

Prayer of St. Francis - The new Respect Life theme for the coming year
“Make me an instrument of your peace”

The unfolding of a new year marks a time of new beginnings and reflection. It also presents an opportunity to take a fresh perspective on the many ways Catholic social teaching supports a broad vision for respecting life – both through acts of charity and acts of justice. During 2012 the Social Justice Committee will explore the significant respect life themes embedded in the Prayer of St. Francis. This well-known prayer calls us to live our faith through action. It challenges us to become instruments of peace – to seek justice and create change.

Catholic social teaching is based on (and inseparable from) our understanding of human life and human dignity. We believe each person is created in the image of God and redeemed by Christ. As a result, every person has inherent dignity and a right to life consistent with that dignity. Moreover, the person is not only sacred but social. How we organize our society – in economics and politics, in law and policy – directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. We believe people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially those at the margins.

In his encyclicals Pope Benedict XVI highlights how acts of charity and justice allow us to more fully love each other and ensure that human life and dignity are respected in ways that contribute to the creation of the City of God. Although the Prayer of St. Francis incorporates elements of charity, the monthly reflections throughout the year will emphasize its call to transform our social, political and economic systems. As the prayer suggests, this call to action will challenge us to step outside our comfort zones, interact respectfully across our differences, and see the complexity of our individual and collective stories.

In becoming instruments of peace, we seek to create inclusive conversations and community spaces that affirm everyone’s dignity and **equal** participation in society. Seeking justice in this way also affirms our relationship with God. “Our commitment to the Catholic social mission must be rooted in and strengthened by our spiritual lives. In our relationship with God we experience the conversion of heart that is necessary to truly love one another as God has loved us” (U.S. Catholic Bishops). As we reflect on the Prayer of St. Francis this year, may we experience a conversion of heart and grow in our ability to love and create change.

Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,

grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.