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World Day of Peace Message

Pope John Paul II, in his long pontificate and his countless visits to countries around the world, has a worldwide vision for all of humanity. He is not tied to a particular country, nationality or ethnic group. When he speaks he does so with a spiritual vision to a world beset by national self-interests, rivalry and competition. His message for the World Day of Peace, as we begin the new millennium, is a prophetic call to view our world as one, made up of the universal human family of different cultures and peoples. His message is entitled "Dialogue Between Cultures for a Civilization of Love and Peace."

Although the peoples of the world have different religious beliefs, what they have in common is a consciousness of a relationship with one God who is the common Father of all. Our Holy Father has declared this year, 2001, as an International Year of Dialogue among civilizations. For the pope, thick clouds overshadow bright hopes. Humanity begins a new chapter in world history with open wounds from bitter and bloody conflicts. People of different cultures need to learn to live in harmony side by side on this planet we call Mother Earth. The people of our world must look to a future that can be assured through dialogue between cultures and traditions as the path for building a reconciled world.

Because of advanced technology and the means of instant communication globally, our world, in a sense, has shrunk dramatically. Events in one part of the world are seen in a matter of minutes throughout the world community. The need for a sense of globalization or a worldview is essential if civilizations are to live in love and in peace.

Around the world we find a complexity and diversity of human cultures. Culture is hard to define of itself. How would one define the American culture, which is certainly distinct from that of our neighbors to the north and the south? Culture is like the air we breathe, the environment in which people live. Culture is the self-expression of a particular group of people fashioned by geographical, historical and ethnic elements. Each culture has a face of its

own, its own personality, its own way of doing things, its distinct way of life. People have a sense of belonging to a particular group, a sense of nationality. Love of country is a virtue as long as it does not foster a narrow-mindedness or an isolationism but manifests a love and respect for the whole human family. Cultural diversity is a good to be promoted and preserved as long as it is seen through the eyes of the unity of the human race. Pope John Paul II emphasizes the need to promote human dignity of all peoples rather than a radicalization of one's identity at the expense of others or the slavish conformity to one's culture which creates hostile and racist ways of thinking and acting. A culture which no longer has a point of reference in God loses its soul, according to our Holy Father, and loses its way from becoming a culture of life to a culture of death.

Dialogue and mutual acceptance between cultures is the way to build a civilization of love and peace. Dialogue brings about communion within the human family. Dialogue recognizes diversity and leads to mutual acceptance and genuine collaboration. Dialogue is not a call to dull uniformity or forced assimilation but a means to discover the richness of the other. This certainly has been the experience in our diocese with the sponsorship of refugees and immigrants from other countries who have so greatly enriched and broadened the horizons of our diocesan family. The same is true in the twinning of our parishes with parishes and people of Haiti. We have automatically extended our horizons and have become so greatly enriched in the process.

In the absence of dialogue we find a world of excessive conflict and violence, a world of itself incapable of seeing signs of hope and peace. Every day we read or see incidents of human atrocities, most often against the weakest and most vulnerable of society. The gap between rich and poor nations continues to grow while so many lack the basic necessities of life. Pope John Paul II again expresses concern over the alarming increase in arms which become not agents of peace but of conflict and death. He expresses concern over the halting commitment to nuclear non-proliferation. He addresses the pro-life issues and decries abortion, euthanasia, irresponsible genetic engineering and capital punishment.

How important it is if we are to be a civilization of love and peace for people to have a lively sense of the value of life itself. Through dialogue and respect for diversity we come to recognize those values which are common in all cultures. Through a sense of solidarity and interdependence we become willing to promote the common destiny of the entire human family. We have, in turn, the foresight to equate peace with the promotion of justice. We become willing not just to share from our surplus but to help the marginalized to enter into the sphere of economic and human development.

Pope John Paul II challenges us who claim to be followers of Jesus who identified with the human race to be missionaries of forgiveness and reconciliation. As we begin a new millennium let us heed his call for a new humanity.

I wish and pray for all members of our diocesan family, which goes beyond those of the household of the faith, a blessed and grace-filled new year.

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