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1994: International Year of the Family

In his annual World Day of Peace message, Pope John Paul II said the modern family needs help in facing the tragic consequences of war and worrisome patterns of social violence.



VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Here is the Vatican text of Pope John Paul II's statement, "The Family Creates the Peace of the Human Family," for World Peace Day, which was celebrated Jan. 1. The text, released at the Vatican Dec. 14, was dated Dec. 8. The papal theme was chosen to coincide with the U.N.-sponsored International Year of the Family in 1994.

1. The world longs for peace and has a desperate need of peace. Yet wars, conflicts, increasing violence and situations of social unrest and endemic poverty continue to reap innocent victims and to cause divisions between individuals and peoples. At times peace appears a truly unattainable goal! In a climate made cold by indifference and occasionally poisoned by hatred, how can one hope for the dawn of an era of peace, which only feelings of solidarity and of love can usher in?

We must not lose heart. We know that, in spite of everything, peace is possible, because it is part of the original divine plan.

God wished humanity to live in harmony and peace and laid the foundations for this in the very nature of the human being, created "in his image." The divine image develops not only in the individual but also in that unique communion of persons formed by a man and a woman so united in love that they become "one flesh" (Gn 2:24). It is written: "In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gn 1:27). This specific community of persons has been entrusted by the Lord with the mission of giving life and of nurturing it by the formation of a family. It thus makes a decisive contribution to the work of stewardship over creation and provides for the very future of humanity.

The initial harmony was disrupted by sin, but God's original plan continues. The family therefore remains the true foundation of society, (1) constituting, in the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, its "natural and fundamental nucleus." (2)

The contribution which the family can offer to preserving and promoting peace is so important that I would like, on the occasion of the International Year of the Family, to devote this World Day of Peace Message to a reflection on the close relationship between the family and peace. I am confident that this year will be a useful occasion for all who wish to contribute to the quest for true peace — churches, religious organizations, associations, governments, international agencies — to study together ways of helping the family to carry out fully its irreplaceable task as a builder of peace.

A community of life and love

2. The family, as the fundamental and essential educating community, is the privileged means for transmitting the religious and cultural val-

Pope says families need help facing the results of violence

ues which help the person to acquire his or her own identity. Founded on love and open to the gift of life, the family contains in itself the very future of society; its most special task is to contribute effectively to a future of peace.

This it will achieve, in the first place, through the mutual love of married couples, called to full and complete communion of life by marriage in its natural meaning and even more, if they are Christians, by its having been raised to a sacrament, and then through the efforts of parents to carry out properly their task as educators, committed to training their children to respect the dignity of every person and the values of peace. These values, more than being "taught," must be witnessed to in a family setting which lives out that self-giving love which is capable of accepting those who are different, making their needs and demands its own, and allowing them to share in its own benefits. The domestic virtues, based upon a profound respect for human life and dignity, and practiced in understanding, patience, mutual encouragement and forgiveness, enable the community of the family to live out the first and fundamental experience of peace. Outside this context of affectionate relationships and of fruitful mutual solidarity, the human being "remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, ... if he does not experience it and make it his own." (3) This love is not a fleeting emotion, but an intense and enduring moral force which seeks the good of others, even at the cost of self-sacrifice.

Furthermore, true love always goes together with justice, so necessary for peace. It reaches out to those experiencing hardship: those who have no family, children who lack guidance and affection, the lonely and the outcast.

The family which lives this love, even though imperfectly, and opens itself generously to the rest of society is the primary agent of a future of peace. A civilization of peace is not possible if love is lacking.

Victim of the lack of peace

3. In contrast with its original vocation of peace, the family is sadly, and not infrequently, seen to be the scene of tension and oppression, or the defenseless victim of the many forms of violence marking society today.

Tensions are sometimes seen in relations within the family. These are often due to the difficulty of efforts to harmonize family life when work keeps spouses far from each other, or the lack or uncertainty of employment causes them to worry about survival and to be haunted by uncertainty about the future. There are also tensions deriving from patterns of behavior inspired by hedonism and consumerism, which drive family members to seek personal gratification rather than a happy and fruitful life together. Frequent arguments between parents, the refusal to have children, and the abandonment and ill-treatment of minors are the sad symptoms that family peace is already seriously endangered; certainly it cannot be restored by

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