

Ecumenical Interfaith Committee Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity



MOST FRANCISCAN JESUIT, POPE FRANCIS SET THE BAR HIGH

by Donna Hollis, OFS, National Councilor

What was Pope Francis thinking when he took on the name of St. Francis of Assisi? I believe he was capturing what it was he wanted to do as a world leader, by way of St. Francis' memory, to energize the legacy as a key to a Christian response in the midst of a stressed and hurting world. When Pope Francis signed the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* at the tomb of St. Francis what was he saying? "Reawaken the spiritual energy that can contribute to the betterment of society" (paragraph 266).

In his opening remarks in the encyclical, Pope Francis, states, "This saint of fraternal love, simplicity and joy, who inspired me to write the encyclical *Laudato Si*, prompts me once more to devote this new encyclical to fraternity and social friendship.... Wherever he went, he sowed seeds of peace and walked alongside the poor, the abandoned, the infirm and the outcast, the least of his brothers and sisters" (paragraph 2).

Pope Francis sets the bar high for the Church and for all people of good will to understand and experience a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood in the world. Our Ecumenical Franciscan family has been one of fraternal dialogue and respect for one another's beliefs, working together to build harmony.

Dialogue is far more than simple diplomacy. "The different religions, based on their respect for each human person as a creature called to be a child of God, contribute significantly to building fraternity and defending justice in society. Dialogue between the followers of different religions does not take place simply for the sake of diplomacy, consideration or tolerance. In the words of the Bishops of India, 'the goal of dialogue is to establish friendship. Peace,

harmony, and to share spiritual and moral values and experiences in a spirit of truth and love" (paragraph 271).

In Fraternal life we are called to reach out to all people in open dialogue and with an open heart, which enriches our own faith. How do we embrace harmony with all people?

To embrace that harmony, let's look at religious freedom. "One fundamental human right must not be forgotten in the journey towards fraternity and peace. It is religious freedom for believers of all religions. That freedom proclaims that we can 'build harmony and understanding between different cultures and religions. It also testifies to the fact that, since the important things we share are so many, it is possible to find a means of serene, ordered and peaceful coexistence, accepting our differences and rejoicing that, as children of the one God, we are all brothers and sisters'" (paragraph 279).

In what way do we as Catholics stay firmly rooted in our own faith while respecting others in the good that they do? "...[W]e ask God to strengthen unity within the Church, a unity enriched by differences reconciled by the working of the spirit. For 'in the one spirit we were all baptized into one body' (I Cor. 12:13), in which each member has his or her distinctive contribution to make. As St. Augustine said, 'the ear sees through the eye, and the eye hears through the ear.' It is also urgent to continue to bear witness to the journey of encounter between the different Christian confessions. We cannot forget Christ's desire 'that they may all be one' (John 17:21). Hearing his call, we recognize with sorrow that the process of globalization still lacks the prophetic and spiritual contribution of

unity among Christians. This notwithstanding, ‘even as we make this journey towards full communion, we already have the duty to offer common witness to the love of God for all people by working together in the service of humanity’” (paragraph 280).

Our Church has always shown us what it means to be catholic with regards to universal love. Even though I came from a Protestant background, I know this to be true. You might say I was raised ‘ecumenical’ because of my seeking out many different spiritualities and denominations along the way. In each encounter, I came away with a different part of the whole picture of who and what “God” is all about. My calling to become a Secular Franciscan is what led me to the Catholic Church. After watching the movie, “Brother Son, Sister Moon” in a movie theater, a fire was lit within me that became a blaze as I pursued my calling. This path led me to a Secular Franciscan Community that was living out the dream that I so craved. It was then I realized it would lead me into the Catholic Church. Because of the zeal to become a Franciscan, I stepped through a door I would not have entered so willingly if it were not for my calling. Through the process of becoming Catholic later in life, I found a richness that put all the pieces together. God sees within our hearts who we truly are and makes it possible for us to find Him already there.

This time during the pandemic has made us realize that we are all “in this together” and we

have found common ground in caring for one another. We realize more deeply the importance of our family and friends and how we need each other and the faith we embrace. We need to see the human family as “us,” not “them.”

Pope Francis concludes Fratelli Tutti with this thought: “Each one of us is called to be an artisan of peace, by uniting and not dividing, by extinguishing hatred and not holding on to it, by opening paths of dialogue and not by constructing new walls” (paragraph 284).

May we recognize the goodness in all people.

We are called to restore hope and bring about renewal, becoming a culture of encounter as described in Pope Francis’ encyclical.

Let us continue to be a people of light, bringing peace to unite a hurting world with healing words of comfort and acts of kindness; accepting all as children of God.



An Ecumenical Christian Prayer

Given in Assisi, at the tomb of Saint Francis, on 3 October, Vigil of the Feast of the Saint, in the year 2020, the eighth year of my Pontificate.

**O God, Trinity of love,
From the profound communion of your divine
life,
Pour out upon us a torrent of fraternal love.
Grant us the love reflected in the actions of
Jesus,
In his family of Nazareth,
And in the early Christian community.**

**Grant that we Christians may live the Gospel,
Discovering Christ in each human being,
Recognizing him crucified**

In the sufferings of the abandoned

**And forgotten of our world,
And risen in each brother or sister
Who makes a new start.**

**Come, Holy Spirit, show us your beauty,
Reflected in all the peoples of the earth,
So that we may discover anew
That all are important and all are necessary,
Different faces of the one humanity
That God so loves. Amen.**