

International Solidarity Days-October 2021

October 1—International Day for Older Persons



International Day for Older Persons is celebrated on October 1st. This day was initiated by the United Nations in 1990 to honor the efforts of the elderly and the value they bring to society. The theme for this year is “Digital Equality for All Ages.” We recognize that access to information and participation in digital communication is essential for all ages, but especially for the elderly. Too often, the elderly find themselves isolated from family and friends due to various physical limitations. Digital communication, especially at this time of the covid-19 pandemic, makes it possible for the elderly to connect with others, share

ideas, stay involved with global and local happenings and events, and lend their unique wisdom and life experience to addressing today’s challenges. Recent reports by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) indicate that women and older persons experience digital inequity to a greater extent than other groups in society. They either lack access to technologies or are often not benefitting fully from the opportunities provided by technological progress. Additionally, cybercrimes and misinformation often target and threaten the human rights, privacy, and security of older people. Governments and international agencies need to explore the role of policies and legal frameworks to ensure privacy and safety of older persons in the digital world. Infrastructure, availability, connectivity, design, affordability, capacity building, innovation and technological training are also needed so that elders can become full participants in societal advancement.

Holy One, thank you for the gift of long life that so many in our world experience. Bless all elderly persons with loving friends, family and communities who are engaged with them on a daily basis and who are willing to learn from their stories and life experiences. Help us to address the digital divides that contribute to the isolation that is experienced by too many of our elders. As we age, help us all to stay involved in our world, using technology to assist us in our participation.

October 2—International Day of Non-Violence



This date, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, was chosen as the International Day of Non-violence by the United Nations on June 15, 2007. Gandhian non-violence is active and seeks to bring about justice and peace in our world through dialogue and understanding, love and compassion. This is what Pope Francis, in his latest encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, calls creating social friendship as a basis for peace-making. We are called to follow the gospel path of forgiveness, truth telling, open listening, and remembering what we may sometimes wish to forget. The path to peace is the path of forgiveness. But to forgive requires what the pope calls an honest and unclouded memory. This theme of truth telling and what some liberation theologians from Latin America have called “dangerous memory” –or history as told from

the point of view of the disenfranchised and the poor—is very personal to Pope Francis. When he was the provincial superior of the Jesuits in Argentina in the early 1970’s, Jorge Bergoglio was thrust into a complex political time in history. Several people that he personally knew were kidnapped and disappeared, including several women, clerics and catechists, by death squads associated with the military dictatorship that ruled Argentina at the time. Several were later found tortured and killed. Others were released after months of torture and abuse. So, Pope Francis is intimately aware of the inhumanity that human beings

are capable of. He also knows how it feels to not be forgiven by those who felt that he did not do enough to protect them. Through these experiences, he learned that forgiveness and reconciliation are personal acts that cannot be imposed on an individual or on society. They require hearing, recognizing, and speaking the truth, no matter how painful this may be. In fact, he sees truth as an inseparable companion of justice and mercy. In paragraph 252 of *Fratelli Tutti*, he says forgiveness is precisely what enables us to “pursue justice without falling into a spiral of revenge or the injustice of forgetting.” And in Paragraph 249 he says: “We can never move forward without remembering the past; ... I think not only of the need to remember the atrocities, but also all those who, amid such great inhumanity and corruption, retained their dignity and, with gestures small or large, chose the path of solidarity, forgiveness and fraternity.” Non-violence is the only path to lasting peace and justice. Truth and reconciliation can heal wounds, build bridges and lead to conversion of hearts and transformation of societies.

God, we pray for peace and nonviolence in our hearts and in the world. Help us to speak the truth as we know it and to listen with openness to the truth that others speak to us. Let us listen with compassion to one another, knowing that such listening will expand our understanding. As we seek to build a peaceful and just world, let us stand firm in our rejection of all forms of violence, especially the violence that we hold in our own hearts. Instead, help us to grow in respect, empathy and love for one another. When we stumble on the road of peacemaking, lift us up, inspire us anew and give us courage to begin again.

October 4—Feast of St. Francis of Assisi



this time of global climate crisis due to human activities. As the patron saint of non-violence and peacemaking, Francis is also an inspiration for those who struggle around the world to end war, terrorism, the death penalty, and violence in all its forms. As we face the many challenges of today’s world, we learn from the life of Francis of Assisi that conversion of heart is possible, and that God’s guidance will lead us if we are open.

It seems fitting that the feast of St. Francis of Assisi is celebrated just 2 days after the International Day of Non-violence. His example of non-violence, joy and love has inspired peacemakers of many faith traditions for over 800 years. Francis’ way of life was deeply rooted in his intuitive understanding that human beings and all of creation are one. He recognized that all are manifestations of the divine presence and reveal the sacred in unique and precious ways. As the patron saint of those who work for ecology, his message of care and respect for creation is particularly relevant during

Holy One, we praise you for the wondrous gift of creation and thank you for Saint Francis who inspires us each day to live as peacemakers and lovers of creation. Help us to see that care for Earth our common home is only possible if we also care for one another by building peaceful and just societies. As we journey together, lead us in your ways of peace. As we listen to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, help us to respond with generosity, courage, determination, and compassion.

October 10—World Day Against the Death Penalty



This year marks the 19th World Day Against the Death Penalty. The theme for 2021 is “Women and the Death Penalty: An Invisible Reality”. This day brings together all efforts to end the death penalty throughout the world—religious and political leaders, lawyers, members of civil society, and peacemakers and all those committed to non-violence in all aspects of life. This year’s focus on women seeks to raise awareness of the gender bias that can put women at increased risk of the death penalty. Discrimination based on gender is often coupled with other elements of bias such as age, sexual orientation, disability, and race leading to sentences for crimes that

are based on stereotypes of women as “witches”, “evil mothers”, or “femme fatales”. These stereotypes can lead to mitigating factors not being considered during the entire judicial process and can lead to the biased imposition of the death penalty.

In his most recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis reminds us that every human being possesses innate human dignity, which even the worst of a person’s actions cannot extinguish. The pope quotes St Augustine as saying: “Do not let the atrocity of their sins feed a desire for vengeance, but desire instead to heal the wounds which those deeds have inflicted on their souls.” In addition to his call for universal abolition of capital punishment, the pope calls a life sentence a secret death penalty. He calls on all of us to work for the improvement of prison conditions out of respect for the human dignity of every person. The aim of imprisonment, in addition to protecting society, must be restorative justice for both victims and perpetrators. Pope Francis condemns the death penalty and says it is inadmissible under any circumstances and must be abolished worldwide.

God, we pray for the worldwide abolition of the death penalty. We recognize the human dignity of each person, no matter what horrendous acts they may have committed. We know that conversion of heart, repentance and forgiveness are always possible. We commit ourselves to seeking restorative justice for those who are victims of crimes. We also pray for perpetrators of violent and hateful acts, that they may come to know their own innate worth and dignity and that of every person. May they experience the soul healing that is needed to bring them to a place of peace. Help all of us to reject revenge as we continue to work for justice and reconciliation.

October 13—International Day of Disaster Risk Reduction

The International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction (IDDRR) is significant because it is a platform to spread awareness about Natural Disaster, their different categories, consequences, and the methods to curb natural disasters. Climate change has led to increased disaster risk across the globe such as famine due to prolonged dry seasons; floods due to increased severity of typhoons, hurricanes, and storms; massive forest fires due to prolonged drought; and pandemics due to the emergence of new pathogens. Disaster preparedness and risk reduction requires good governance and can be measured in reduced numbers of disaster-affected people, lives saved, and reduced economic losses. It requires actions based on scientific evidence with good vision, plans, competent implementation, and strong institutions acting for the common good. These efforts must be national as well as local. They must be multi-sectoral, linking policies around land use, building codes, public health, agriculture, energy, water and food resources, education, and environmental protection. For example, part of addressing the risk of typhoons and hurricanes



involves restoration of coastal wetlands, as well as limiting human habitation in areas that encroach on these natural barriers that help protect other coastal communities. This day raises awareness of the complexity of disaster risk reduction, examining behavior and policies, and developing creative solutions.

Holy One, thank you for the gift of creation that we share. Help us to live in harmony with nature, so that we can reduce the risk of disasters that can be worsened by our own actions. Bless us with respect for the natural world so that we make wise choices for our lives that do not increase disaster risk. Lead us to creatively work together to reduce the risk and to realize that we are part of the web of life.

← **Flooding in Dili, Timor Leste, as seen from overhead**

October 15—International Day of Rural Women



On this day the United Nations recognizes “the critical role and contribution of rural women, including indigenous women, in enhancing agricultural and rural development, improving food security and eradicating rural poverty.” The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals clearly recognize that rural women play an essential and major role in lifting their families and communities out of poverty. This day recognizes their key contributions to household food security, safeguarding traditional knowledge, biodiversity, peace building and education. This day is also dedicated to focusing on the needs and rights of rural women and mobilizing international institutions, networks and media to advocate for and with rural women.

God, we thank you for the many gifts that rural women bring to our world. As these brave and resourceful women work to raise their families and communities out of poverty, help us to learn patience and perseverance from their struggle. As rural women educate the next generation about living in harmony with creation and traditional ways of healing and caring for each other, may we grow in our own understanding of nature and its gifts. As rural women demand access to education and property inheritance rights, inspire us to work for justice locally and globally as well.



October 17—International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals call for an end to extreme poverty globally by the year 2030. A peaceful world depends on the eliminating extreme poverty. The United Nations has declared that extreme poverty is a violation of human rights. It calls upon people everywhere to cooperatively work to end poverty by developing systems of production and distribution of earth's resources that are equitable, just, sustainable and based on the common good. By eradicating poverty, all humanity will be transformed.

Holy One, we pray for the 1 billion people living in extreme poverty throughout the world. Inspire us to actively seek ways to address global poverty in our personal choices and in our advocacy and solidarity with the poor. We pray for an end to war so that resource

of the earth which sustains us all. We also pray for generosity of spirit so that we willingly share what we have with love.

October 24-30—United Nations Disarmament Week



Global goals for disarmament are vital for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in 2030. There is a growing understanding and awareness that national resources the world over are presently being squandered on building implements of war, even though it is clear that these instruments of mass destruction make war practically and morally unacceptable. The accumulation and illicit trade in so called “conventional weapons” jeopardize international peace and security as well as the sustainable development of poor nations. New and emerging weapons technology such as drones threaten to further destabilize international relations and global security. Movement toward disarmament seeks to maintain international peace and

security, upholds the principles of solidarity among people, promotes sustainable development and secures peace through non-violent resolutions of differences among nations. Disarmament is a step toward creating open dialogue between peoples and putting resources into meeting human needs, rather than creating weapons of destruction and intimidation.

God, we long for peace, yet too often we bow in worship to the idols of weapons to “keep us safe”. Inspire us with wisdom as we seek to create a culture of encounter based on dialogue and respect. Help us to turn away from weapons of violence, destruction and intimidation and instead use our resources to meet the needs of the poor and of earth. Rather than building weapons that destroy and separate, help us to build bridges that bring us together.