

World Peace: *a family recipe!*



The heart of each child and of each parent is the privileged centre where the seed of universal peace can take root and grow in family life, parish life, the country and the world. For how can we be instruments of peace if it is not first found in our own heart?

A gift and a mission

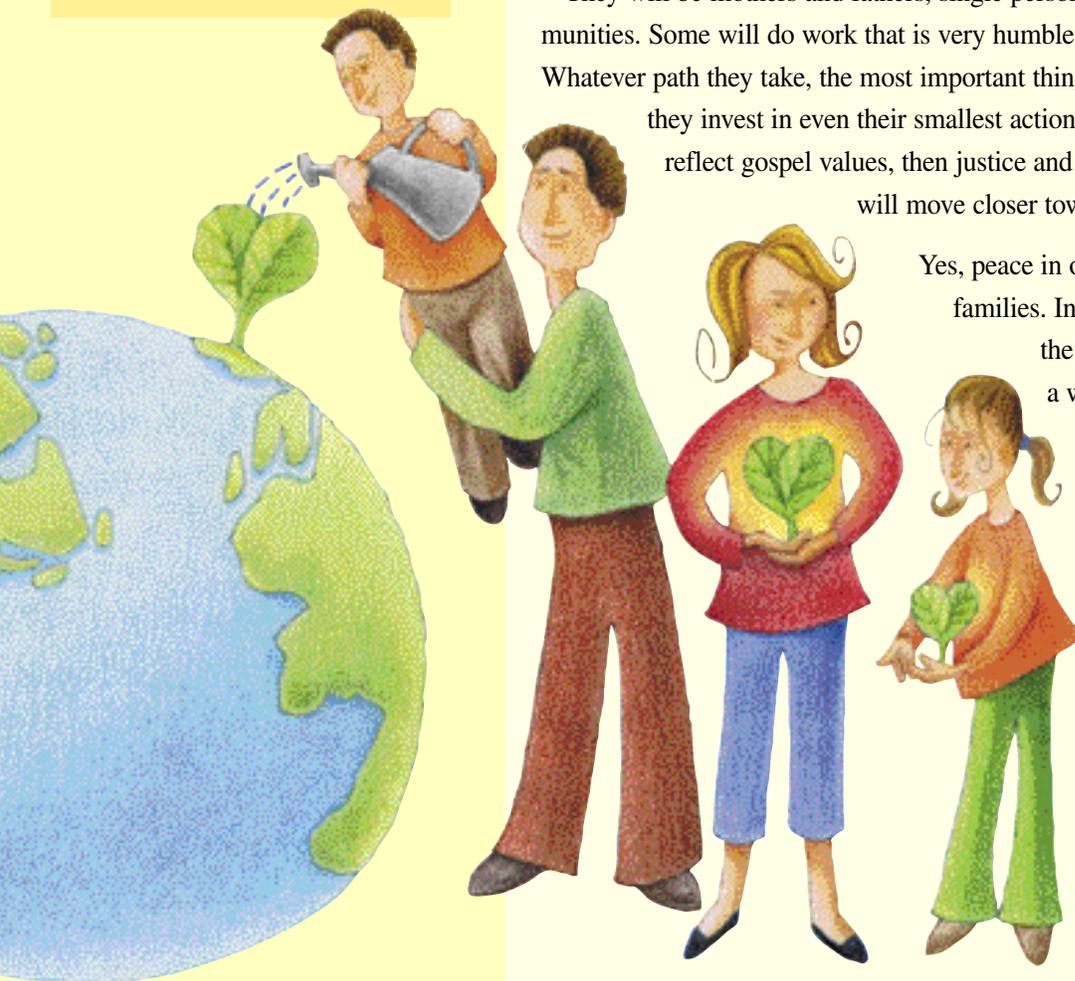
Peace: is it an illusion, a dream or a utopian vision? *“To everyone I affirm that peace is possible. It needs to be implored from God as his gift, but it also needs to be built day by day with his help, through works of justice and love,”* said Pope John Paul II.¹ For its part, the United Nations proclaimed in 2001 an International decade for a culture of peace and non-violence for the children of the world.

Peace is a mission that has been entrusted to all families, where the citizens of the world are born and raised. To these young people who will be tomorrow’s social, political, economic, media and religious leaders. To these boys and girls who represent our future; they will soon become involved in guiding and transforming all of society in the image of the values they have received from their parents.

They will be mothers and fathers, single persons, priests or members of religious communities. Some will do work that is very humble, while others will assume leadership. Whatever path they take, the most important thing is their desire to serve and the love they invest in even their smallest actions. If their choices, decisions or gestures reflect gospel values, then justice and solidarity will increase and our world will move closer towards a long-awaited peace.

Yes, peace in our world begins at the heart of our families. In raising our children, we can transform the world! What a responsibility and what a wonderful adventure! For us believers, building peace is also an invitation to cooperate with God, for God’s greatest dream – *“that all may be one”* – is inextricably tied to peace. A peace based on truth, freedom, justice and love.

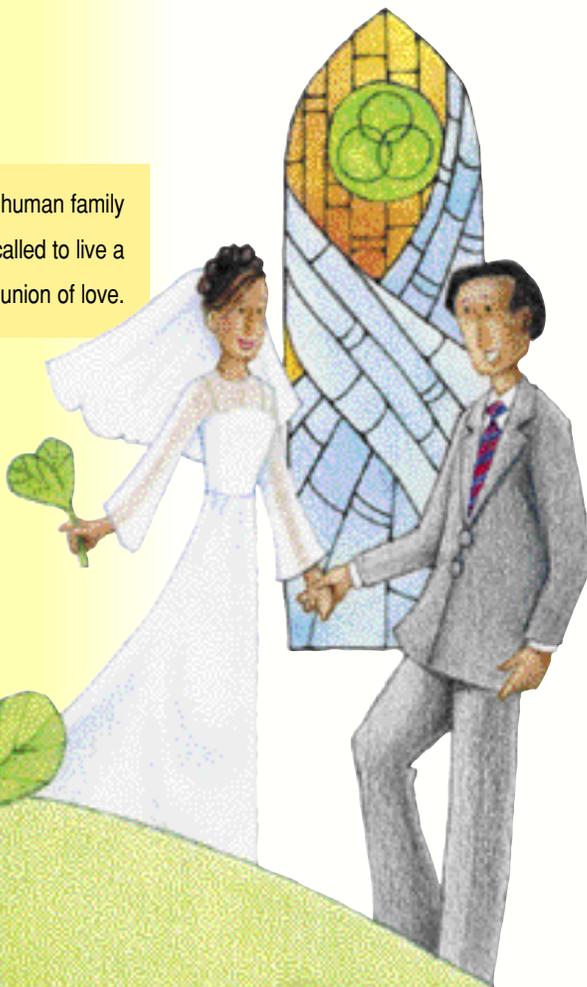
Deep and lasting peace is a gift – a gift from the Risen Christ who, on the cross, defeated everything that destroys people, families and societies:



“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give it to you as the world gives” (John 14:27). This peace, which is so actively sought by the international community and which is the only one that can satisfy the human heart, is rooted in love, forgiveness and reconciliation.

This kind of peace has nothing to do with the egotistical “Give me a moment’s peace!” Indeed, it means allowing ourselves to be interrupted. It calls for courage and boldness, for we must cry out, rattle people’s indifference, stand with the poor and the oppressed, even if that means being misunderstood, judged and ridiculed.

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The Source of peace

Each human family is called to live a communion of love. The man and woman who decide to build their family on the sacrament of marriage in order to bring about this community of love have an unheard-of opportunity: to be three in a covenant of love! The God of peace, the Almighty, joins in their commitment to each other to guarantee the couple and their family a renewable supply of love. This love is far greater than that of the couple on its own, and is essential at the critical points of their marriage.

Therefore, it is in the family that young people learn to desire and to build unity, despite the inevitable conflicts – large and small – of daily life. The heart of each child and of each parent is the privileged centre where the seed of universal peace can take root and grow in family life, parish life, the country and the world. For how can we be instruments of peace if it is not first found in our own heart?

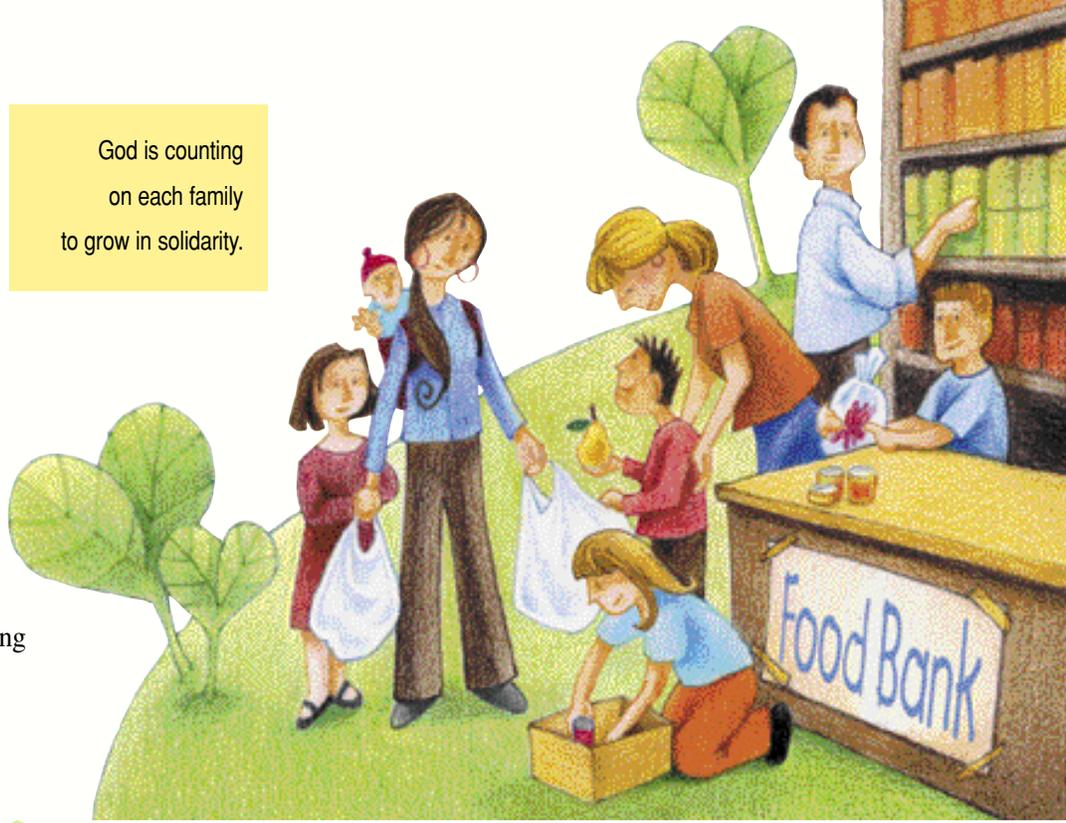
Whatever the circumstances of our personal or family life, the source of this inner peace remains the same: *“I am a child of God and God loves me to the point where God gives up his life for me.”* Once we are anchored in this truth, we will fear nothing.

Jesus – God who became human to tell us the truth about our humanity – has given us nothing less than the secret for living in peace. To welcome and to imitate Christ, the Prince of Peace, in the intimacy of our families is to open ourselves up to God’s justice. In doing so we must make our will, our perspective, our actions, our desires and our dreams like God’s. We follow the directions God has written in our hearts to lead us to happiness.

Teaching our children to love Jesus, to recognize Him in each person they meet and especially in victims of injustice means gently awakening their thirst for justice and solidarity towards all humans, who are their brothers and sisters in God. It means sharpening their desire to share the bread, the knowledge and the truth that is everyone’s due.

Since solidarity is the new name for peace, we need to globalize it! God is counting on each family to grow in solidarity. Families do this by giving each member the attention, affection and education they are entitled to by right. Families also do this by opening themselves to the needs and expectations of the millions of women and men who are victims of dehumanizing poverty. They deserve to be treated and respected according to their dignity as children of God.

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Peace begins at home

As the primary educators of their children, parents help their children become sowers of peace and joy when they teach them how to exercise their conscience for a truly responsible freedom. Parents succeed in this work when they trust in the human and divine potential of their children, encouraging and congratulating them, but also correcting them discreetly and delicately each time it is necessary. To make the world more just, we must first ensure that those who make up that world are more just.

In a society that is polarized over individual rights, young people need to discover their obligations as individuals. Young people are particularly sensitive to the values of justice, non-violence and peace. Their hearts are wide open to fraternity, friendship and solidarity. Adults must seize upon young people's idealism and their passion for peace to talk to them about God's dream and to teach them ways to live it in their daily lives. God needs them!

Since peace begins at home, all family members share in the responsibility for achieving it. In the couple and in the family, certain attitudes and good habits are needed to build peace. The example of parents is key, especially if their children are

to discover, in seeing how their parents live, that happiness is found in giving one's life to serve others.

What if there is conflict sometimes? This provides an opportunity to generously practise understanding, tolerance, forgiveness and reconciliation. Much inner strength is required to recognize our weaknesses and to try to improve. We must remember that there is a solution to every misunderstanding.

It goes without saying that the art of communication is essential in all of the situations that couples and families face: knowing how to express our feelings and ideas without attacking the other; showing tenderness, affection and gratitude; recognizing problems without attributing blame; asking for further explanation; accepting responsibility even if we have injured someone unwittingly; deciding to avoid any behaviour that can injure someone else; and becoming instruments of reconciliation.

Imagine parents who sit down every night across from each other and review the day with the firm intention of never going to bed angry... Imagine a parent and a child who, before dealing with a delicate issue or expressing their dissatisfaction, take the time to tell each other that this does not change in any way the fact that they love each other... Imagine a family that prays for the grace of peace...

God's gifts for peace

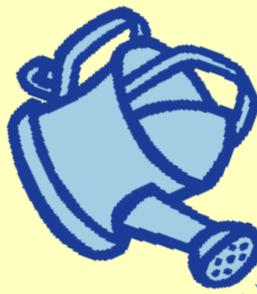
Through their baptism, members of the Christian family have received a sacred calling: to live as Christ did! Living this way is more than we can do on our own, but it is the only way to build the unity that brings forth peace – a mission that has been entrusted to all of God's children.

Wanting to remain with us after his Resurrection, Jesus took care before he died to leave us concrete signs that would remind us of his love and that would make him truly present to us through the journey of life. These expressions of God's love are the sacraments, including the Eucharist, the greatest sacrament, and Reconciliation. These are the sacraments of everyday life, the source of a *supernatural* strength that gives us the ability to love the way Christ did. In these sacraments, we are freely offered the strength and the grace that allow us to love more fully, to be in tune with God's loving plan and to live in greater communion with God and others in order to build peace and achieve lasting happiness. What a treasure for a Christian family!

A forgiveness that heals

No one is perfect: parents know this by looking at their children; children know it by looking at their parents! Sometimes we exchange hurtful words or gestures. Forgiveness is the only way to restore peace within a family. In these moments, it is easy to say, "What do you want? That's the way I am! Sorry." The better path is to try to overcome our faults.

God has given all human beings the ability to love in order to direct our relationships with God and with others. When we lack love, we build walls between us and God and between



Seeds for peace

Peace is not a matter of chance, but the fruit of belief and effort. Many qualities serve the cause of peace. Here are some of the most important peace-building seeds that we must pass on from generation to generation if we want the world to know lasting peace...

Respect for life at all of its stages, and respect for the dignity of each person; respect for the property, the differences and the fundamental rights of others; the search for common values and goals; the rejection of prejudice; honesty.

Humility can be shown in many ways: recognizing our strengths and weaknesses, admitting our mistakes and asking for forgiveness; developing the desire to improve ourselves and having the courage to correct our mistakes; avoiding sarcasm or showing off; not judging or condemning, to mention a few.

Self-control allows us to master our spontaneous reactions, to curtail our whims and to wait before speaking; to correct without getting angry; to avoid criticizing; to make choices that respect life and the dignity of all people, including ourselves, by avoiding, for example, pornographic or violent films and reading material.

Patience and tolerance lead us to bear without complaint the suffering, difficulties and vexations that are part of life and to accept others as they are, to understand them, to bear with them, to be lenient and to forgive.

Inner strength gives us the ability to face life's difficulties with perseverance; to think beyond ourselves and give freely to others; to overcome impatience; to nurture a spirit of service and sacrifice; and to seek to do good.

Generosity leads us to use our strengths and talents in the service of others and of the common good; to share our time and material possessions, especially with the most vulnerable (the poor, the sick and the elderly); to avoid excluding others, even within our family; to find the positive qualities in another person; to think and say good things about others; and to forgive.

Goodness and kindness consist of gentleness, of a warm and unconditional welcoming attitude; of attention to others and attentive listening; of an openness to dialogue, to understanding and to compassion; of many little selfless acts; of timely words to encourage reconciliation; of a concern for the welfare of others, seeing them as God sees them.

Joy is a result of shared love, and is present even in the midst of suffering. It manifests itself through optimism, humour and a smiling face. God knows the power of a smile!

Justice leads us to fight against inequality and poverty, and for the common good; to seek the good of others as if it were our own; to call for the equal distribution of the earth's resources; to support organizations such as Development and Peace and Amnesty International, which work for equitable development and human rights.

Prayer within a family initiates children in the adoration of God, who loves them so much; they learn to praise God, to thank God, to ask God's forgiveness, to count on God, and to call upon God throughout their day. Prayer awakens in children a desire to be like Jesus, the Prince of Peace.



us and others. This also wounds our own soul... *“Truly I tell you,”* Jesus says, *“just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me”* (Matthew 25:40).

The path to peace is found through reconciliation, which is what Christ offers us in the sacrament of Reconciliation. This sacrament is a privileged encounter, a personal meeting with God where we experience God’s love, and trust in *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”*. During this sacrament we experience inner healing. The Risen Christ wipes away our lack of love and replaces it with divine energy.

In the sacrament of Reconciliation, Christ tells us: *“I love you and I forgive you. Do not be upset. I will help you continue on the path of love. You can count on me. I have faith in you!”* This is how God chooses to go beyond our lack of love to give us a surplus of love. God forgives us freely and renews the connection between us.

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Marital life and family life blossom into a fullness when each one of us incorporates in our daily life these strengths that are beyond human capabilities. We can then forgive each other, trust each other and share words that are freeing and life-giving.

Some relationships may seem irretrievably broken, and some situations may seem impossible to fix. In such cases it is best to commend them to God, trusting that His healing grace may work through someone other than us, even in a different time and place.

In communion with the Body of Christ

Another wonderful expression of God’s love awaits our families every day: the Eucharist. This sacrament aims to unite all people in Christ. The Eucharist is not merely about remembering a past event, but about the living presence of the Risen Christ in our midst. *“Ask who the Eucharist is, not what the Eucharist is.”*²

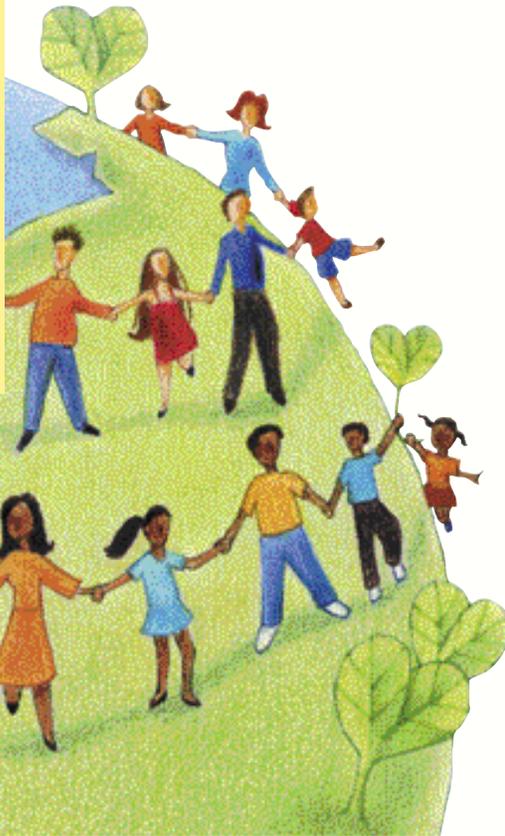
At every mass, Christ offers his life for us. As the bread and wine are transformed into his Body and Blood, we can offer our lives – our joys, our sufferings, our prayers, our work, our praise. We can offer even our most mundane acts done with love... *“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”* (John 15:13).

Yes, this is a great mystery. Our lives, given with Christ’s life, have meaning: they help bring people to God. There we find the greatest reason for our existence – our *raison d’être*. Our children need to know this!

The Risen Christ gives himself as food. *“For what is the bread? It is the Body of Christ. And what do those who receive it become? The Body of Christ – not many bodies but one body.... We are mutually joined to one another and together united with Christ.”*³ When we eat the consecrated bread, we are in communion with all of our brothers and sisters.

How can we then fight each other and stay mired in our grudges and our conflicts?

"In all that you do, let yourselves be guided by this constant thought: peace within you and peace around you, peace always, peace with everyone, peace for everyone."⁴



Working together for peace

In this time of the new evangelization, all the baptized are called to live the Gospel of peace each day, wherever they are. It is urgent, therefore, that the family structure founded on marriage between a man and a woman, the first place where we learn about peace, be maintained and supported.

Today's parents and children who are disciples of Christ are among the first Christians of the third millennium. Since each small gesture is important in this great work of peace-building, let us follow the example of the early Christians, sowing peace and joy wherever we work and live, and being agents of reconciliation. *"In all that you do, let yourselves be guided by this constant thought: peace within you and peace around you, peace always, peace with everyone, peace for everyone."*⁴

A sending forth concludes the Mass: *"Go in the peace of Christ!"* Go work in the service of others, go love, console and forgive, go help one another! Go proclaim God's great plan of love and communion for all of humanity! Go and do God's will! Go build peace! Go be God's hands, smile and heart for the world! Go be another Christ!

Mass is the root, the source, the centre of our Christian life! How can we not be filled with gratitude and say a huge "thank you" to God, who makes us and our children promoters of communion and solidarity through the Eucharist, this great school of peace?

One person who can help us enter into this great work of peace-building is Mary, Mother of God and our Mother, Queen of Peace. By imitating her life and the life of Christ, after pondering them in the beautiful prayer of the Rosary, we will "overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21) and thus become able to build peace in the world one step at a time.

1 John Paul II, *Message for World Day of Peace 2000*, no 2

2 Cardinal Jozef Tomko, Guadalajara Eucharistic Congress, October 10, 2004

3 John Paul II, *"Ecclesia de Eucharistia"*, no 23

4 John Paul II, *Message for World Day of Peace 2000*, no 22



**Catholic Organization
for Life and Family**

This leaflet has been prepared by the Catholic Organization for Life and Family (COLF). Copies are available from the COLF offices at 2500 Don Reid Drive, Ottawa, Ontario K1H 2J2, Tel: (613) 241-9461 ext. 161, Fax: (613) 241-9048, E-mail: ocvfcolf@cccbb.ca, Web site: <http://colf.cccb.ca>.

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