



# **PEACE AND JUSTICE**

## **A source of stability in changing times**

*Letter from the Roman Catholic Bishops of the Netherlands*

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The political, social, economic and cultural world order is changing. Several countries are extending their influence across their borders. At the same time, their governments are paying less and less heed to international organisations that limit the power of individual nations. As the focus shifts towards self-interest, international solidarity is waning. These changes to the world order are leading to unrest, instability and conflict. In the Netherlands, too, we are seeing the consequences of this for our freedom, prosperity and security.

Amidst all these changes, we find stability, direction, hope and comfort in our faith, which calls us to pray for and work towards peace and justice, bearing in mind the first words of the Risen Lord: “Peace be with you.” (John 20)

Peace and justice are intertwined. The prophet Isaiah (32:17) says that peace is a fruit of justice. The Epistle of James (3:18) states that justice is a fruit of peace. Where there is injustice, there can be no peace; and where there is discord, justice cannot flourish. Peace does not arise from violence and intimidation, but from justice. Peace is not merely the renunciation of violence, but the seeking and maintaining of connection. Peace is not about disarming and defeating the opponent but ultimately restoring their dignity. Peace means working towards a shared future, in which sources of conflict are removed and ways are found to resolve conflicts. Peace is about seeking the common good, the ‘bonum commune’, for the warring parties and thereby also for the region and ultimately for the whole world.

There may be situations in which the use of force in self-defence is justified, but only as a last resort, such as when one’s own country is under attack or in cases of human rights violations. In all such cases, the use of force must remain proportionate, effective and limited. Coordination and authorisation by organisations such as the United Nations or the European Union are necessary in this regard.

The government must protect human dignity. Human dignity is the guiding principle of the democratic process, in which people express their opinions and those in authority are held to account through elections. Human dignity is reflected in a constitutional state, where people are treated objectively and impartially, and where it is not power but collectively established regulations that govern how we live together. The government must protect the social diversity that characterises every society, enabling minorities to be themselves and to live together in peace. There must also be a free press and

freedom of the press, so that people can express themselves freely and keep themselves informed.

In his encyclical 'Pacem in terris' (1963), Pope John XXIII wrote: "Instead of a criterion for peace based on a balance of arms, there must be the principle that peace can only be built on mutual trust" (61). Through diplomacy and non-violent action, the dignity of both victims and perpetrators can be upheld, thereby offering opportunities for the restoration of peace and justice. In times of conflict, Pope Leo XIV consistently advocates for disarmament, dialogue and the conversion of hearts. In his prayer for peace, often addressed to Mary, Queen of Peace, he calls for 'unarmed and disarming peace': "Our prayer for peace continues unabated, particularly through the communal recitation of the Holy Rosary. And from this intercession of the heart spring many gestures of evangelical charity, concrete closeness and solidarity" (Angelus address, 26 October 2025). In his message for World Peace Day 2026, the Pope emphasises that it is necessary "to encourage and support every spiritual, cultural and political initiative that keeps the hope for peace alive". In his prayer for the month of March 2026, the Pope elaborates on this: "Strip our hearts of hatred, resentment and indifference, so that we may become instruments of reconciliation."

We are called upon to contribute to the well-being of others, and thereby to their security. We need a broadly supported European perspective on security based on peace, in which human dignity, territorial integrity, national sovereignty and international solidarity are the guiding values. Within civil society organisations, of which our Church is a part, we must engage in dialogue on how we, as a whole society, can become more resilient.

Pope Leo XIV consistently emphasises that true security does not stem from control fuelled by fear, but from trust, justice and solidarity among peoples. Following in the footsteps of his predecessor Pope Francis, the Pope regards believers of different traditions and all people of good will as brothers and sisters who are jointly committed to peace and justice. This gives rise to a global, cross-border and unifying plea for peace and justice.

In his prayer for the month of March 2026, the Pope prays: "May every kind word, every gesture of reconciliation and every choice in favour of dialogue be seeds for a new world."

Together with you, we wholeheartedly join in the Pope's prayer for peace. His call to pray for and continue to work towards peace and justice offers us a source of strength in these changing times. As we journey towards Pentecost, may the Holy Spirit grant us that peace.

Baarn, second week of Easter, 15 April 2026

**The Roman Catholic Bishops of the Netherlands**