



Our Global Faith

Tom Layden SJ, engaged in ecumenical work in Belfast for many years, writes on the Pope's intention for January. He encourages us to come together and follow in the footsteps of Pope Francis in reaching out to the other in order to create a world of peace and justice for all. Please remember this intention during Church Unity Week, 18–25 January.



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Pope's Intention (evangelisation): We pray that Christians, followers of other religions, and all people of goodwill may promote peace and justice in the world.

In a flash he answered back: 'How do you know that I am good?' The bold reply stopped me in my tracks. But the warm

Early one morning I met a rabbi on the corridor outside the chaplaincy office in a Canadian hospital. Somewhat frivolously I greeted him with the words: 'And how is the good rabbi this morning?'

smile that soon appeared on the rabbi's face put me at my ease. The memory of his words has lingered.

In truth we know so little about each other. Our impressions are often quite limited. We only see so far into the

heart of our neighbour.

If our world is to work, however, we need to presume a basic goodness in the other. As St Ignatius says in his *Spiritual Exercises*, a Christian is always more willing to put a good construction on the action and motivation of a neighbour.

I recall being at a church service in Belfast 1 January 1995. The minister leading the service invited all those in the church who were under twenty-five years of age to stand up. They did not quite understand why they had been asked to stand. In a minute it all became clear as the minister told them: 'For those of you who are standing, this is the first new year that you have had that there has been peace in this city and this part of the country'.

As we give thanks for relative peace in our own part of the world, we remember countries where there is strife and tension, warfare and unrest. We pray a blessing on the peacemakers and on the peacekeepers. We pray that each of us will play our part in bringing about that justice in the wider society which is the guarantee of real and lasting peace.

As we pray about this month's intention, we of course think of those who serve in leadership in political and civic life, but we cannot leave it all to them. The task of promoting justice and sustaining the peace involves all of us. We are called to be participants rather than bystanders.

We Christians cannot accomplish the bringing of peace into our world on our own. We need to join with others, with followers of other religions

and all women and men of goodwill. We are sisters and brothers in the human family. We are all children of the one God.

In Northern Ireland, clergy from different traditions were seen together praying for peace many years before the politicians were seen publicly together. The desire for peace and the ending of violence moved them to stand together rather than work separately.

All of us, Catholic and Protestant, Jew and Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist, women and men of goodwill need to form a strong community united in our diversity and our common desire for peace based on justice in our time and in our world.

For this we have to let go of a certain clannishness and recognise that the future of the globe depends on each individual and group putting their own particular interests and concerns in the second place and giving the first priority to promoting justice and pursuing peace. We have to let go of the hurts of yesteryear and the fears of today so that the hopes for tomorrow can be fulfilled.

Jesus told his disciples that the peacemakers are blessed. This stimulates us to work along with sisters and brothers of all traditions and none to establish the peace in which we can all live in safety and security. The example of Pope Francis who himself always reaches out in friendship to the other is an encouragement to us to build coalitions for peace in our streets and neighbourhoods, in our cities and indeed in our global village. 