

Saint Katharine Drexel Region

Secular Franciscan Order (USA)

Justice, Peace, & the Integrity of Creation

October 2020



“Fear and resentment can easily lead to viewing punishment in a vindictive and even cruel way, rather than as part of a process of healing and reintegration into society. Nowadays, ‘in some political sectors and certain media, public and private violence and revenge are incited, not only against those responsible for committing crimes, but also against those suspected, whether proven or not, of breaking the law... There is at times a tendency to deliberately fabricate enemies: stereotyped figures who represent all the characteristics that society perceives or interprets as threatening. The mechanisms that form these images are the same that allowed the spread of racist ideas in their time.’ (cf. Address to Delegates of the International Association of Penal Law, 23 October 2014) This has made all the more dangerous the growing practice in some countries of resorting to preventive custody, imprisonment without trial and especially the death penalty.”

Pope Francis (Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, 266)

JPIC Reflection

Traditionally, the month of October is **“Respect Life Month.”** This year’s theme is so very Franciscan: **Live the Gospel of Life!** In our OFS Rule (Chapter 2), there are clear expectations of how we are to live. How often do we revisit our call to live that kind of life?

The inspiration for this month’s newsletter comes from two sources:

- Pope Francis’ new encyclical *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship*, signed in Assisi on the Transitus of St. Francis (October 3rd);
- Archbishop Nelson J. Pérez, Chairperson of the USCCB Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church and their quarterly newsletter *One Church, Many Cultures: The Good News of Cultural Diversity*.

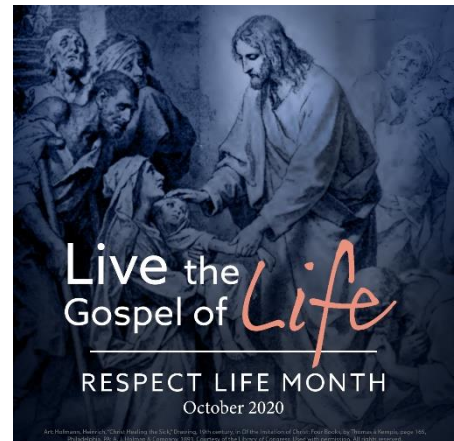
The Church is on a journey during *Laudato Si’* Year to discover new ways of forming fraternal relationships that will transform how we care for the poor and for the earth. Both the new encyclical and the USCCB quarterly newsletter provided insights into pastoral issues that insist upon genuine conversion to follow Christ in how we relate to other people.

At the beginning of this newsletter there is a quote from Pope Francis’ new encyclical regarding the death penalty. It is a pro-life topic of great importance in the US, where 28 states (including PA) still have legal executions. Seven of those states have executed 36 people in the past two years (12 in TX alone).

This month, let us take a closer look at:

- The encyclical *Fratelli Tutti’s* call for universal fraternity;
- Prison ministry and the death penalty;
- United Nations Day (October 24th) and multilateralism toward Sustainable Development Goals.

Much of what we read is only “information” unless we take time to use it for formation with the Gospel as our guide. Transformation then occurs when we become more deliberate with our actions as Christians.



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Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship

In the opening paragraphs of the encyclical, Pope Francis highlights how St. Francis demonstrated an openness of heart in meeting with the sultan at Damietta, quoting from the *Earlier Rule of St. Francis* about how his followers were to avoid conflict and be subject to others for God's sake. Since becoming pope in March 2013, Pope Francis has made "fraternity" a key theme in more than seven years of messages. In 2019, he met with Muslim Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb of the United Arab Emirates. Together, they issued the:

[*Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*](#) (Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019)

Pope Francis hopes that this encyclical will lead to further reflection and an invitation to dialogue among all people of good will. Our fraternities can use the encyclical for formation. The encyclical has eight chapters:

1. Dark Clouds over a Closed World;
2. A Stranger on the Road;
3. Envisaging & Engendering an Open World;
4. A Heart Open to the Whole World;
5. A Better Kind of Politics;
6. Dialogue & Friendship in Society;
7. Paths of Renewed Encounter (includes discussion on the death penalty);
8. Religions at the Service of Fraternity.

In expressing his gratitude to the Holy Father for the encyclical, Archbishop Pérez noted, *"This profound and beautiful teaching document emphasizes that we are all brothers and sisters made in the image and likeness of God. This work deserves careful attention from all people of good will. Pope Francis' call for us to work in harmony to build and promote a just global society is one that resonates loudly within the human spirit regardless of faith tradition."*

One Church, Many Cultures: The Good News of Cultural Diversity ([Spring Summer 2020](#))

In the current issue of this USCCB Cultural Diversity in the Church newsletter, Mar Muñoz-Visoso (Executive Director) wrote that the topic of prison ministry had been planned long before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Considering the effect of isolation and affliction prevalent across the US, she shared: *"For a minute we hesitated: Was this the right topic for this moment? Then, we read and watched the very moving meditations for the [Way of the Cross](#) on Good Friday at St. Peter's Square in the Vatican. And learned how the Holy Father had entrusted a prison ministry in Italy with the task of gathering the reflections for each Station. They included prisoners serving long sentences, teachers working with prisoners, families whose relatives were killed by an inmate, and even a prison guard who is also a deacon. And we decided that, yes, this was the right topic and the right time to bring attention to this issue. In fact, it seems providential that we are bringing it to you when we have been forced to take a pause from the external world and limit our 'in person' social interaction."*

For many years, the USCCB has promoted justice for the incarcerated through a vision of [restorative justice](#). As Secular Franciscans, why should we be interested in this? The newsletter gives these sobering statistics:

- The U.S. has only 5% of the world's population, but we house 25% of the world's prisoners;
- Since 1970, our incarcerated population increased by 700%;
- About 2.3 million people are in prison today.

Death Penalty in the USA (<https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/>)

The Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church highlighted the inconsistencies across states that reinstated the death penalty in 1976 (execution is still legal in 28 states and the federal government). There are facts that should disturb us on this respect life issue:

- As of January 1, 2020, there were 2,620 people on death row;
- PA is considered a moratorium state, where it is legal to execute, but none have taken place. It took years to pass the legislation to abolish the death penalty in NJ (2007) and DE (2016);

- Since the Supreme Court reinstated the states' right to execute in 1976, 1,516 people have been killed;
- Since 1973, there have been 170 death row exonerations (29 just from FL);
- Between 1976 and 2005, 22 people were executed who had committed crimes as juveniles (the Supreme Court ruled such executions unconstitutional on March 1, 2005);
- Despite pleas for mercy from Pope Francis and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops for mercy, the first federal execution since 2003 took place in July 2020, followed quickly by six more, with two more scheduled before the end of the year (only the president can pardon a federal execution);
- There have been 14 executions in the US so far in 2020: federal government (7), TX (3), AL (1), GA (1), MO (1), and TN (1). There were no executions in the Northeast for the past two years.

Restorative Justice

There are many good Catholic resources available to take action for restorative justice. Their ministries embrace victims, offenders, families, and the communities affected by crime to work for justice and healing. Catholic Mobilizing Network is a national organization that mobilizes Catholics and all people of goodwill to value life over death, to end the use of the death penalty, to transform the U.S. criminal justice system from punitive to restorative, and to build capacity in U.S. society to engage in restorative practices. Through education, advocacy, and prayer, and based on the Gospel value that every human is created in the image and likeness of God, CMN expresses the fundamental belief that all those who have caused or been impacted by crime should be treated with dignity.

<https://catholicsmobilizing.org/>

FAITH & ACTION FIRST FRIDAYS (Catholic Mobilizing Network Prayer Resource)

Fridays hold special significance in the Catholic tradition. Christ was crucified on a Friday, and first Friday devotions have been observed for hundreds of years. At the center of these devotions is the recognition that people desire to draw closer to and learn from the Sacred Heart of Christ, which is full of love and mercy for humanity. Catholic Mobilizing Network (CMN) created **Faith & Action First Fridays** as a way to allow Christ's mercy to transform our broken criminal legal system and eradicate the use of capital punishment. On the first Friday of each month, CMN will feature a new selection of timely and impactful resources for education, advocacy, and prayer. <https://catholicsmobilizing.salsalabs.org/first-fridays-signup/index.html>

Racism--Facebook Post from Archbishop Nelson Pérez (Archbishop of Philadelphia)

"Sisters and brothers in Christ, last evening (October 5th), the Religious Leaders Council of Greater Philadelphia, of which I'm a co-convenor, held an online prayer service as we draw upon the rich resources of our religious traditions to lament and confess the sin of racism and to commit ourselves to the sacred work of dismantling racism and constructing a just society. I had recorded a Prayer of Intercession, which was played during the recording, and Monsignor Michael J. Carroll who served as Director of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs from 2008-2012, represented the Archdiocese during the livestream Zoom portion of last night's program. You can watch it in its entirety at the @Interfaith-Philadelphia Facebook page. May God bless you."

On their website, *Catholic Philly* noted that the archdiocese is one of 30 member communities that represent 2 million people of various faith traditions throughout the greater Philadelphia area. During the prayer service, Imam Quaiser Abdullah of Masjid Quba then recited the Al-Fatihah, the first chapter of the Quran, which he described as "a call to mankind to reflect on our Creator and on our relationship to him." After additional prayers and a slideshow of images from some of the council's 83 participating organizations, Rabbi Eric Yanoff of Temple Adath Israel in Merion Station recited *Ahot Ketana* ("Little Sister"). The text of the 13th-century prayer, which is sung by some communities at the beginning of the Jewish year, calls for the past year with its curses to come to an end. Rabbi Yanoff prayed: "May this new year, this new time into which we venture forth, be a time of blessing – of togetherness and support for one another, across races and creeds throughout our community." Let us add our fraternal voices to these prayers for unity and respect!

United Nations Day (October 24, 2020)



When people gather to discuss serious issues sometimes, such as poverty, health, education, social services, environment, politics, racism, conflict, just legislation, labor, sustainable development, and religious freedom, among many others, people may remark: “Well, we can’t solve global hunger. What can we do?” For 75 years now, the United Nations has used multilateralism to approach those kinds of global topics. This is an anniversary year.

From the UN website: *“The United Nations was founded in 1945 to support collective action to realize peace, development and human rights for all. The **UN75 initiative** seeks to spark dialogue and action on how we can build a better world despite the many challenges we face. The UN is marking its 75th anniversary at a time of great disruption for the world, compounded by an unprecedented global health crisis with severe economic and social impacts. Will we emerge stronger and better equipped to work together? Or will distrust and isolation grow further? 2020 must be a year of dialogue, when we come together to discuss our priorities as a human family, and how we can build a better future for all.”*

On September 25th, Pope Francis delivered a [video message](#) to the United Nations strongly urging the organization to serve as a sign of unity among States and to be an instrument of service to the entire human family. In his address, the Holy Father emphasized how important **solidarity** (one of the seven themes of Catholic social teaching) was in the face of a global pandemic. Discussing the prevalence of a “throwaway culture,” Pope Francis raised concern about abuses of fundamental human rights and the lack of attention to humanitarian crises. Without mincing words, he expressed disappointment that the international community had not honored its promises of five years ago to make progress on 17 sustainable development goals and to follow through on the Paris Climate Accord. How do we follow the global issues and participate in change for the common good? In order for our nation to be the bridge-builder between peoples that the Holy Father described, we must insist that the US be a world champion of the dignity of all human beings.

Conclusion

During Respect Life Month, we have a new encyclical available to open our eyes and ears to new possibilities in relationships. USCCB’s Cultural Diversity in the Church Committee focused our attention on racism and restorative justice as respect life issues. Our actions for JPIC are rooted in the Gospel, but they require diligent attention so that we are in an ongoing state of conversion and reconciliation—with God and one another.

A PRAYER TO RESPECT HUMAN LIFE

God Eternal Father,

You are the Living God.

Life is who you are, Life is what you love,

Life is what you breathe.

Creation was made to house life; Life is what you give.

Human life is your most beloved, and what you most affirmed when you sent your Eternal Son to take our flesh, die our death, and rise again glorious.

Help us be a people of life—a Church that can do no other than love what you so mightily love, and defend what your Son so willingly died and rose to defend.

Amen.



-Most Reverend Daniel E. Flores, Bishop of Brownsville, Texas and Episcopal Advisor to Catholic Mobilizing Network