

"The path of peace and reconciliation will require new acts of courage and prophetic witness to help us navigate the residual undercurrent of fear that continues to influence our society."

Bishop Noel Treanor

New Year's Message 2021 World Day of Peace

Each year, Pope Francis publishes a Peace Message drawing attention to the project of reconciliation and justice at the heart of Catholic Social Teaching. In his 2021 Message entitled "A Culture of Care as a Path to Peace", Pope Francis encourages us all to re-calibrate our 'compass of social principles'.^[1] Realigning our values to the values of the Gospel draws us closer to Christ and his people. Recognising the dignity of the human person and caring for the other is the beating heart of all Catholic Social Teaching.

2020 has been an extremely difficult year as we have faced together the Covid-19 crisis. This global pandemic has revealed how interconnected we and the entire human family are. The virus has indiscriminately affected persons across all territorial borders and all sectors of society. This health crisis has also aggravated already existent inequalities, poverty, migration, and economic adversity. Many have experienced hardship and suffering. We especially remember all those who have lost family members or loved ones.

The experience of the past year has made it clear, sometimes painfully, that the decisions and actions of individuals affect the lives of everyone. It is not possible to fully anticipate the legacy of this global pandemic upon society at large and upon families and individuals, businesses and charitable agencies closer to home.

On behalf of the local Church, I pay tribute to all the medical personnel, doctors and nurses, pharmacists, chaplains and all frontline workers who have sacrificed much to alleviate suffering and to save lives. While we are still in the midst of a global pandemic and need to remain ever vigilant to the contagious threat of the virus, the seedlings of hope are emerging with the roll out of vaccination programmes.

The resilience of the human spirit, grounded in our ability to adapt and respond to the changing circumstances of our time and supported by those who love us, provides the foundations to move forward with hope and a greater sense of security.

The year ahead 2021 in Northern Ireland will also be marked by tremendous uncertainty as we withdraw from the European Union and as we reflect upon the Centenary foundations of the Partition of Ireland. This context generates discussion

and reflection on identity and identities, on cultural heritage and on the foundations and societal structures of Northern Ireland. We are all aware that the combination of such circumstances creates uncertainty. Fuelled by fear, this uncertainty can also amplify fault lines and create tension across communities.

For these reasons, more than ever, a culture of care as a pathway to peace is necessary. All of us, political leaders, educators, citizens and faith leaders should make a concerted effort to build upon the legacy of peace, achieved through sacrifice and constructive dialogue. The path of peace and reconciliation will require new acts of courage and prophetic witness to help us navigate the residual undercurrent of fear that continues to influence our society.

I extend my heartfelt blessing to all across the Diocese of Down and Connor and beyond and I pray that the coming year may build upon and nurture the foundations of peace and reconciliation.

+Noel Treanor
Bishop of Down and Connor