

Catholic social teaching on peace and conflict

Teacher's notes

Starter

Give each pupil one of the thirty quotations from scripture and Catholic Social Teaching, according to ability (lower numbers are simpler).

Give pupils a few minutes to read through and ask for definitions of any unknown words. Pupils then have a few minutes to rewrite the quotation in their own words and think about how it relates to peace-making.

Next, each explains his or her quotation to another pupil, then they swap quotations. These two pupils find another two; all four explain their new quotations to each other.

Each foursome chooses what it considers the most important quotation for peace building, giving their reasons. Foursomes feed back to the whole class.

Record answers on the board. Identify points that illustrate the Church's teaching on why peace-making is essential and what it should look like.

Main session

Explain that projects backed by CAFOD are building peace in multiple conflict situations. Poverty and conflict are closely linked, so CAFOD works in many countries where there is war or violence.

Three inspiring examples are given in the case studies.

Give each group of pupils the conflict situation report of one case study. Groups discuss the causes of the conflict, how they would feel if they were in this situation and what they could do to build peace

Give out the second half of the case study. Pupils read and discuss the questions.

How can we help build peace?

Ask pupils to feed back or write answers to the following questions:

- What steps have been taken to build peace?
- Was there a special role played by the Catholic Church or another faith?
- What scripture or CST is reflected here?

Repeat with other case studies as time allows.

Plenary

Pupils explain how CAFOD's peace-building work reflects scripture and Catholic teaching. They can refer back to the quotations.

Suggestions might include:

- The project workers are committed to peace: Q11: "Blessed are the peacemakers".
- People even risk their lives to build peace and tragically, some are killed. Q18: "we too must shoulder that cross".
- People of various faiths are working together. Q21: "This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves".
- People on different sides are encouraged to talk to each other and be reconciled. Q26: "first be reconciled".
- CAFOD works to relieve the poverty and injustice that can lead to conflict. Q4: "to fight poverty is to build peace".
- Local people who are most affected are involved in decision-making. Q17: "The voice of the peoples affected must be heard".
- CAFOD's work is supported by the prayer of Catholics in England and Wales.

Extension activities

South Sudan: watch the video from The Jesuit Review on YouTube: "Pope Francis kisses the feet of South Sudan leaders". How do you think his action shows the Christian understanding of peace? Read "Prayer for the people of South Sudan" on our website.

Colombia: find more stories from Magdalena Medio on our website. How does violence affect young people in our own country? Read our Colombia prayer "Make us builders of peace".

Myanmar: find out more about the religious and ethnic divides that separate people here. How can a country with many different groups live peacefully and promote the common good?

1. "All Christians are urgently summoned... to join with all true peacemakers in pleading for peace and bringing it about."

Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 78

2. "No one can cultivate a sober and satisfying life without being at peace with him or herself."

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 225

3. "Peace is the fruit of love, which goes beyond what justice can provide."

Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 78

4. "The truth... cannot be refuted: 'to fight poverty is to build peace.'"

Pope Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace 2009

5. Excessive economic, social and cultural inequalities among peoples arouse tensions and conflicts, and are a danger to peace.

Saint Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 76

6. "Interreligious dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world, and so it is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities."

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 250

7. "In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things... making peace by the blood of his cross."

Colossians 1:19-20

8. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Matthew 6:12

9. "'Lord, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' ...'I tell you, seventy-seven times.'"

Matthew 18:21-22

10. "We are called to be instruments of God our Father, so that our planet might be what he desired when he created it and correspond with his plan for peace, beauty and fullness."

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 53

11. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

Matthew 5:9

12. "A child has been born for us... and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Isaiah 9:6

13. "We are called to identify the causes of violence, injustice and warfare and challenge the systems and structures that sustain and maintain them."

Saint Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 98

14. "When nature is viewed solely as a source of profit... resources end up in the hands of...the most powerful... Completely at odds with this model are the ideals of... justice, fraternity and peace as proposed by Jesus."

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 82

15. "Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Matthew 6:10

16. "For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us."

Ephesians 2:14

17. "The voice of the peoples affected must be heard and their situation must be taken into consideration, if their expectations are to be correctly interpreted."

Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 72

24. "When people witness the denial of their elementary rights, such as the right to food, water, health care or employment, they are tempted to obtain them by force."

Pope Francis, *World Day of Peace 2015*

18. "(Jesus) taught us by example that we too must shoulder that cross which the world and the flesh inflict upon those who search after peace and justice."

Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 38

25. "Various subcultures exist side by side, and often practise segregation and violence. The Church is called to be at the service of a difficult dialogue."

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 74

19. "Peace is not merely the absence of war. Instead, it is rightly... called an enterprise of justice."

Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 78

26. "...if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister."

Matthew 5:23-24

20. "Peace, justice and the preservation of creation are three absolutely interconnected themes."

Pope Francis, quoting the Conference of Dominican Bishops, *Laudato Si'*, 92

27. "A firm determination to respect other [people] and their dignity, as well as the studied practice of brotherhood are absolutely necessary for the establishment of peace."

Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 78

21. "The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity."

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 201

28. "The common good calls for social peace... which cannot be achieved without particular concern for *distributive justice*; whenever this is violated, violence always ensues." Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 157

Distributive justice = justice for each and all

22. "Prayer, as a means of drawing ever new strength from Christ, is concretely and urgently needed. People who pray are not wasting their time, even though the situation appears desperate and seems to call for action alone."

Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 36

29. "Injustice, excessive economic or social inequalities, envy, distrust, and pride... constantly threaten peace and cause wars. Everything done to overcome these disorders contributes to building up peace and avoiding war."

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2317

23. "If a mistaken understanding of our own principles has at times led us... to engage in war, injustice and acts of violence... by so doing we were not faithful to the treasures wisdom which we have been called to protect and preserve."

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 200

30. "Excessive economic and social differences between the members of the one human family or population groups cause scandal, and *militate against* social justice, equity, the dignity of the human person, as well as social and international peace." Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 29

Militate against = make it less likely to happen

South Sudan

Why did Pope Francis kiss the feet of South Sudan's warring leaders?

Conflict situation report

South Sudan is the world's newest state, founded in 2011 after decades of conflict between the north and south of Sudan.

The creation of this new country at first brought hope. It has the river Nile, fertile earth and oil. Its people should be able to thrive.

Yet since 2013 there has been violence, mainly between two ethnic groups: the dominant Dinka led by President Salva Kiir, and the minority Nuer led by Riek Machar. They have been fighting for control of the country, its oil reserves and its best pastureland. Mostly they are rivals, occasionally they have peace deals and share power.

The cost of war

Civilians have paid the price for the brutal war. The UN estimates 19,000 children have been forced into service by armed groups. Nearly half the population depends on aid. South Sudan ranked last on the 2019 UN World Happiness Report.



"The civil war has killed more than 400,000 people, ruined the economy, driven four million people from their homes and disrupted the education of generations," explains Fr. James Oyet. He works in the South Sudan Council of Churches, who cooperate to promote peace in their different communities.

The Church's path to peace

Photo: Christian Aid



"We are working with **war-torn** communities on **peace-building** and **reconciliation.**"

The Catholic Church in South Sudan is trusted by people on all sides of the conflict. This gives it a special peace-building role, supported by agencies like CAFOD and our sister agency Trócaire.

The different Christian Churches have an "Action Plan for Peace," as Fr. James Oyet says. Leaders like him set up face-to-face meetings between the warring sides in safe settings, so they can talk to each other and try to find a way forward.

Local people are also being trained in trauma healing, to help their communities deal with the emotional impact of the terrible years of conflict.

"My hope is the last thing to die," says Fr. James. "With international support we can turn a 'bad deal' – death and destruction – into a good one, where there is peace and reconstruction."

Pope Francis kneels

Pope Francis invited President Salva Kiir and other opposition leaders to the Vatican in April 2019 for a retreat. An uneasy ceasefire had been in place since the previous September.

The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland helped lead this meeting, showing how Christians are joining to work for reconciliation in the wounded country.

In the Vatican, people who had fought one another prayed together instead. Pope Francis said: "I am asking you as a brother to stay in peace. I am asking you from my heart, let us go forward."

Dramatically, he then knelt and kissed the feet of the opposing leaders. Salva Kiir, later said that he "trembled" as Pope Francis knelt before him. Many in the room wept.

The latest peace deal

A few months later in February 2020, a unity government was formed, bringing together rival leaders. "How can we not bring peace if the Pope pushes us to do so?" said the different sides.

However, the political future of the country is still very fragile. As Fr. James says: "Ink on paper is not enough. There needs to be change at the grassroots level."

Myanmar

How can young people change hearts and minds in the midst of war?

Conflict situation report

Myanmar, also known as Burma, is rich in natural resources but is one of the world's poorest countries, due to decades of violence, corruption and military rule. Although there has been a civilian government since 2015, the army is still very powerful.

Ever since independence from Britain in 1948 there has been civil war in Myanmar. More than 135 ethnic groups are governed by the Burman majority. The failure to grant political and human rights to these minorities causes tension and violence.

A dozen armed ethnic groups are fighting the military for the right to govern themselves, and for control of resources. There is conflict and ecological damage linked to the trafficking of drugs, timber, gems and precious metals. Violence and poverty leave young people with very few positive choices in their lives.

In 2017 a campaign of violence led to over 700,000 Rohingya Muslim people fleeing the country in fear of their lives. This minority population are widely discriminated against by Buddhist nationalists. In a crackdown by the army, they were driven out of their homes and thousands were killed. Most fled across the border into Bangladesh where they live as refugees, dependent on aid from international organisations like CAFOD.



Young people against violence

Against this backdrop, many young people in Myanmar find themselves trapped in a culture of violence and tension between different cultures and religions. Yet some are determined to make positive changes in their communities.

Nan Ngurn Hom, 23, lives in northern Shan State, a conflict zone. A Buddhist, she is in a group that gets young people from different faiths and backgrounds to meet and talk, while creating eco projects like mud houses or recycling.

Working together on something they all care about, young Buddhists, Christians and Muslims discover that they are not enemies after all. This way they can become leaders for change, taking new attitudes back to their communities.

"It gives us a feeling of hope," they say. "It brings a realisation that we are not alone and there are others who feel, think and act from the same ethics and values as us."



Photo: Freeland

The way forward

"Ethnic or religious divides needn't be an obstacle when we work together for a just and equal society," says Julian of our CAFOD team in Myanmar. "Issues like climate change affect all of us, whatever our background. Our peace-building work with young people shows that we are stronger if we act together to transform our communities and society for the better."

The Catholic Church in Myanmar is urging peace and reconciliation to end the civil war, asking the government to find a political rather than a military solution. In other words: talking not fighting.

Conflict situation report

Colombia has been torn apart by an internal conflict lasting over 50 years. More than 280,000 people have been killed in the fighting between the army, guerrillas, paramilitary groups and criminal gangs. The conflict is complex, but it grew out of inequality and a struggle for land. Poorer people had no voice in society.

In recent years, the violence has been fuelled by drug trafficking and illegal gold mining amongst other issues. Sadly, violence has become normalised, not only on a political level but in daily life, between neighbours, families, even school pupils.

Peace of a kind

In 2016 the government signed a peace deal with a major guerrilla group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Fighters handed in weapons in return for a peace agreement that promises to look at root causes of the conflict such as poverty and injustice. However, talks with another armed group, the National Liberation Army (ELN), have stalled.

The poorest are worst hit, especially rural people. There are over 7.8 million internally displaced people in Colombia, the highest number in the world. Those who stand up for the poor and for the peace process are targeted: tragically, over 400 human rights activists and community leaders have been killed in Colombia just since 2016. CAFOD works to defend social leaders in their dangerous struggles.



The role of the Church

Catholicism is Colombia's main religion, and the Church promotes peace and human rights in many ways. It enabled victims to participate in the 2016 peace deal and checks whether the agreement is being respected. Very importantly, it works to try and get truth, justice and reparation for victims of the conflict, to help them deal with the pain of the past. "Truth is an inseparable companion of justice and mercy," said Pope Francis on a visit to Colombia in 2017. "Truth should not lead to revenge, but rather to reconciliation and forgiveness."

Young peacemakers

Fernando, 17, is from Magdalena Medio in northern Colombia. Here three generations have known little else but fear and violence. Armed groups continue to recruit young people in the area for their operations.

"I see conflict on a daily basis," says Fernando, who has a special role resolving disputes between pupils at his school. He believes peace must start with ourselves. "Along with my friends and other young people, I can bring a message of peace to everyone I meet.... if you have been hurt or damaged, you have to learn to forgive."

Local experts funded by CAFOD work in 34 secondary schools and four local organisations in Magdalena Medio. The aim is to change the attitudes and behaviour of young people, their teachers, parents and families, and in this way build more peaceful and tolerant communities.

"As young people we have a responsibility towards our country," says Rosana, one of the young leaders. "We can choose to make a difference and are ready to give it our all. I am part of the peace generation."



Photo: Louise Norton