

LIVING FRATERNITY

Theme: Dark Clouds over a Closed World ...

In this month of November 2021, we offer the Chapter 1 of the Fratelli Tutti Study Guide prepared by Fr. Pat McCloskey, OFM. The presentation of the first chapter of this encyclical gives us a guide to studying its content. The author for this is Caryn Crook, OFS, Vocation Minister for Sisters of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities.

Good reflection and study to everyone

Recall: Our monthly meeting should favour *an encounter with Christ*. A spirit of prayer heralds a good encounter, and a good preparation promotes communal experience.

NOVEMBER 2021 MONTHLY MEETING

Opening of the meeting if it happens

The members can offer suggestions for a song. After the chosen song, the prayer according to the Ritual or one chosen by the fraternity starts the meeting.

Introduction

This guide serves as an overview to the chapter featured but cannot in the space available do justice to the richness of each chapter. The person animating the meeting should make sure that each member has a copy of Chapter 1 of the encyclical letter. If possible the copy should be distributed before the meeting so that the fraternity members can do a first reading of its contents, thus avoiding reading during the meeting.

A Word about Inclusive Language

The announcement that the Holy Father was going to Assisi to sign a new encyclical on social relationships caused some people to applaud. When we learned that the encyclical would be known as *Fratelli Tutti*, much of that applause died out.

As we go forward, we Franciscans share a deep concern about inclusive language and the role of women in the Church while also sharing the urgent plea of this letter from Pope Francis. Every word has a denotation, a precise definition, which we can find in dictionaries; however, it also has a connotation, a commonly accepted meaning, even some emotional impact.

For this reason, the same word can evoke feelings of joy and security in one person while causing someone else to feel threatened or repulsed. In any conversation or dialogue, both parties need not only to listen to the words, but also to delve into what the other is saying. I personally find it encouraging that the English translators of this encyclical show some sensitivity to the issue by leaving the incipit in Italian.

Summary of Chapter 1

St. Francis' Canticle of Creatures sings "Praised be You, my Lord, through all your creatures..." Together we praise God in our own voices and God hears it as one song. Pope Francis calls us to remember that all peoples have a common father and therefore we are all brothers and sisters. But today, there are many trends that hinder fraternity. Our human family is becoming more divided, more isolated, more fearful, and more selfish in spite of more technology that is supposed to bring us together. Our faith is one of hope and there is much hope for stronger universal fraternity if we do our part in embracing the dignity of all human persons.

The shared dream of unity St. Francis sang over 800 years ago is fading. Extremism and aggressive nationalism are on the rise fomenting a feeling of "us versus them." A lack of appreciation for history opens up one to be influenced by divisive ideologies furthering the breakdown of unity increasing despair which increases polarization. Despair leads to a throwaway where the value of created things is secondary to selfish greed. The COVID-19 pandemic calls us to unite as a global community.

Communication is key in fostering fraternity. Digital connectivity helps us to communicate with people all over the world. The anonymity of social media fosters the breakdown of responsible communication and hinders privacy which increases alienation. Entertainment is laughing at a person's misfortunes or mishaps with no regard for their dignity.

True dialogue centered in reality is needed to build wisdom which fosters unity. Listening to one another helps us to truly listen to God's voice. Our faith always calls us back to hope for "God continues to sow abundant seeds of goodness in our human family," Pope Francis wrote. Let us reflect on how we can foster unity in our homes, in our communities and in our world.

Quotes from Chapter 1

- In this world that races ahead, yet lacks a shared roadmap, we increasingly sense that "the gap between concern for one's personal well-being and the prosperity of the larger human family seems to be stretching to the point of complete division between individuals and human community (31).
- There is a problem when doubts and fears condition our way of thinking and acting to the point of making us intolerant, closed and perhaps even without realizing it, racist (41).
- Together, we can seek the truth in dialogue, in relaxed conversation or in passionate debate. To do so calls for perseverance; it entails moments of silence and suffering, yet it can patiently embrace the broader experience of individuals and peoples (50).

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

Time should be allocated for each question presented to ensure that everyone can share their thoughts.

1. What trends listed by Pope Francis in Chapter 1 resonate with you? Which trend is God calling you to address in your own attitudes and actions?
2. St. Clare's prayer style of Gaze, Consider, Contemplate, and Imitate helps us to respond with love and not react out of anger. In this time of political and religious division, especially on social media, how is God calling you to be an instrument of peace and unity in our world?
3. Wisdom is readily perceived by those who love her and found by those who seek her. (Wisdom 6:12) What role does wisdom play in building fraternity and hope in our world?

Biblical Reflection:

Read the texts of Sunday or of the day, or the preceding or following day of the meeting.

- Take a moment of reflection; then underline words or inspiring phrases ...
- Share your thoughts on the gospel: a) How can it be integrated in our life

Linking points from the Study Guide to the Rule and the General Constitutions

While preparing this document, we found two articles from our Rule that have a link to this study. Let us look at the articles 13 and 18 from Chapter II, the Way of Life and the Apostolic Activity.

Rule

Article 13

As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son, the first-born of many brothers and sisters, so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ.

A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.

Article 18

Moreover they should respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, which «bear the imprint of the Most High,» and they should strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship.

General Constitutions

Article 18.2

They should deepen the true foundation of universal kinship and create a spirit of welcome and an atmosphere of fraternity everywhere. They should firmly commit themselves to oppose every form of exploitation, discrimination, and exclusion and against every attitude of indifference in relation to others.

Article 18.3

They should work together with movements which promote the building of fraternity among peoples; they should be committed to " create worthy conditions of life " for all and work for freedom of all people.

Article 18.4

Following the example of Francis, patron of ecologists, they should actively put forward initiatives that care for creation and should work with others in efforts that both put a stop to polluting and degrading nature and also establish circumstances of living and environment which should not be a threat to the human person.

Can you see the link to the chapter in the Rule and the General Constitutions? Name a few ...

Life-Objective:

In this month of November 2021, let us continue praying for the doctors, nursing personnel and all the people who remain in service.

May their devotion inspire thankfulness in us and may we not hesitate in expressing it to them. Let us pray particularly for our members and our families who have suffered during the pandemic. May God give them health and strength.

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Events and Information from the Church and the Order

Remind the members of regional and local activities.

Pray for the International Chapter which is being held presently in Rome. The participants will be working with *Instrumentum Laboris* document that we all looked at and sent through our International Councilor, Michel David, to the CIOFS in Rome.

At Home

Take the copy of chapter 1 you received and read it over again.