Peace or Shalom, a common Jewish greeting do not just mean the absence of conflict. It also expresses a desire that the one “greeted will have all the righteousness and goodness, God can give”. Its most profound meaning is ‘God's highest good to you’ and what can be better than caring for humanity. Peace is an integrated behaviour, based on the sentiments of solidarity and concern for the common well-being of the community. Hence, Peace is an integral component of Humanity at its best.

We are living in a world where peace is at stake. Today, the matters of grave concern such as domination of the rich and powerful, climate emergency, arrogant capitalism, wars, and communal riots are resulting into increased marginalization, violence, poverty, and sufferings in human life. This year, 1 January 2023 was marked as the 54th World Day of Peace, where Pope Francis in his message offered the Church's social doctrine as a "compass" to encourage a culture of care for peace in the world. Pope Francis has also been emphasizing to work for the good of humanity and that there is no peace without a "culture of care." Hence claiming, Humanity and Peace are co-related.

This year, Caritas India through its Annual Lenten Campaign 2023, focussing on the theme 'Caring Humanity Building Peace' invites everyone to join hands and come together to spread Pope Francis' message of Peace. The theme holds significance in the current situation when the basic needs of the people are compromised due to human arrogance and climate crisis. Peacebuilding can pave the way where everyone will have fair and equal access to justice and an atmosphere to live in security.

Caritas India's commitment to integrated human development have facilitated people's liberation from inequities and helped transform their deplorable conditions as befits human dignity. In its totality, Caritas India (CI) reaches out and works with 2,61,28,937 population, largely hailing from the most vulnerable sections such as Dalits, small holder farmers, unorganized sectors, migrants and displaced people of concern. During Covid alone, Caritas India reached out to 25 million distressed population with care and support to uphold peace within such troubled times. We have engaged with the communities in conflict to safeguard the identities of the communities through mutual dialogue and regular interface. Caritas India has harnessed the concept of inclusiveness in all our programs and engagement. Taking insights from the Church Social Teachings and the Papal Encyclicals, Caritas India promotes in all her programs, the approach of “Love thy Neighbour.” The renewed approach of journeying and caring for nature, solidarity through campaigns, volunteering for a cause and sharing communities, are some of the offshoots of our strategic orientation of Transforming lives through a culture of care.
We, being the Peacemakers can promote participatory governance supporting peace. A culture of tolerance and consensus-building needs to be highlighted by the government and civil society in general. It is more crucial to promote inter-country, intercultural communication, and civic education, to build a culture of peace and social harmony. Good governance and peacebuilding initiatives can play a crucial role in ensuring people-oriented development, demanding all citizens and groups to articulate their interests, needs, and concerns. The need for making the governance more participatory and interactive is done through the animation process of mobilizing and facilitating communities to participate in the active functioning of the local governance.

**ACTION/PLEDGE POINTS**

- Each family reach out to their neighbourhood to express their care.
- Community Institutions in parishes can come together to discuss on peace building and plan community actions.
- Create volunteers as Shanti Mitras in parish/village level to create awareness, disseminate knowledge and mobilize the local communities for a harmonious living.
- Celebration of National as well as common events to create synergies.
- Have inter-faith meetings and set up Children peace clubs to bridge the gaps and build solidarity.

Caritas India requests partner fraternity to spread this message to every parishioner and community. So, let us come together and do our bit...

“We need peace! More peace!”

Pope Francis