

NEWSLETTER

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A Season for Hope

A season of hope, a season of renewal, a season of peace.

We are at the doorstep of the Christmas season, in fact on Sunday we lit the

first candle of advent, the candle representing hope.

Christian or not, you likely associate with this time of year a sense of serenity, peace, well-being. A time where you reflect on the year, thinking about those good things you experienced, the new relations you made; thinking about the lows of the year, and maybe as we approach the new year considering addressing some shortcomings.

In this article, I would like to focus on that one word that is central to this time of year. **Peace**.

We all crave for peace. We want to live our lives in peace. We seek refuge in times of turmoil in places that fill us with a sense of peace. But what kind of peace do we aspire to?

Pope Francis refers to an age of "**a world war in instalments**". Looking back as far as the attacks on the twin towers, for almost a quarter of a century, the world has been at war. Not that conflict did

not exist, but it has become so pervasive that we have normalised it. Think about it, all young people under the age of 25 have consistently lived through major conflicts; Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Ukraine, Palestine, Myanmar, Central Africa, and the list goes on.

While we crave for peace, we still struggle to achieve this Nirvana. Conflict is self-defeating, yet we revel in it. It's enough to look at some of the outrageous comments about the Israel/Gaza conflict.

We need to think differently about peace. For many when thinking about world peace we think of what the IEP ([Institute for Economics and Peace](#)) refer to as negative peace. Negative peace is defined as "**the absence of violence or fear of violence**". Not a bad thing but falls short of achieving lasting peace.

Negative peace does not address the problems underlying conflict. The Israel/Palestinian conflict is a prime example. After decades it is still not resolved, so much so that its resurgence resulted in outright butchery by both sides; events which put humanity to shame. As Pope Francis commented this is terrorism not war.

We need to work towards a new model of peace, that which the IEP refers to as positive peace.

Positive peace is defined in terms of "**the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies**". It shifts the focus away from the negative to the positive aspects that create the conditions for a society to grow. Improvements in Positive Peace are associated with desirable results for society including stronger economic outcomes, higher resilience, better measures of wellbeing, higher levels of inclusiveness and more sustainable environmental performance. Positive Peace creates an optimum environment in which human potential can be achieved.

The IEP notes that the greater the improvements in Positive Peace, the greater the economic performance. The countries with the largest improvements in Positive Peace have on average higher rates of sustainable economic growth per capita when compared to countries recording the largest deteriorations.

Peace has a very tangible economic value. While some resort to conflict to extract value through death and misery, the majority would benefit from the value created through positive peace!

Humanity needs to evolve from a primitive fragmented species. The survival of the species depends on it as we face real existential threats. Recently google published statistic showing a dramatic increase in the number of searches on [climate anxiety](#). Our species is at cross-roads and yet we are still literally at each other's throats - which behaviour is manipulated by a few so-called leaders for the benefit of a minority, in the name of wealth, perceived power and blinded ego.

In pursuit of positive peace, it serves to briefly list the pillars of positive peace as described by the IEP. These pillars have a direct bearing on how a functional socio-economic system should work.

Well-functioning government

A well-functioning government delivers high-quality public and civil services, engenders trust and participation, demonstrates political stability, and upholds the rule of law.

Sound business environment

The strength of economic conditions as well as the formal institutions that support the operation of the private sector. Business competitiveness and economic productivity are both associated with the most peaceful countries.

Acceptance of the rights of others

Peaceful countries often have formal laws that guarantee basic human rights and freedoms, and the informal social and cultural norms that relate to behaviours of citizens.

Good relations with neighbours

Peaceful relations with other countries are as important as good relations between groups within a country. Countries with positive external relations tend to be more politically stable, have better functioning governments, are regionally integrated and have lower levels of organised internal conflict.

Free flow of information

Free and independent (unbiased) media disseminates information in a way that leads to greater knowledge and helps individuals, businesses and civil society make better decisions. This leads to better outcomes and more rational responses in times of crisis.

High levels of human capital

A skilled human capital base reflects the extent to which societies educate citizens and promote the development of knowledge, thereby improving economic value creating productivity, care for the young, political participation and social capital.

Low levels of corruption

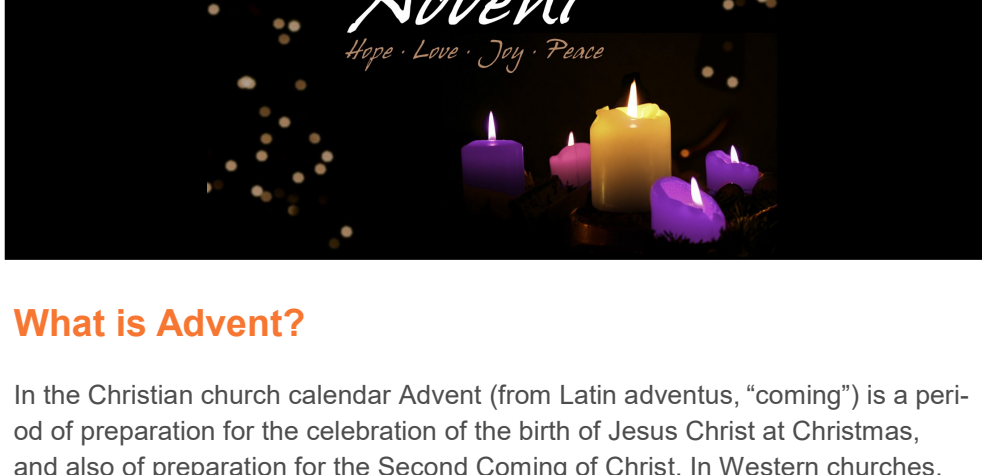
In societies with high levels of corruption, resources are inefficiently allocated, often leading to a lack of funding for essential services and civil unrest. Low corruption can enhance confidence and trust in institutions.

Equitable distribution of resources

Peaceful countries tend to ensure equity in access to resources such as education, health, and equity in income distribution.

This is a lot to digest, but this applies not only at an international level, but even on a national level. Disappointingly one notes that Malta levels badly in quite a few of these pillars; this does not bode well. Malta's demographics are evolving into a more diverse society where understanding each other and working together cannot just rely on unwritten norms. Achieving stability requires structures, codes of behaviour, and ethics that are exercised and enforced. The respect for established norms must be practiced by all citizens, starting with parliamentarians.

The road ahead is tough, but there is hope. We simply need to thirst for change and be that change that we want to see today.



What is Advent?

In the Christian church calendar Advent (from Latin adventus, "coming") is a period of preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ at Christmas, and also of preparation for the Second Coming of Christ. In Western churches, Advent begins on the Sunday nearest to November 30th, this year Advent began on Sunday 3rd December.

Unlike the hectic pace of the commercial Christmas season, Advent is a time of peace. Specifically, Advent is a time to quiet our minds and to open our hearts to receive Jesus. It's an opportunity to reflect on what this season is really all about.

Advent symbols

During advent we use a number of symbols to emphasize this time of preparation. Two symbols of note are the purple liturgical colour, a symbol of prayer, penance and sacrifice, and the advent wreath.

The wreath itself, which is made of various evergreens, signifies continuous life. The circle of the wreath, symbolizes the eternity of God, the immortality of the soul, and the everlasting life we find in Christ.

The four candles, one lit on each Sunday, represent the four weeks of Advent.

The first candle, is purple and symbolizes hope. It is sometimes called the "Prophecy Candle" in remembrance of the prophets, especially Isaiah, who foretold the birth of Christ. It represents the expectation felt in anticipation of the coming Messiah.

The second candle, also purple, represents faith. It is called the "Bethlehem Candle" as a reminder of Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem.

The third candle is pink and symbolizes joy and it is called the "Shepherds Candle". The third Sunday of Advent is Gaudete Sunday and is meant to remind us of the joy that the world experienced at the birth of Jesus, as well as the joy that the faithful have reached the midpoint of Advent.

The fourth candle is purple, and marks the final week of prayer and penance as we wait for the birth of our Saviour. This final candle, the "Angels Candle," symbolizes peace. It reminds us of the message of the angels: "Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men."

The white candle, a recent addition, is placed in the middle of the wreath and lit on Christmas Eve. This candle is called the "Christ Candle" and represents the life of Christ. The colour white is for purity—because Christ is our sinless, pure Saviour.

Reflect

We invite you to spend some time of reflection during Advent. You might find the following art based imaginative prayer exercises helpful [week 1](#), [week 2](#), [week 3](#), [week 4](#), [Christmas](#).



ŽHN on accidents and deaths on construction sites

On the 10th and 11th of November, the Justice and Peace Commission organised an international workshop on the theme of '**The changing world of work – a transversal justice issue**'. Alex Grech from the Żgħażgħ Haddiema Nsara was a panellist for the workshop entitled '**Losing their lives whilst making a living – Accidents and deaths on construction sites**'.

Among the several points that Alex raised, he called for better representation of construction workers, an increase in the regulatory powers of the Occupational Health and Safety Authority (OHSA) to pursue legal action against illegal and unsafe construction practices, increase the powers of the Department for Industrial and Employment Relations with respect to the exploitation and abuse of constructions workers and to increase the regulatory powers of the Office of the Commissioner for Standards in Public Life and of the Permanent Commission Against Corruption to monitor the opaque relationship between officials, construction lobbyists and developers.

The Economy of Labour

Natalia Mangion on behalf of ŽHN was invited as a guest on Kelma b'Kelma, a video interview organised by Yes-Europe, focusing on the **economy of labour and workers' rights and conditions**. Natalia Mangion is currently pursuing a Masters degree in Economics at the University of Malta. You can watch the full interview on [Yes-Europe Malta](#) you-tube channel from the end of November.

Building bridges

As part of a continued effort to build bridges with all stakeholders in our society during the month of November ŽHN met with stakeholders in the political scene. In this informal discussions some of our younger members had an opportunity to bring to the fore concerns and anxieties they face as they gradually take on new responsibilities in the world of work and in leading the nation.

