



*“A lively awareness of our relatedness
helps us to look upon and to treat each person
as a true sister or brother;
without fraternity it is impossible to build a just society
and a solid and lasting peace.”
Pope Francis, 1 January 2014*

On this New Year’s Day of 2014, Pope Francis has published his first message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, focusing on the theme of brotherhood. As President of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Canada, I want to relay Pope Francis’s intervention to my fellow citizens by taking a look from our own Canadian perspective at some of the questions he has chosen to raise.

Families: The Pope identifies the family as the first school of brotherhood. Unfortunately, too many Canadian families live in poverty, suffering from unemployment, experiencing violence, breakdowns and indifference. Should we not commit ourselves to the full flowering of our families as a genuine social priority?

Aid to poor countries: Francis reminds us that rich countries have a special responsibility in building a common future for humanity. He suggests that human brotherhood presents itself in this regard under three aspects: the duty of solidarity, the duty of social justice and the duty of universal charity. When we consider our foreign policy, the role of our ambassadors, our international commitments and our economic agreements, should we not consider these three duties as foundational?

Poverty in Canada: The Pope recognizes that our world is experiencing a reduction in absolute poverty. However, relative poverty is increasing, that is to say “inequality between people and groups who live together in particular regions”. This certainly describes Canada, one of the most prosperous countries of the world, where we unfortunately find too many soup kitchens, drop-in centres and neglected, unhealthy neighbourhoods. And what about our Indian reserves where overwhelming and devastating poverty is unfortunately rampant? Could we not foster true brotherhood among us, a brotherhood made concrete by our care of others and our sharing with them as well as the development of government policies and programs that make a greater difference in people’s lives?

Voluntary Simplicity: The Pope salutes those families and individuals who intentionally choose voluntary simplicity in their life style. This is a testimony that speaks to all, a gesture that makes a difference. As we begin this New Year, could we not all reflect on our lifestyle, our consumption and our priorities?

Ethics in business and finance: Francis invites business leaders to uphold the traditional virtues of prudence, temperance, justice and perseverance as they engage in commercial and financial activities. Otherwise, we may find ourselves beset with the continuing financial and economic crises that have shaken our country and our world. Should not all Canadian business leaders strive to be international models of these ethical principles?

The arms trade: The Pope's words are incisive: "As long as so great a quantity of arms are in circulation as at present, new pretexts can always be found for initiating hostilities." Should Canadian companies be complicit in the many fratricidal wars that hurt our world and kill children? Do not our governments have an obligation to consider this question more seriously?

Organized crime: Our Pope deplores the presence of criminal organizations that profit from the sale of drugs, corruption, human trafficking and prostitution. Persons involved in such organizations or doing business with them should seriously listen to the call of Pope Francis: "In the heart of every man and woman is the desire for a full life, including that irrepressible longing for fraternity which draws us to fellowship with others and enables us to see them not as enemies or rivals, but as brothers and sisters to be accepted and embraced." How shall we help our brothers and sisters free themselves from the scourge of organized crime?

The ecological challenge: Francis warns us of greed and the arrogance of domination, possession, manipulation and exploitation. It would be more helpful to consider nature as "a gracious gift which we must care for and set at the service of our brothers and sisters, including future generations". Since Canada is recognized for its natural beauty and its rich natural resources, we have an even more serious obligation in this area. Harmonizing economic development and respect for nature is not easy, yet social and political will must rise to the task. Will we leave our grandchildren and great -grandchildren a healthy and ecologically rich environment?

In conclusion: When I look at the state of the world today, I cannot help but count myself lucky to live in a prosperous and peaceful country like Canada. This prosperity and peace allow us to strive even more radically towards the ideal of brotherhood. Yes, let us rejoice in the path already travelled, but let us also remain clear-thinking as we face the path ahead. Citizens, governments and community organizations, I call on you with Pope Francis: let us once again take up the pilgrim's staff. Together, let us journey ever further along the path of brotherhood, the true road to peace.



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