

“Let Peace Begin with Me...”

“*Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me...*” How often we have sung these words in our churches and in our schools! Peace is certainly a value we seek. We see instances of armed conflict, suicide bombings, and domestic violence in the media, and we long for a change, for a peace-filled world. Although simplistic, we can say that peace begins with each of us.

Where can we begin? The *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* (from Vatican II) states: “*The family has received from God its mission to be the first and vital cell of society. It will fulfill this mission if it shows itself to be the domestic sanctuary of the Church through the mutual affection of its members and the common prayer they offer to God, if the whole family is caught up in the liturgical worship of the Church, and if it provides active hospitality and promotes justice and other good works for the service of all the brethren in need.*” (#11; cf. CCC #2207) So peace begins with the family.

In addition to daily prayers for peace, some very practical ways that a family can promote peace are outlined by Kathleen R. McGinnis, executive director of the Institute for Peace and Justice in St. Louis and co-founding coordinator for the Parenting for Peace and Justice Network. I will cite and paraphrase just a few suggestions, but the entire article, which appeared in the *National Catholic Reporter*, can be found at: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1141/is_25_38/ai_86047225/print.

- In speaking with our children, we need to show the real face of war. Bombs kill people; they don't just fall on tanks or buildings. This means that we need to be aware of the play of young children and how much of it is war/terrorism/violence-related. As children get older and their toys change to video and computer games, it is even more important for parents to be aware of the violent images portrayed.
- Our children should see us making efforts to build peace and justice in our own communities, in particular, addressing racial and economic divisions. Children need to hear us talk about these issues, challenge our government officials and be part of sustained activism around the work of justice.
- The family should exhibit a deep sense of respect for diversity in our everyday lives. All of us, young and old, can ask ourselves these questions: Do I ever take part in name-calling? Make fun of someone else? Label people because of some physical characteristic? Use stereotypes when referring to others? Stand up for someone who is being put down by others?
- Artifacts in the home can reflect the diversity in the human family. We can stand in solidarity with people who are the victims of discrimination and injustice and not shy away from talking about and becoming activists in controversial issues like the naming of sports teams after Native Americans.
- Modeling peacemaking behavior in the family is of utmost importance. Continuing to work on our communication skills and developing those skills in children is an essential part of peacemaking in the family. The family meeting is one good tool for encouraging listening, affirmation, articulation

of feelings, forgiveness, mutuality in decision-making and problem-solving. Day-to-day family life can be a battleground of its own, but it can also be a marvelous opportunity to practice peacemaking.

- A final and very simple practice is suggested, originating with Thich Nhat Hanh, the renowned Buddhist peacemaker. He says the most basic form of peacemaking we can do as individuals is to smile. Smiling may seem like an overly simple suggestion for a very complex question, but whatever other strategies and actions we decide on, the first step is to always "be" peace in our own hearts and our own families.

If we are tempted to think "*What impact can my family make?*" remember the words of anthropologist Margaret Mead: "*A small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*"

Some Resources for the Family

The Institute for Peace and Justice 4144 Lindell, Suite 408 St. Louis MO 63108 (314) 533-4445 or www.ipj-ppi.org.

The "*Pledge of Nonviolence*" has been used by families, churches and schools around the country. The family meeting is explained in detail in the institute's resources.

National Institute on Media and the Family 606 24th Ave. South, Suite 606 Minneapolis MN 55454 (888) 672-5437 or www.mediafamily.org.

This is a resource for teachers, parents, community leaders and other caring adults who are interested in the influence of electronic media on children. One of the most helpful features is "Kidscore," an innovative, content-based rating system that evaluates video and computer games, movies and television from a family-friendly perspective.

Pax Christi USA, at: www.paxchristiusa.org.

This is a U.S. Catholic peace organization. Many resources and programs are described here.



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