power through the acquisition of ever more sophisticated weaponry (n 14).

All people of good will must “come together to reach concrete agreements aimed at an effective demilitarization, especially in the area of nuclear arms” and those in authority must work with greater determination for the progressive and mutually agreed dismantling of existing nuclear weapons (n 14).

### An Invitation

Benedict XVI invites “every man and woman to have a more lively sense of belonging to the one human family, and to strive to make human coexistence increasingly reflect this conviction, which is essential for the establishment of lasting peace.” (n 15).

### For Reflection & Discussion

- Did you learn about peace in your family of origin? If so, how?
- Write your own Charter of the Rights of the Family. Compare your Charter with the Holy See’s.
- How is family life portrayed in television programs? Are these representations truthful? Are they respectful? Do they promote peace?
- Make a list of ways in which your family, community, school or parish can reduce its consumption and support the development of renewable energy sources.
- How are energy resources and political freedom linked?
- Describe how resources are shared in your family or household. Is this how you would like to see resources shared in the human family? Why / why not?
- What are some values that you think the whole human family might agree on? Do the international human rights agreements provide any hints?
- Do we as individuals, organizations, or as a nation, profit from the sale of arms? Does your superannuation fund invest in companies that earn profits from the sale of arms?
- How can we develop a more lively sense of belonging to one human family?

### References:

*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*  
<http://www.un.org/events/humanrights/2007/hrphotos/declaration%20eng.pdf>  
*Charter of the Rights of the Family*  
[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/family/documents/rc\\_pc\\_family\\_doc\\_19831022\\_family-rights\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/family/documents/rc_pc_family_doc_19831022_family-rights_en.html)