

The Parish Priest and Parish Secretary
St Joseph's Parish of Takapuna
10 Dominion Street
Takapuna
Auckland 0622



**"Lay down weapons and heed the cries for peace from the poor,
the people, and the innocent children."**

(Pope Francis on the conflict in the Holy Land)

Kia ora Msgr. David,

As I write this letter the current conflict in the Holy Land continues to intensify and the human crisis escalates. Meanwhile, in our relatively peaceful and untouched corner of the world, as Christmas draws nearer I get the sense that, over the years, Christmas has become more a time of receiving rather than giving.

Like many, I believe that giving back and remembering those less fortunate at Christmas is important. We can make a powerful difference in the lives of those most in need when we give at Christmas.

Peace is something that our world desperately needs. In the midst of uncertainty and turmoil overseas we find ourselves watching on from afar, feeling helpless, but compelled to assist in some way.

Giving is at the heart of the Christmas message. In the work that we do supporting vulnerable communities, I see the immense power of this every day.

With your support, we have stood with vulnerable communities, advocated for, and worked to build peace where it is so crucially needed.



Image credit: Cartas Internationalis

The Holy Land: The Road to Peace

I'm sure like me, you have been following the recent conflicts in the Holy Land closely.

The scale of this crisis can be difficult to comprehend from such a distance. What is obvious, however, is the tragic human cost of what has unfolded.

Thousands of lives have been lost, and many thousands more have sustained serious injuries.

Over a million people in Gaza have been displaced, and they urgently require food, shelter, healthcare, and psychological support. Gaza's entire population is experiencing severe shortages of electricity, water, fuel, food, and medicine.



100,000 people need humanitarian assistance.



Over 1 million people forced to flee their homes.



Over 60 percent of the fatalities are women and children.

The recent bombardments and shelling exacerbated an already deadly humanitarian crisis. **Even before the latest events, 80% of Gaza's population were reliant on some sort of humanitarian support.**

These latest events have seen further destruction of homes, crucial water and sanitation infrastructure, and a hospital in Gaza. There are growing concerns about a looming water crisis. Hospitals have been overwhelmed with injured patients and continue to face severe shortages of fuel and other essential supplies.

The human cost to this conflict has been tragic, with thousands of casualties in Israel and Gaza, including thousands of children. We know the recovery will be long and will likely continue for years to come. We will be with the people of the Holy Land on their road to recovery.

If we have learned one thing from history, it is that education is the key to changing hearts and minds. The work of our long-standing partner Bethlehem University is crucial to teaching and promoting peace to the next generation. The University, which teaches students of all faiths and backgrounds, has been greatly affected by the recent violence, with one of their students being tragically killed in mid-October. Despite recent challenges, the University remains committed to promoting excellence and teaching peace to the next generation.

A prayer for Peace



God of light,

We pray for our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land, walking in the shadow of darkness.

In You, Lord, may we see a flicker of hope, a warm ray of light to heal our hearts.

Pour upon us all Your glorious light, Your radiance brings us to fullness of life.

We pray as one that fighting may cease, and all may be blessed by the dawn of Your peace.

We ask this through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Prayer by Rachel McCarthy, CAFOD (adapted). Image credit: MAHMUD HAMS | AFP via Getty Images



Inspiring the next generation of young Catholics

Through our work, we connect with the leaders of tomorrow in Catholic schools. Our education team passionately inspires students' hearts and minds, empowering them to actively champion justice and peace.

The theme for Social Justice Week 2023, 'Imagine Peace For All / Pohewatia te Rangimārie mō te Katoa' centred on the idea of 'Peace begins with you! / Ka tīmata tonu te Rangimārie i roto i ā koe!'. The associated learning activities highlighted the importance of everyone playing a role in promoting peace and finding true personal peace through a loving, personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

During Social Justice Week, students participate in a diverse range of activities. This offers them both practical and creative insights into the concept of peace and the way they can actively contribute as peacebuilders. These resources are multi-purpose, seeking both to educate and inspire change, and lead a culture of peace, justice, and equity for all.



Top: The incredible work of students at St Francis de Sales School in Island Bay showcases their creativity and passion as peacebuilders.

Bottom: Students from St Theresa's School, Invercargill, took their learning beyond the classroom, breathing life into the concept of peace for their school community. Chalk drawings created a joyful and colourful experience for all.

Finally, I wanted to share a special story I was told recently by our partners Caritas Poland. The story is about a mother who fled the violence in Ukraine, fearing for the safety of her young son. It highlights the immense impact of our international network.

Tanya sits on a makeshift bed in Przemyśl, Poland, anxiously checking her phone for messages from the family she left behind. Tanya and her son Nikita are the only members of their family who have made it across the border into Poland after fleeing their war-torn homeland.

Leaving her husband and second son behind in Ukraine, the war has torn Tanya's family apart.

The family initially took shelter near their home in Mykolaiv but, fearing for her sons' safety, Tanya fled for Poland. Eventually, they reached Przemyśl, Poland, and took refuge in a temporary accommodation facility run by Caritas. They had few belongings when they arrived; but Caritas supported them, providing Tanya and her son with the vital support and supplies they needed.



Tanya sits on the bed watching the harrowing coverage of the war in her homeland; hoping that her city remains unscathed and that her friends and family are unharmed.

Thank you again for your continued support of our mission to be 'love in action'.

May you and your loved ones have a restful holiday period, and a blessed Christmas.

Ngā mihi nui,



Mena Antonio
Chief Executive / Kaiwhakahaere Matua
Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand

