

Prayer and Social Justice Calendar

January, February, March 2026

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REST FOR THE WEARY BY GIFT AMARACHI OTTAH/ WORLD DAY OF PRAYER



A good way to integrate Catholic Social Teaching into the life of your community is to celebrate some of the exemplary witnesses in humanity's long struggle for peace and justice, the key documents, or global observance days. Schools, parishes and charities could use liturgies, assemblies, INSET days, fundraising, or advocacy campaigns for formation and education.

The list below is not exhaustive but offers some of the key milestones from the liturgical calendar as well as UN and other international days. You might want to add your own dates from the charism of your community, or themes of particular resonance for you.

As we begin 2026, we celebrate the closing of the Jubilee Year and consider what we have learned.

What is the legacy of the Jubilee Year as we turn our attention to the Great Jubilee in 2033, the 2000th anniversary of the Resurrection of the Lord.

You'll find all the papal social encyclicals referenced below at the Vatican website: www.vatican.va. If you enter an encyclical name into your search engines, this website should come up as an option.

1 January 2026

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God; World Day of Peace. An annual celebration by the Catholic Church, dedicated to universal peace, held on 1 January, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. Pope Paul VI established it in 1967, being inspired by the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* of Pope John XXIII. Peace Sunday follows the international day and is

celebrated in England and Wales on the 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, this year on **18 January**. Pax Christi provides resources for parishes families at paxchristi.org.uk.

6 January 2026

The solemnity of the Epiphany. In 2026, the Epiphany falls on a Tuesday, an ideal opportunity for the celebration of Mass in school and to reflect on the themes of gift and gratitude. Today also marks the end of the Jubilee Year, so it's an opportunity to reflect on what's been done, perhaps on your **Jubilee Pledge**, and commit to making your pledge a permanent feature of your mission. You can still add you pledge to the Jubilee Pledge Map at cafod.org.uk/jubilee-schools/jubilee-pledge/jubilee-pledge-map.

19 January 2026

Martin Luther King Day, which falls on the third Monday of January, in honour of Dr King's birthday on 15 January. Martin Luther King was the *de facto* leader of the civil rights movement in mid-twentieth-century America. Inspired by his Christian faith, he was a prophetic witness to justice and nonviolence in the face of systemic racial discrimination. For more information see thekingcenter.org/.

18–25 January 2026

Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity. Division between Christians is still sadly the cause of violence and suspicion. We pray this week for unity among the followers of Christ. Visit the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland website for resources at ctbi.org.uk/.

27 January 2026

Feast of St Angela Merici, who founded the Company of St Ursula (the Ursulines) in Italy in 1535. At a time when one commentator described schools as 'slaughterhouses' due to the extent of the use of corporal punishment, the schools founded by Angela's religious order forbade all corporal punishment. She urged her sisters to be loving to the students, 'Love all your daughters equally and do not show preferences for one more than another because they are all God's children.' Today there are Ursuline schools all over the world.

27 January 2026

Holocaust Memorial Day. We must never forget the horrors inflicted on the Jewish people by the Nazi regime. We commit ourselves anew to stand against anti-Semitism and racial discrimination in all its insidious forms. For resources and information visit www.hmd.org.uk/.

30 January 2026

The anniversary of the death of **Venerable Mary Ward** in England in 1645. Like St Angela Merici, Mary was dedicated to the education of girls in an age when education was mostly denied to them. Living at a time in England of great danger for Catholics, Mary persevered with her vision and on her return to London in 1637 opened free schools for poor girls. She founded the Congregation of Jesus and the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1615, better known as the Loreto Sisters. Like the Ursulines, Mary Ward or Loreto schools can be found today all over the world.

31 January 2026

Feast of St John Bosco. Better known as Don Bosco, a nineteenth-century Italian who dedicated his life to the street children in northern Italy who were suffering from the effects of industrialisation and urbanisation. He founded the Salesians of Don Bosco.

1 February 2026

Racial Justice Day (three Sundays before 1st Sunday of Lent). For information and resources, check www.cbcew.org.uk/.

4 February 2026

International Day of Human Fraternity. In 2020, the United Nations declared 4 February as day to promote and celebrate greater cultural and religious tolerance. For more information visit www.un.org/en/observances/human-fraternity.

8 February 2026

Feast of St Josephine Bakhita (falls on a Sunday in 2026). **International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking.** Almost 50 million people are estimated to be in slavery today, more

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now than ever before. For more information and resources, visit the website of Bakhita House, a project of Caritas Westminster, at caritaswestminster.org.uk/bakhita-house/. For more information on the strategic approach to tackling human trafficking, visit the Santa Marta Group at santamartagroup.org/.

11 February 2026

Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, World Day of the Sick. This day was introduced by Pope John Paul II as a reminder for the Catholic community to pray for the sick and their caregivers. It is an opportunity to raise awareness of health services and the extent to which they are accessible by all.

12 February 2026

Red Hand Day, or the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers. Every year since 2002, this day has raised awareness of the use of child soldiers and urged politicians to commit to ending the use of anybody under the age of 18 in military organisations. See www.redhandday.org/en/.

15 February 2026

Day for the Unemployed. On the Sunday before the 1st Sunday in Lent, the Church turns in prayer and solidarity to those who have no work and considers again the practical expressions of support in the community to help those seeking work not to lose hope.

18 February 2026

Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the season of Lent. During Lent we are called to deepen our relationship with God (prayer), our neighbour (almsgiving), and our common home (fasting). For pastoral notes see the Liturgy Office website at <https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Calendar/Info/background1.shtml#Lent>.

20 February 2026

World Day of Social Justice. In 2007, the United Nations declared that a day to promote and celebrate social justice globally would be held on this day. For details of the theme for the year, visit the UN website at www.un.org/en/observances/social-justice-day.

27 February 2026

Lent Fast Day. For more information visit cafod.org.uk/education/for-teachers/key-dates-for-school-planning.

6 March 2026

The World Day of Prayer is a global ecumenical movement led by Christian women who welcome you to join in prayer and action for peace and justice. More information can be found at worlddayofprayer.net/index.html#/.

22 March 2026

World Water Day. An annual United Nations observance day since 1993 to celebrate water and raise awareness of the two billion people in the world without access to safe water. See the UN website for more details: www.unwater.org/our-work/world-water-day.

24 March 2026

Feast of St Oscar Romero, one of the patron saints of Caritas Internationalis and patron saint of Caritas Social Action Network. Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador, was assassinated while saying Mass on this day in 1980. He was a prophetic voice for justice and human dignity in El Salvador during the years of the military dictatorship. He embodies the preferential option for the poor. For more information and a bank of resources visit www.romerotrust.org.uk/.

26 March 2026

Anniversary of the publication in 1967 of *Populorum Progressio* ('On the Development of Peoples') by Pope Paul VI. A good day to revisit this groundbreaking document in the school or parish and discuss some of its key passages. Why not try paragraph 21 on truly human conditions, or have a look at the radical vision for the common good in paragraph 24? You'll find the text on the Vatican website.

Raymond Friel OBE is CEO of Caritas Social Action Network. His latest book, God's Story: The Vision, Values and Mission of a Catholic School in the Twenty-first Century, is available from Redemptorist Publications. You can contact Raymond and order his books through his website, www.raymondfriel.com.