

WORLD DAY OF PEACE

Francis: End the Death Penalty And Act for Global Justice

Pope Francis called for abolishing the death penalty worldwide, lifting the burden of debt on poor nations, global aid policies that respect life and revamped laws that welcome and integrate migrants.

He urged individuals, communities and nations to not let indifference, information overload or pessimism discourage them from concrete efforts “to improve the world around us, beginning with our families, neighbors and places of employment.” Building peace, he said, is not accomplished by words alone but through the grace of God, a conversion of heart, an attitude of compassion and the courage to act against despair.

The pope’s multifaceted plea came in his message for World Peace Day, Jan. 1. The message, titled “Overcome Indifference and Win Peace,” was delivered to world leaders by Vatican ambassadors and was released at the Vatican on Dec. 15; it contains a three-fold appeal to the world’s leaders.

Pope Francis asked that countries: “refrain from drawing other peoples into conflicts of wars,” which not only destroy a nation’s infrastructure and cultural heritage, but also their “moral and spiritual integrity”; forgive or make less burdensome international debt of poorer nations; and “adopt policies of cooperation which, instead of bowing before the dictatorship of certain ideologies, will respect the values of the local populations” and not harm the “fundamental and inalienable right to life of the unborn.”

Also part of building peace in the world, he said, is addressing the urgent problem of improving the living conditions of prisoners, especially those still awaiting trial. Since rehabilitation should be the aim of penal sanctions, effective alternatives to incarceration should be considered as well as the abolition of the death penalty.

The pope called on national governments to review their current laws on immigration and find ways they could “reflect a readiness to welcome migrants and to facilitate their integration.”

All nations’ leaders should also take concrete measures to alleviate the problem of a lack of housing, land and employment, the pope wrote, as well as to stop discrimination against women

in the workplace, which includes unfair wages and precarious or dangerous working conditions. He said he hoped those who are ill could be guaranteed access to medical treatment, necessary medications and home care.

The pope’s message focused on the dangers of cynicism and indifference against God, neighbor and creation.

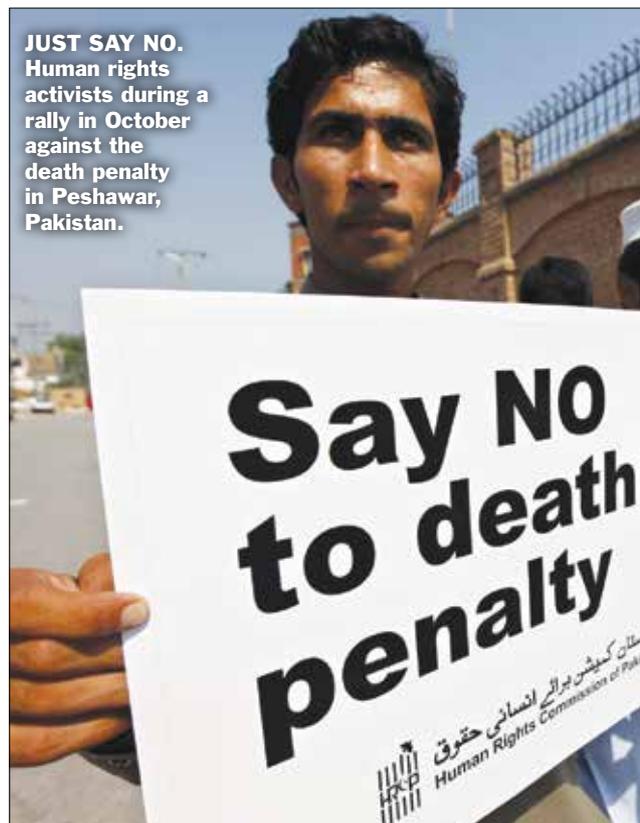
“Disregard and the denial of God,” he said, “have produced untold cruelty and violence.” And the exploitation of natural resources and mistreatment of animals have an effect “on the way we treat other people.”

“With the present Jubilee of Mercy, I want to invite the church to pray and work so that every Christian will have a humble and compassionate heart” and that all people will learn “to forgive and to give,” he said in his message.

God is never indifferent to the world, he said. He not only sees, hears

and knows, he “comes down and delivers” real healing and eternal teachings.

The pope welcomed one effort that offers a glimmer of hope for a more peaceful world, expressing his satisfaction with a resolution adopted on Dec. 18 by the U.N. Security Council to resolve the Syrian conflict. For the first time, diplomats from the United States, Russia and other world powers agreed to a political roadmap toward the end of the civil war in Syria, though many obstacles remain. “I am moved to turn my thoughts to beloved Syria and express my great appreciation for the agreement just reached by the international community,” Pope Francis said, following the Angelus prayer in St. Peter’s Square on Dec. 20. “I encourage everyone to continue energetically down the path to an end of violence and a negotiated solution for peace,” he added.



JUST SAY NO. Human rights activists during a rally in October against the death penalty in Peshawar, Pakistan.



MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL

Settlement Brings Court Oversight

The Ramsey County Attorney's Office in Minnesota announced a landmark civil settlement with the Archdiocese of Saint Paul-Minneapolis related to a civil case that alleged grave breakdowns in the archdiocese's child protection policies. According to County Attorney John Choi, the primary objective of the settlement is to transform the organizational culture of the archdiocese "into one that is vigilant about ensuring that no child will ever again become the victim of clergy sex abuse."

"Today's historic agreement increases oversight and transparency to

systemically change how the archdiocese protects children and responds to suspected incidents of child sexual abuse," said Choi. "It is my expectation that the facts of this case will never be repeated and the protection of children will forever be of paramount importance within this archdiocese." The "case" referred to by Choi involved Curtis Wehmeyer, a former priest who is now serving a prison term for molesting two boys in 2010.

Civil charges will be stayed for three years while the church puts in place enhanced policies and practices to protect children. The archdiocese would have to submit progress reports to the court every six months, and the civil case would be dropped after three years if the court is satisfied with its progress. An accompanying criminal investigation will continue, the county attorney's office reported.

Archbishop Bernard Hebda, the archdiocese's apostolic administrator, described the agreement in a letter to parishioners as "an opportunity for us to do all we can to make sure children are as safe as possible now and into the future."

Archbishop Hebda wrote, "From the time I first arrived here in June.... I have worked to learn as much as I can about the events surrounding" Wehmeyer and "his abuse of children under his care."

According to the archbishop, since his appointment he had been in dialogue with Choi and his staff. "We immediately realized we all had the same goal: to make sure children are safe in our churches, schools and communities....we worked together to find the best ways to make that a reality."

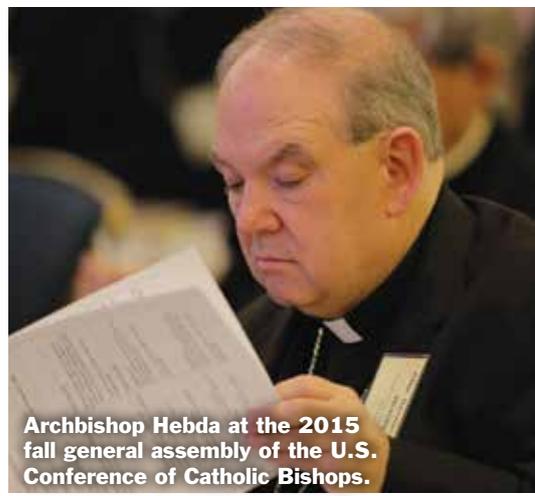
Days after the civil and criminal complaints were filed by Choi's office in June, Pope Francis accepted the resignations of the former arch-

bishop of Minneapolis-St. Paul, John Nienstedt, along with that of Auxiliary Bishop Lee Piche, and appointed Archbishop Hebda as the interim leader. The archdiocese filed for bankruptcy in January, and the proposed settlement will require federal bankruptcy court approval.

According to Archbishop Hebda, "much of what is in the new document are things we are already doing, while others are practices and procedures that are already working in some dioceses around the country. We are agreeing to implement the plan under a set deadline and to be held accountable for that commitment."

Choi's office reports that the settlement "incorporates many of the October 2014 Child Protection protocols agreed upon by the archdiocese...as well as the 2014 recommendations of the [archdiocesan] Safe Environment Task Force."

Two independent audits will be completed in 2017 and 2018. Among other new procedures, when allegations of misconduct, including sexual abuse of a child, arise in the future, they will now be addressed by the Ministerial Review Board, rather than allowing one or two members of the clergy to determine how to respond.



Archbishop Hebda at the 2015 fall general assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

