

New Year's 2012 - 45th World Day of Peace

In the year 1940 three future popes were still relatively young

The future Pope Paul VI was 43 years old

The future Pope John Paul II was 20 years old

The future Pope Benedict XVI was 13

These three future popes were living in Europe

Pope Paul VI was in Italy

Pope John Paul II was in Poland

Pope Benedict XVI was in Germany

From 1940 to 1944:

their countries would be bombed

enemy tanks would roll through their streets

paratroopers would land on their soil

foreign troops would come through their fields

the three future popes would see first-hand the impact of war

In 1968 Pope Paul VI started an annual event that has been continued by those three popes for 45 years.

Every year those three popes have, one after the other, declared

January 1st as the World Day of Peace. (This is the same day where we celebrate Mary, Mother of God, Mary who is the Queen of Peace.)

Those three popes saw war first-hand and wanted to make sure it would not happen again.

Over those 45 years the three popes have approached peace from 45 different angles - trying to get the whole world on-board for striving to achieve world peace.

(Interestingly enough, they did not simply say "Let's pray for peace.")

They offered ideas for action, on what we humans, Catholics and others, could do to prevent future wars.

And a common theme that developed was: "No justice, no peace."

You can't have Germans enslaving Jews and have peace

You can't have Jews and Arabs using unjust means to achieve peace in the Holy Land.

You can't have the rich nations treating the poor nations unjustly and expect world peace

You can't have tyranny and expect world peace.

So what does Benedict ask us to do in his annual formal address designating January 1st as World Day of Peace?

The title of his address is:

Educating Young People in Justice and Peace.

Pope Benedict notes that young people, "with their enthusiasm and idealism, can offer new hope to the world."

He then has guidance for all those who have an impact on young people:

Families - the first and primary school of young people

Schools

Political leaders

The Media and

Young people themselves

Over the 45 years this topic of "education about peace" has come up four times.

It is the most common of all the World Day of Peace topics.

My question is: "What exactly do we educate about?"

By going over the topics for the 45 years I find that Peace is really an umbrella for many important topics.

[List of 45 years of World Day of Peace topics at main entrance]

The umbrella can rightly highlight at least eight topics related to peace.

Justice: Pope Paul VI said it most simply in 1972: "If you want Peace, work for Justice." The reversal is so true: unjust situations will always lead to unrest and a lack of peace

Respect: We respect others because they are made in the image and likeness of God; everyone, regardless of race or ethnicity; we will respect the human rights of everyone

A key tool for achieving peace is honest and respectful **dialogue** between cultures, between all parties, among all nations.

Through that dialogue we can arrive at a true **reconciliation**

And that reconciliation can lead to **forgiveness** of other parties

True peace can only be achieved with religious **freedom** and broader freedoms as well

Poverty needs to be addressed to arrive at justice and then peace

Peace is even broader than human concerns and even includes concerns for all of God's creation, that is the **environment**

Work and pray for justice.

[standing under umbrella and with the eight words on it:]

Avoid the reign (rain!) of war.

How do we go about teaching young people about these eight important issues?

I see three key ways:

We all need to become better informed about these topics in our own country and other countries as well. [Less time on face book and ipods; more time on public radio and reputable news shows]

Practice these same eight principles in our everyday lives - in our families, small groups, our work environments - certainly respect, dialog, reconciliation, and forgiveness belong in our daily lives.

Give witness to young people by working in some level of community efforts (church group, scouts, block clubs, neighborhood groups, and special interest groups) to address at

least one of the concerns: poverty, human rights, race relations, interfaith relationships, etc. These groups tend to fit into one of two categories:

Taking care of the immediate needs of people through food drives, medical help, contributions of clothes, etc. (things we might all call "charity"): examples: our *Giving Tree*, collecting medicine for Haiti, putting food in our wishing well for our hungry neighbors.

Addressing the root causes of the problems - justice, education, political power, etc. - through such organizations as Pax Christi, Bread for the World, bishops Campaign for Human Development, etc.

As we start this New Year it would be a good time for each of us to challenge ourselves, just as the last three popes have already challenged us for 45 years.

How will we find ways in our lives to work for things that will bring about peace in our families, communities and the world?

As we prepare for offering our gifts to the Lord here in this Mass we might well search our souls for ways to work for peace.

