

# Building Bridges



In his first address to the crowds gathered in St Peter's Square in Rome, Pope Leo XIV shared his vision for the future and emphasised the importance of building bridges. "We have to look together how to be a missionary church, building bridges, dialogue, always open to receiving with open arms for everyone..." He was speaking not only to the church but equally to a world in desperate need of "a disarming and humble and preserving peace."

Building bridges is a necessary tool in order to foster an environment in which peace is enabled to flourish. It is only in a state of peace that human creativity reaches its full potential. As such, 'peace' is a goal desired by everyone, no matter how long or hard the work required to bring this about. Yet building bridges to achieve peace is more often than not complex and requires certain skills from the start. Ask any parent of a two-year-old!

Fundamental to bridge building is the ability to listen to a story objectively; to hear without prejudice the words that are being told and to hold with empathy the feelings that lie behind the words spoken. It is fair to say that sometimes the words verbalised are so abhorrent and traumatising that the common impulse is to reject them. Such rejection needs to be checked by the hearer, however, if the one telling the story is to feel heard and understood. 'I can't believe my child would do such a thing' is a common response of parents to young people receiving a prison sentence. It is a challenge to work through this shock and pain if a necessary bridge is to be built and a resolution achieved. 'I still love my child.'

Reaching out to others who are different from ourselves, be it culture, language, sexual orientation, etc, requires a certain generosity of spirit and a willingness to engage even if at times it means stepping back from those groups with which we have a natural affiliation. Clergy working in multi-faith communities are often at the forefront of experimenting with bridge-building in order for a degree of community cohesion and harmony to exist. Such work is to be lauded, particularly so in some of our more deprived urban areas where tensions can surface very quickly.

Pope Leo has rightly asserted that bridge-building is a walking exercise, not running. The pace might be slow, but being sensitive and paying attention to detail is important. The nuance of the story being told, the impact of the pause and sigh amid the storytelling, emphasising the point being made, is all critical to the narrative. All of this builds the bridge that leads to enduring peace. Our shared responsibility.

God Bless.

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