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Pope cites children's rights in peace message

EDITORS' NOTE: The following are selected excerpts from the Vatican text of Pope John Paul II's message for World Day of Peace, celebrated Jan. 1. The document was released at the Vatican Dec. 12.

At the end of 1994, the International Year of the Family, I wrote a letter to the children of the whole world, asking them to pray that humanity would increasingly become God's family, living in harmony and peace. I have frequently expressed my heartfelt concern for children who are victims of armed conflicts and other kinds of violence, and I have not failed to call these serious situations to the attention of world public opinion.

At the beginning of this new year, my thoughts turn once again to children and to their legitimate hope for love and peace. I feel bound to mention in a particular way children who are suffering and those who often grow to adulthood without ever having experienced peace. Children's faces should always be happy and trusting, but at times they are full of sadness and fear: How much have these children already seen and suffered in the course of their short lives!

Let us give children a future of peace!

This is the confident appeal which I make to men and women of good will, and I invite everyone to help children to grow up in an environment of authentic peace. This is their right, and it is our duty. ...

I pray that everywhere a harmonious relationship between adults and children will promote a climate of peace and authentic well-being. Sadly, many of the world's children are innocent victims of war. In recent years millions of them have been wounded or killed: a veritable slaughter ...

In addition to the children who have been killed, my thoughts also turn to those who have been maimed during or after these conflicts. I likewise think of young people who are systematically hunted down, raped or killed during so-called "ethnic cleansings." ...

Millions of children suffer from other kinds of violence present both in poverty-stricken and in developed societies. These kinds of violence are often less obvious, but they are no less terrible. ...

In some countries children are forced to work at a tender age and are often badly treated, harshly punished, and paid absurdly low wages. Because they have no

way of asserting their rights, they are the easiest to blackmail and exploit.

In other circumstances children are bought and sold, so that they can be used for begging or, even worse, forced into prostitution, as in the case of so-called "sex tourism." This utterly despicable trade degrades not only those who take part in it but also those who in any way promote it. ... Many children end up with the street as their only home. Having run away, or having been abandoned by their families, or never having known a family environment, these young people live by their wits and in a state of total neglect, and they are considered by many as refuse to be eliminated. ...

Many children are also compelled to endure the trauma caused by fighting between their parents or by the actual breakup of the family. Concern for the children's welfare does not prevent solutions which are often dictated by the selfishness and hypocrisy of adults. Behind an appearance of normality and peacefulness, masked even further by an abundance of material possessions, children are at times forced to grow up in dismal loneliness, without firm and loving guid-

ance and a suitable moral formation. Left to themselves, such children usually find their main contact with reality in television programs which often present unreal and immoral situations which they are still too young to assess properly.

It is no wonder if this kind of widespread and pernicious violence also has its effect on their young hearts, changing their natural enthusiasm into disillusionment or cynicism, and their instinctive goodness into indifference or selfishness. When young people chase after false ideals, they can experience bitterness and humiliation, hostility and hatred, absorbing the discontent and emptiness all around them. ...

It can hardly be hoped that children will one day be able to build a better world, unless there is a specific commitment to their education for peace. Children need to "learn peace": It is their right, and one which cannot be disregarded. ...

If children are properly helped and loved, they themselves can become peacemakers, builders of a world of fraternity and solidarity. With their enthusiasm and youthful idealism, young people can become "witnesses" and "teachers" of hope and peace to adults. Lest these possibilities be lost, children should be offered, in a way adapted to their individual needs, every opportunity for a balanced personal growth.

A peaceful childhood will enable boys and girls to face the future with confidence. Let no one stifle their joyful enthusiasm and hope! ...

Little children very soon learn about life. They watch and imitate the behavior of adults. They rapidly learn love and respect for others, but they also quickly absorb the poison of violence and hatred. Family experiences strongly condition the attitudes which children will assume as adults. Consequently, if the family is the place where children first encounter the world, the family must be for children the first school of peace. ...

It is above all in the home that, before ever a word is spoken, children should experience God's love in the love which surrounds them. In the family they learn that God wants peace and mutual understanding among all human beings, who are called to be one great family.

Besides the basic education provided by the family, children have a right to a specific training for peace at school and in other educational settings. These institutions have a duty to lead children gradually to understand the nature and demands of peace within their world and culture. Children need to learn the history of peace and not simply the history of victory and defeat in war. ...

Children are not a burden on society; they are not a means of profit or people without rights. Children are precious members of the human family, for they embody its hopes, its expectations and its potential. ...

To become like a little child — with complete trust in the Father and with the meekness taught by the Gospel — is not only an ethical imperative; it is a reason for hope. Even where the difficulties are so great as to lead to discouragement and the power of evil so overwhelming as to dishearten, those who can rediscover the simplicity of a child can begin to hope anew. This is possible above all for those who know they can trust in a God who desires harmony among all people in the peaceful communion of his kingdom. ...

It is therefore to men and women of good will that I address this confident appeal. Let us all unite to fight every kind of violence and to conquer war! Let us create the conditions which will ensure that children can receive as the legacy of our generation a more united and fraternal world!

Let us give children a future of peace!

Sponsor a child at a Catholic mission for just \$10 a month

This is Conchita. She lives in Guatemala in a one-room house with a tin roof, a dirt floor and no electricity. Only four years old, she must help her mother carry water for cooking and bathing. She gets very tired but finds little comfort on her stiff wooden bed with a straw mattress. Because her father earns only \$25 per month as a day laborer, there is no money for playthings, and even basic necessities are a luxury to her family of six.

But there is hope!

You can help one very poor child like Conchita through **Christian Foundation for Children and Aging (CFCA)**, a Catholic sponsorship program assisting needy children at Catholic mission sites around the world.

For as little as \$10 a month, only 33 cents a day, you can help a poor child receive nourishing food, medical care, the chance to go to school and hope for a brighter future. **You can literally change a life!**



Through CFCA, you can sponsor a child with the amount you can afford. Ordinarily it takes \$20 a month to provide a child with the life-changing benefits of sponsorship. But if this is not possible for you, we invite you to do what you can.

CFCA works hand-in-hand with dedicated, trusted Catholic missionaries and lay leaders who know their communities and labor tirelessly to improve conditions for needy children and their families. Your sponsorship dollars help them do the work Jesus has called us to do.

When you become a sponsor you receive a photo of your child, their personal family history, a description of the country where your child lives, and the CFCA newsletter. Your new friend will write you — and you may write them as often as you like. But most of all, you have the satisfaction of helping a child in need.

Please don't miss this opportunity to make a difference.

Sponsor a child today!

<p>CFCA Catholic Child Sponsorship</p>	<p>Yes, I'll help one child at a Catholic mission site:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Boy <input type="checkbox"/> Girl <input type="checkbox"/> Teenager <input type="checkbox"/> Boy/Girl in most need</p> <p>My monthly pledge is: <input type="checkbox"/> \$10 <input type="checkbox"/> \$15 <input type="checkbox"/> \$20 <input type="checkbox"/> \$25 <input type="checkbox"/> Other \$ _____</p> <p>I will contribute: <input type="checkbox"/> monthly <input type="checkbox"/> quarterly <input type="checkbox"/> semi-annually <input type="checkbox"/> annually</p> <p>Enclosed is my first contribution of \$ _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bill my first sponsorship payment to my credit card: CJ 1/96</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Credit Card No. _____</p> <p>Exp. Date _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I cannot sponsor now, but I enclose my gift of \$ _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Please send me more information about sponsorship</p> <p>FOUNDED AND DIRECTED BY CATHOLIC LAY PEOPLE</p>	<p>Name _____ (please print)</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>City/State/Zip _____</p> <p>Phone (____) _____</p> <p>Send to: Christian Foundation for Children and Aging (CFCA) c/o Catholic Courier 1150 Buffalo Rd. • Rochester, NY • 14624-1899 for more info., call Ray at (716) 329-4340</p> <p>Member: U.S. Catholic Mission Association, National Catholic Development Conference, Catholic Network of Volunteer Service, National Catholic Council for Hispanic Ministry.</p> <p><small>Financial report available on request/ Donations may be U.S. tax-deductible</small></p>
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