



Pastoral Letter
Ego cógito cogitationes pacis
on the Centenary of the End of World War I

1. *Ego cógito cogitationes pacis*. I think thoughts of peace (Jer. 29:11).
2. On this November 11th 2018 we commemorate the centenary of the signing of the armistice which ended the Great War, the First World War.
3. Divine Providence has made it so that this November 11th falls on a Sunday, and that at the beginning of the Mass celebrated today, we hear God say to us: I think thoughts of peace, and not of affliction.
4. World War I was a conflict which inaugurated a very different kind of warfare and for which soldiers were unprepared. For the first time, battles were fought in trenches, airships (zeppelins) and planes were used, as were tanks, trucks and submarines, machine guns and long range artillery, flame throwers and chemical weapons in the form of poisonous gas.ⁱ All making for warfare much deadlier than had previously been possible.
5. Estimates of casualty numbers for World War I vary to a great extent. When military casualty statistics include combat related deaths as well as military deaths caused by accidents, disease and deaths of prisoners of war, when casualties due to war-caused famine and disease (which constitute most of World War One casualties), the total number of military and civilian casualties in World War I was around 40 million. There were 20 million deaths and 21 million wounded. The total number of deaths includes 9.7 million military personnel and about 10 million civilians. The Allies lost about 5.7 million soldiers while the Central Powers lost about 4 million.ⁱⁱ This makes of the Great War one of the deadliest in human history.
6. It was thought by many, and it was hoped by most, that this massive conflict would be the war to end all wars. We know full well that it has not been so. Indeed, the destabilization of Europe which followed World War One formed the conditions for the outbreak of the Second World War.

7. It is difficult for those of us who have not experienced war either directly or been touched by it personally through knowing someone killed, maimed, or psychologically injured in war to appreciate the devastation and the ravages that war causes. Yet, millions of our contemporaries are living and suffering the consequences of war and conflict this very day.

8. In 2017 alone, 2.9 million new asylum seekers were created as conflicts raged in Syria, Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan.ⁱⁱⁱ That total is the biggest single-year increase since the creation of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1950. It equates to 44,500 new asylum seekers a day and brings the total number worldwide to 68.5 million.

9. Sixty-eight point five million. That is almost twice the population of Canada which is 36.95 million. Take the time to absorb the magnitude of this number.

10. And each figure that makes up that total number is a person, a human being like you and me, a child of God.

11. As we commemorate the passing of 100 years since the signing of peace that ended World War One, as we honour those who fought, those who died, and those who were irrevocably changed, both military and civilian, let us remember that war is still raging.

12. This past summer I was fortunate to see a production of the 2011 opera *Silent Night*.^{iv} This opera tells the story of true events in the trenches on Christmas Eve 1914, the first Christmas Eve of the War. Scottish and French troops, and enemy German troops succeed in overcoming the divide between them and hold a ceasefire to mark Christmas Eve. They come together to celebrate the birth of the Christ-Child, and in so doing they discover their common humanity. In their shared humanity, they transcend the political divisions which have pitted them on opposite sides of a conflict driven by nationalist ambitions.

13. The birth of the Prince of Peace reminds these soldiers, as Saint Paul reminds the Colossians, that “as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved (they have) a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, patience (Col. 3:12). As it was possible for these soldiers on that Christmas Eve 1914, so it is possible for us as well.

14. As we commemorate this important anniversary, let us commit ourselves to do the work of peace, a work which must include efforts to remove the causes of war. Let us commit ourselves to form our own hearts into hearts “of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, patience”, hearts of peace. Let us commit ourselves to pray to the Prince of Peace that hearts bent on violence into hearts of peace. Let us think thoughts of peace.

15. Let us pray: Lord Jesus Christ, who are called the Prince of Peace, who are yourself our peace and reconciliation, who so often said, “Peace to you,” grant us peace. Make all people witnesses of truth, justice, and love. Banish from their hearts whatever might endanger peace. Enlighten our rulers that they may guarantee and defend the great gift of peace. May all peoples of the earth become as siblings. May longed-for peace blossom forth and reign always over us all.^v

Given this 11th day of November, in the Year of Our Lord 2018, the thirteenth of my episcopate,
at Toronto, Ontario.



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ⁱ <http://www.flandersfieldsmusic.com/WWI-statistics.html>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.centre-robert-schuman.org/userfiles/files/REPERES%20%E2%80%93%20module%201-1-1%20-%20explanatory%20notes%20%E2%80%93%20World%20War%20I%20casualties%20%E2%80%93%20EN.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/world-refugee-day-2018-un-conflict-war-famine-syria-myanmar-displaced-stateless-people-a8407401.html>

^{iv} Silent Night by Kevin Puts and Mark Campbell. Presented by the Glimmerglass Festival, Cooperstown, NY.

^v Prayer of Saint John XXIII (adapted). <https://aleteia.org/2018/04/28/a-powerful-prayer-for-peace-in-the-world/>