

EDUCATION FOR PEACE

Speech of His Eminence, Peter Ebere Cardinal Okpaleke at the All School Mass at the Memorial Coliseum, Fort Wayne, October 20, 2026

I am happy to be here and to share the Eucharist with all of you – Bishop Rhoades, the priests, teachers and pupils/students at your All School Mass. I thank God who made this possible. I thank you, dear Bishop Rhoades, for all that the Lord is doing through you in this diocese. I thank all the priests, the teachers, the schools management, the parents of these children, although they are not here, and I thank you, my dear children.

Being here this morning reminds me of what we do back home in the Catholic Diocese of Ekwulobia. Each pastor celebrates mass for the pupils and students at the beginning of every academic session. I personally meet with children every year. They come from all over the diocese. We share the Eucharist and then have an interactive session. Children ask whatever questions they have and share their concerns regarding their families, schools and life in general. It is usually enriching and I look forward to this meeting with the children of my diocese.

There is a saying in Igbo, my native tongue, which underlines the fact that without formation, without education, the human being becomes a problem for himself or herself, the family and society at large. It is education, one that is balanced, which helps a human baby become a person in the society.

That is why I thank the teachers in a special way. You contribute greatly in helping children become more human. Some parents get stressed out taking care of the two or three children in their family. But in the school, and for many hours, you have many children you keep an eye on. And you do this very well. Thank you, teachers! We also thank the parents who are the first teachers and remain teachers of their children.

In a special way, I want to draw your attention to something that you already know. There is so much conflict in the world today. Wars are being fought in many parts of the world. Your experience of war here in the United States may be limited to video games. But that is a reality

for many people including children in many parts of the world. However, and surely, you experience wars fought with nasty words. Some children are mean to others, saying unkind things, and trying to hurt and keep them miserable. Such people may be very bright pupils and students, passing the examinations in flying colours. But if they do not learn to care for, feel with and respect others, they may in adult life, remain thorns in the flesh of others.

That is why I want to remind you that education, above all, Catholic education, is geared towards shaping us to become more the image of Christ, who is the prince of peace. This reminds me that back home, we have a way of greeting children, just as you give “High Five!” as an informal way of greeting. Myself, the priest, or the teacher or animator calls out: “Children, Children!” And they respond: “Friends of Jesus.” Then the greeter intones again, “Friends of Jesus” and they respond: “children children!” That is a little but powerful way of projecting friendship with Jesus Christ as the goal of their formation.

I see a similar thing communicated in the way you are dressed. By dressing like saints, you are showing your aspiration to become saints. This is cool.

Finally, I want to enjoin on the teachers and parents to keep emphasising peace as one of the goals of education. Let us remember that after his election on May 8, 2025, Pope Leo XIV greeted all gathered at St. Peter’s Square Rome in the words of the resurrected Christ: “Peace be with You!” Since then, the Holy Father keeps coming back to and drawing the attention of the whole world, including our schools, to peace; peace not as the world gives, but as only Christ gives.

Let me therefore conclude in those same words of Jesus: Peace be with you!