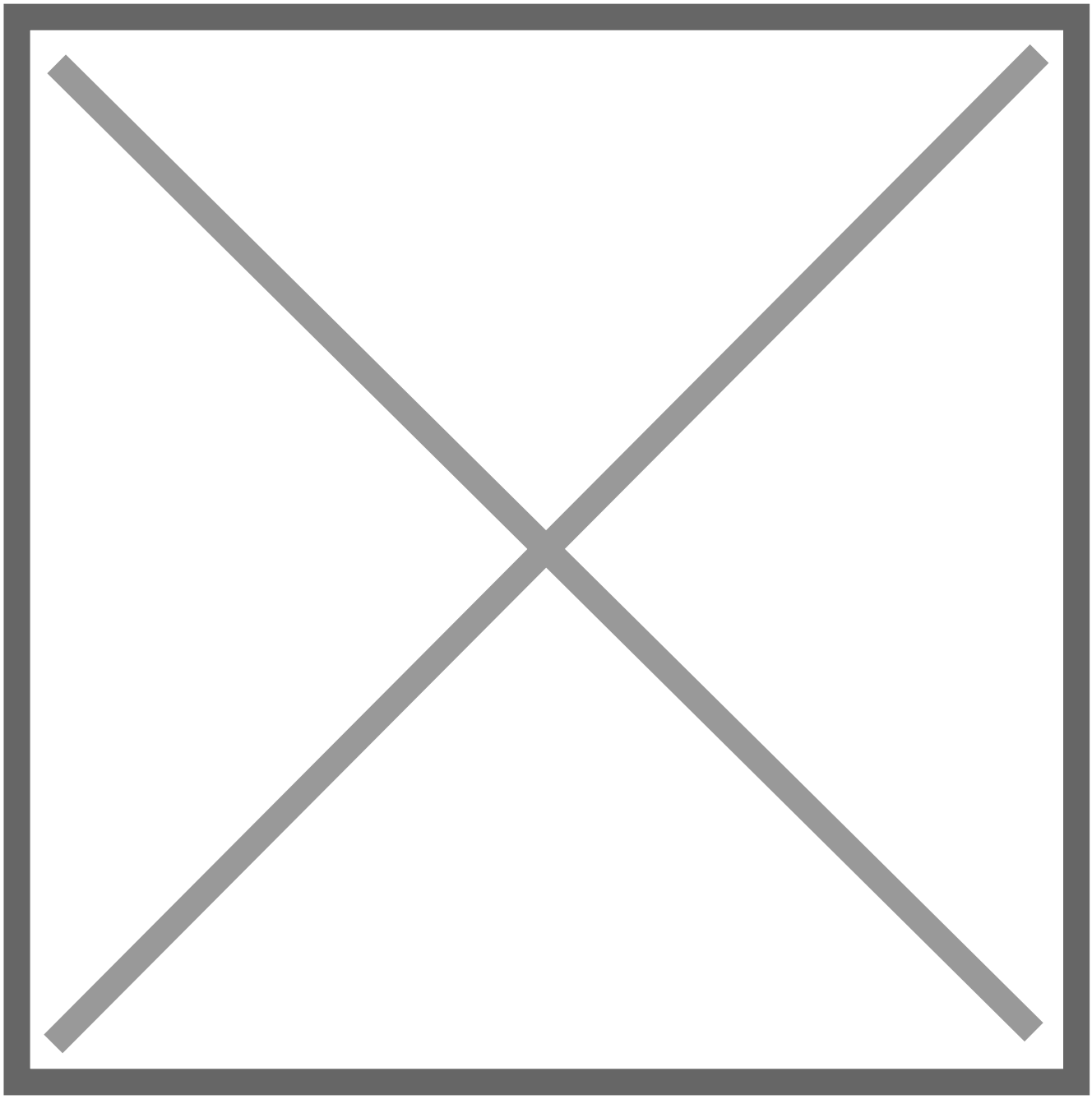
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Pope Leo XIV greets a child from the popemobile as he rides around St. Peter's Square at the Vatican before his weekly general audience Dec. 17, 2025. In his message for World Peace Day, the pope encouraged everyone to contribute to peace by being kind. "Goodness is disarming. Perhaps this is why God became a child," he wrote. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

by Cindy Wooden, Catholic News Service

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The "confrontational" tone dominating both global and national politics is "deepening instability and unpredictability day by day," Pope Leo XIV wrote in his message for World Peace Day.

"It is no coincidence that repeated calls to increase military spending, and the choices that follow, are presented by many government leaders as a justified response to external threats," he wrote in the message for the Jan. 1 observance.

But peace must be protected and cultivated, Leo said. "Even when it is endangered within us and around us, like a small flame threatened by a storm, we must protect it."

Throughout the coming year, Leo will give visiting heads of state signed copies of his message, which was released by the Vatican Dec. 18, and Vatican ambassadors will distribute it to government leaders in the countries where they serve.

Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, presented the message at a Vatican news conference.

"In some ways we have been beaten into accepting the logic of war, the logic of armaments, the logic of enemies," the cardinal said. Leo's message recognizes that "the first triumph of the logic of war is that we give up our hope for peace."

"I am not a soldier, I have never been a soldier," the cardinal said, but "even a soldier can be comforted" by Leo's appeal to cultivate "peace in his heart and in his relationships and in his prayer and in his aspirations."

While the message "does not diminish in any way the horrors that we are surrounded with," he said, "it puts an enormous part of the responsibility on ourselves."

The theme of the pope's message, "Peace be with you all: Towards an 'unarmed and disarming' peace," begins with the first words he said to the crowd in St. Peter's Square May 8, the night of his election.

> "Unfortunately, it has become increasingly common to drag the language of faith into political battles, to bless nationalism, and to justify violence and armed struggle in the name of religion," the pope wrote in his message for World Peace Day. "Believers must actively refute, above all by the witness of their lives, these forms of blasphemy that profane the holy name of God."
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Leo wrote in the message that he and all religious leaders have an obligation to teach and preach against "the growing temptation to weaponize even thoughts and words" and to condemn the use of religion to justify violence and exaggerated forms of nationalism.

"Unfortunately, it has become increasingly common to drag the language of faith into political battles, to bless nationalism, and to justify violence and armed struggle in the name of religion," the pope wrote.

"Believers must actively refute, above all by the witness of their lives, these forms of blasphemy that profane the holy name of God," Leo said.

What is needed instead, he said, is prayer, spirituality and ecumenical and interreligious dialogue "as paths of peace and as languages of encounter within traditions and cultures."

The message echoed what Leo had told reporters Dec. 2 after meeting Christian, Muslim and Druze leaders in Turkey and Lebanon during his first foreign trip: "The more we can promote authentic unity and understanding, respect and human relationships of friendship and dialogue in the world, the greater possibility there is that we will put aside the arms of war, that we will leave aside the distrust, the hatred, the animosity that has so often been built up and that we will find ways to

come together and be able to promote authentic peace and justice throughout the world."

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The first step in sowing peace, the pope wrote, is to believe that peace is possible and that all people desire it.

"When we treat peace as a distant ideal," he wrote, "we cease to be scandalized when it is denied, or even when war is waged in its name."

"When peace is not a reality that is lived, cultivated and protected, then aggression spreads into domestic and public life," he said. When that happens, "it could even be considered a fault not to be sufficiently prepared for war, not to react to attacks, and not to return violence for violence."

Statistics show that is already happening, the pope said.

Global military expenditures "increased by 9.4% in 2024 compared to the previous year, confirming the trend of the last ten years and reaching a total of $2718 billion — or 2.5% of global GDP," he wrote, citing studies by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

Leo also decried a shift in education and in the media that instead of focusing on achievements in peacemaking and diplomacy since World War II and on remembering with horror just how many people died in that war, "we now see communication campaigns and educational programs — at schools, universities and in the media — that spread a perception of threats and promote only an armed notion of defense and security."

That shift becomes especially frightening given advancements in weapons technology, particularly the development of drones, robots and other automated lethal weapons systems that can be controlled by artificial intelligence.

"There is even a growing tendency among political and military leaders to shirk responsibility, as decisions about life and death are increasingly 'delegated' to machines," he wrote.

Leo called on Christians and all people of goodwill to join forces "to contribute to a disarming peace, a peace born of openness and evangelical humility."

"Goodness is disarming," he wrote. "Perhaps this is why God became a child."

Leo prayed that as the Jubilee Year draws to a close, its legacy would be a "disarmament of heart, mind and life."

This story appears in the **Pope Leo XIV** feature series. View the full series.