



POPE FRANCIS' 54th WORLD DAY OF PEACE MESSAGE - 1 JANUARY 2021

"A CULTURE OF CARE AS A PATH TO PEACE"

**Reflection by Sr Teresia Wamüyũ Wachira (IBVM)
Co-President of Pax Christi International**

Blessings, joy and peace, to you all this New Year 2021.

As we usher this New Year, we are aware of the uniqueness of 2020. Bishop Marc Stenger and I (co-presidents), Greet Vanaerschot and the team at the International Secretariat in Brussels, thank each one of you for your support in different ways, your commitment and service to the vulnerable among your families and neighbourhoods. We express our gratitude for your courage, care and compassion as you went about your lives and service despite the different forms of loss due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We feel with those of you who have lost loved ones, jobs and even property, as you try to cope with this 'new normal'. Equally, we express our gratitude to those in caring professions that have left all to "lay down their lives" for their brothers and sisters during this pandemic. Though we do not know what the future will bring, we are hopeful and live in faith that the Creator God who has walked humbly and lovingly with us will continue to protect us, our families, communities and our global world in the New Year 2021 and beyond.

I share this reflection on Pope Francis' 54th World Day of Peace message and invite each one of you to journey with me in internalizing and acting creatively on this profound message. The message is full of grace-filled, life-giving insights and hope and is challenging as well. It calls us to go beyond the Covid-19 reality, to the year 2021 and beyond.

In his earlier reflections on the World Days of Peace, and in the two Encyclicals '*Laudato Si'*' and '*Fratelli Tutti*', Pope Francis intertwines love and care of the environment and of humanity (called to be each other's keeper). In his 2021 World Day of Peace message '**A culture of care as a path to peace**', the Pope echoes this when he invites us once more to commit ourselves to care and compassion, by promoting each person's dignity, being in solidarity with the poor and vulnerable and working towards the common good and concern for the protection of creation. This has been an ongoing invitation for all of us due to the Covid-19 pandemic and climate change reality. Similarly, this global experience has kept us focused on the fact that we are all interconnected irrespective of our gender, creed, race, different affiliations, socio-economic and political status.

Furthermore, the Pope calls us to live and work for what really matters that is "*the value and dignity of every person, ... solidarity for the common good, and ... relief to those suffering from poverty, disease, slavery, armed conflicts, and discrimination.*" Pope Francis further challenges us to "*become a prophetic witness of a culture of care, working to overcome the many existing social inequalities*" and cautions that this "*can only come about through a widespread and meaningful involvement on*



the part of women, in the family and in every social, political and institutional sphere." This is food for thought for all of us as we usher in the New Year 2021.

The initial questions we may need to ask ourselves are: What will be different in 2021 in the way we engage with each other (women and men, youth and children), our communities, our neighbours, and the global world? What do we need to do to open our hearts, our homes and our borders to the "vulnerable" that reach out to us each day, challenging us to act in response to their cry of vulnerability? How can our hearts be converted and our ways of thinking changed, in order to work for true peace in solidarity with one another and our Mother earth?

Caring for each other goes beyond words and reflections. It is about adopting a 'new culture' that calls us beyond ourselves towards selfless love as Mother Teresa of Calcutta articulated it "loving until it hurts". Jesus' own life and mission was characterised by love, care, compassion, respect for each one's dignity; a love that led to the self-emptying on the cross. Through Jesus' example we learn to be our sister and brother's keeper, to be the 'Good Samaritan' (Luke 10:34-35) who binds and heals the wounds of those suffering from different vulnerabilities and who binds and heals the wounds of our Mother Earth, devastated by lack of care.

Pope Francis also invites us to think creatively and act on the vast amounts of resources that are spent to fund weaponry, especially nuclear weapons, and other weaponry such explosives, artillery and small arms causing loss of lives, widespread displacements and curtailment of different freedoms. He calls for these resources to be used to ensure the safety of individuals, the promotion of peace and integral human development, the fight against poverty, and the provision of health care. He calls on the creation of a "global fund" that would be utilised to eliminate hunger and contribute to the development of the poorest countries. Furthermore, he reminds us that the promotion of a culture of care calls for a process of education.

As we engage in a theological reflection on these profound calls from Pope Francis, let us embrace his call to take the compass in hand and "become a prophetic witness of the culture of care". In order to do this, it is important to recap his insights and concerns, contained in both his Encyclicals and World Day of Peace messages, that we have referred to earlier in this reflection, where he has invited us to respect and protect both the human persons and environment, thus setting the compass in the right direction. He reminds us that we are called to articulate and exemplify what it is to care by following in Jesus' own footsteps (Lk 10:37). Jesus fulfilled the mission for which he was sent, to redeem all human persons; he healed the broken hearted, gave sight to the blind, set prisoners free and proclaimed God's year of favour to all (Luke: 4:18). He therefore taught us what it is to care and to act nonviolently. Yet, as reminded by Pope Francis, there is a tendency today for humanity to adopt a '*culture of indifference, waste and confrontation*' and equally engage in a culture of violence; such a culture only brings destruction and death of God's creation.

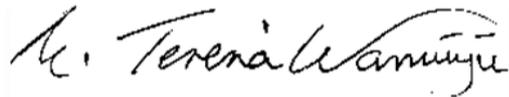
Pope Francis has a special message for all peacemakers, thus for us too, members of Pax Christi International, that we are called to "become prophetic witnesses of a culture of care". The invitation for all of us in 2021 is to renew our commitment once more to advocate, defend and promote the fundamental human rights of each person, heal the broken hearted, restore sight to those who suffer different forms of blindness and injustices, to set prisoners free from the different chains of exclusion, lukewarmness, insecurity, racism, xenophobia, and to responsibly 'till' and be custodians of our Mother Earth. We also encompass Pope Francis' call to speak and act against kingdoms of

weapons of mass destruction and all forms of arms and artillery (in this we draw special attention to small arms and light weapons) which are weapons of choice fueling the intractable conflicts in especially the Africa continent. In our following of the nonviolent Jesus, we are called and missioned to challenge structures and actions that are violent and not compatible with 'a culture of care' and thus cannot be a 'path to peace'. As Pope Francis succinctly points out, *'peace and violence cannot dwell together'*.

In conclusion, inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit we move in hope to serve and ignite the world anew this New Year 2021. May we continue to nurture 'a culture of care as a path to peace' in our homes, communities and the environment. Invoking Mary, Mother of God and our "Our Lady, Star of the Sea and Mother of Hope", we ask her to protect and journey with us as we strive to become prophetic witnesses of "a culture of care".

May 2021 be a time of blessings, family bonding, healing and care for each other. May the peace of Emmanuel-God-With-Us bring renewed hope for you, your families and friends.

"Jesus came that all may have life and have it more abundantly." (John: 10:10)

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sr. Teresia Wamũyũ Wachira". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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