

ON
FRATERNITY
and SOCIAL
FRIENDSHIP

GROUP READING GUIDE

to POPE FRANCIS'
Fratelli Tutti

BILL HUEBSCH



TWENTY-THIRD
PUBLICATIONS

twentythirdpublications.com



NOVALIS

SESSION ONE

The Introduction and Chapter One of the Encyclical

Introduction

1] St. Francis of Assisi taught his brothers and sisters (and all of us!) to live with a love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance. He taught us to love as much when distant from each other as when we are near. **2]** He has inspired me to write this letter to the world in which I will speak about fraternity and social friendship. Like Francis, I want us all to sow seeds of peace. I want us to walk alongside the poor, the abandoned, the infirm, and the outcast.

3] One time, St Francis expressed how open his heart was. He made a dangerous and challenging journey during the Crusades to visit a Muslim leader in Egypt. He reached out in peace and love during a time when Muslims and Christians were enemies. Extraordinary! **4]** Francis didn't insist on doctrine, but "he simply spread the love of God."

5 I've always been committed to social friendship as the basis of peace and cooperation for good. In preparing these pages, I am encouraged by the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, whom I met in Abu Dhabi recently. As a result of our dialogue there, we co-published a statement calling for more generous social friendship and solidarity among people. **6**] Building on that joint statement, I wish to contribute to the continued reflection of leaders in today's world, and I hope people will respond with a new vision of fraternity and social friendship. I'm writing from my own Christian beliefs, but I have tried to include all people of good will.

7 As I was writing this, the Covid-19 pandemic emerged. "Aside from the different ways that various countries responded to the crisis, their inability to work together became quite evident." This crisis has gripped the world, and the response of various nations has demonstrated our great need to join together in sisterhood and brotherhood. "Anyone who thinks that the only lesson to be learned was the need to improve what we were already doing, or to refine existing systems and regulations, is denying reality." **8**] I want to help the world acknowledge the dignity of every person on our planet. I want us to dream as a human family of strong solidarity among everyone. "No one can face life in isolation.... We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead."

Chapter One: Dark Clouds Over a Closed World

9 Let me name some trends in our world today that hinder the growth of fraternity and social friendship.

SHATTERED DREAMS

10 It seemed for a while that the world had learned a lesson from the many wars and disasters of recent memory. For example, we saw the

European Union as a way to work together and avoid war, and it has been succeeding. Likewise, in Latin America, nations took steps to cooperate more fully.

11] But today we see a regression in this regard. Old ways of thinking are emerging again. We thought these ways of thinking had come to an end. Hence, extremism, short-sightedness, and aggressive nationalism are replacing cooperation. We are in danger of losing our progress. Goodness doesn't last forever; we must build it up continuously. **12]** Furthermore, the global cooperation we do see results mainly to make the rich wealthier on the backs of the poor. We're closer as neighbors, it is true, but that doesn't make us sisters and brothers.

No sense of history

13] We do not teach the lessons of history. Therefore, many people have the idea that we can consume as much as we wish, no matter the cost to the environment or the poverty this creates. **14]** One way in which leaders weaken the social bonds that have kept us together historically is to empty words of their meaning. What does democracy mean today? Freedom? Justice? What is true, and what is false?

LACKING A PLAN FOR EVERYONE

15] "The best way to dominate and gain control over people is to spread despair and discouragement..." Such leaders stir up fear by using extremism and polarization, as though we are pitched in a fight against each other. They divide us in order to dominate and stay in power. **16]** In this context, how can we see others as sisters and brothers? **17]** We need to think of ourselves as one human family sharing a common home.

A throwaway world

18] We have become wasteful people in a throw-away culture. Our

wastefulness stretches from unwanted people—often including the unborn—to unwanted things and food. 19] We likewise abandon or ignore the needs of the elderly. 20] Discarding others takes many forms, and one of those insidious forms is racism. 21] Poverty increases in this context, and new forms of poverty are evident today.

Human rights are not universal

22] The simple fact is that human rights are not yet universal. Many people are left out, as though they're not part of the human family. The profit-based economic model freely exploits, rejects, or even destroys human beings. 23] Many of those who suffer such indignities are women. 24] Likewise, slavery continues to rear its ugly head around the world, taking new and terrible forms as women, children, and men alike are conscripted to labor at low wages or to operate as sex workers.

Conflict and fear

25] Something like a third world war is being waged today as war, terror, and persecution persist. 26] People fear and mistrust each other. We're trapped in a so-called peace that is built on fear of others. 27] Part of this is the demand for building new walls in a false attempt to keep the rest of the world away from us. We no longer see the poor at our borders as sisters and brothers but as bothersome intruders who threaten us. 28] Many criminal interests roam among those who are kept out by our new walls, offering them false hope in exchange for loyalty, so-called safety, and of course, money.

GLOBALIZATION AND PROGRESS WITHOUT A SHARED ROADMAP

29] In our dialogue about this, the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb and I agree that there have been many advances in science, technology, medicine, manufacturing, and welfare. But at the same time we can also see a moral decline and weak spiritual values. Resources are not distributed fairly, and even when millions of children die of hunger, there is a deafen-

ing silence from world leaders. 30] The sense of belonging to the same human family is disappearing. We are deceived into thinking that we can go it alone, but in fact, “we’re all in the same boat.” We withdraw from the world’s problems into our selfish worlds, but that’s a dead-end that doesn’t lead to hope or renewal. 31] We have no roadmap, even though we’re racing forward as a human race.

PANDEMICS AND OTHER CALAMITIES IN HISTORY

32] This pandemic has helped us become aware again that we are brothers and sisters, all. 33] The powerful surge of the pandemic has helped us “recover our concern for human beings” above all else. Perhaps we had gone down the road of technological connections without intimacy. Now we agree that it’s time to rethink how we live together. 34] Because everything on earth is connected, we know that this pandemic results from the pressure we have put on both the environment and the people of the world. “The world itself is crying out in rebellion.”

35] “Once this health crisis passes, our worst response would be to plunge even more deeply into feverish consumerism and new forms of egotistic self-preservation.” Let us no longer think in black and white terms: them and us. Let us think of who we are as God’s people. Let us rediscover how much we need each other. And let us stage a rebirth of the human family. 36] We must recognize in the post-pandemic world that merely consuming more and more while others have less and less will not make us happy. Such consumerism would be worse than the pandemic.

AN ABSENCE OF HUMAN DIGNITY ON THE BORDERS

37] There is an insidious belief among both populist-nationalist regimes and liberal economic schemes. It is the belief—based on fear—that we must prevent an influx of migrants at all costs. And also that we must limit or end aid to developing nations so that the spur of their poverty will

drive them to produce more. But these abstract beliefs fail to realize that many lives are at stake and many families seeking security and basic human needs are suffering. 38] We must always affirm that these migrants have the right to remain in their home countries and that migration is a last resort. However, when it is necessary migrants must be made welcome.

39] However, “in some host countries, migration causes fear and alarm, often fomented and exploited for political purposes....For Christians, this way of thinking and acting is unacceptable....” The deep conviction of our faith is that these migrants are as worthy and important as any of us. 40] Europe is facing this right now. Some find it difficult “to defend the centrality of the human person.” 41] Even though it is natural to fear what we don’t know, being open to others helps build our own culture and nation. Let us not be held prisoner to our doubts and fears, which are often racist at their root.

THE ILLUSION OF COMMUNICATION

42] It is strange to realize that while we fear and shun newcomers on our shores, the distance between people is shrinking because of travel and technology. Privacy is now a scarce commodity. 43] Entire campaigns of hatred are conducted online. Some people see online groups as a form of mutual support, but in fact they are mainly enclaves of the like-minded, all focused on a single perceived enemy. As helpful as it is, digital connections cannot build authentic and loving unity.

Shameless aggression

44] Social aggression has grown exponentially online. 45] Crude, hateful, and violent things are said in this quasi-public forum now, things that until now would have risked the loss of respect. Even some political figures do this. 46] This online hate speech forms networks of fanatics resulting in defamation and slander. How does this contribute to the welfare of the human family?

Information without wisdom

47] True wisdom is the result of encountering reality. But in the online environment today, platforms allow users to simply “dislike” any idea or person they wish, creating a virtual enclave. This isn’t how wisdom grows. **48]** Wisdom comes from sitting down and listening to others. Attentive listening today is rare. Even in public debates, people interrupt others before they finish speaking, barging in with their point of view. **49]** What follows is a frenzy of texting. And the outcome of all this is that we only hear what we want to and block what we dislike. **50]** “The flood of information at our fingertips,” however, doesn’t lead to wisdom. Seeking the truth in dialogue and respectful listening does that. Building solidarity and community only happens when we encounter one another.

FORMS OF SUBJECTION AND SELF-CONTEMPT

51] Some first-world nations are considered good models for developing countries, as though their culture and economic system should be copied. In fact, though, each of these developing nations should be helped to grow in its own way. A problem they often face, however, is that the wealthy minority in a developing nation shuns what native people think. **52]** Financial speculators can then step in and take advantage of the poor, selling off their natural resources. **53]** But a nation truly becomes a community only when its people sense that they are valuable.

HOPE

54] I have just sketched the dark clouds that appear today on the world’s horizons. But there are also pathways of hope emerging, more visible today because of the pandemic. People realize that their lives are interwoven. Many heroes stepped forward during Covid-19—medical, retail, and transportation workers to name a few—and they are a great source of hope for the world. **55]** Let us become people of hope!

SESSION 1

Group or Personal Reflection

Step 1: Pause quietly for a minute or two. Look and think back over this section of the encyclical. Which ideas strike you as most important? What touched your heart or caused you to take special notice? What feelings emerged in you as you studied this section? Share about this with your group or reflect on it privately.

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Step 2: Discuss these points together and close with a brief prayer: (1) How do you experience the modern pressures and developments that the pope is describing in your personal life and community? (2) How have you observed technology being used to spread hate and fear rather than love and hope? Share specific stories if appropriate.

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Step 3: Read article 27 from the original encyclical out loud together. What is your response to the pope's observations about using new walls to handle the fear of outsiders? What barriers have you built in your heart? What do you fear from those who ask to enter your nation or community? How do you reconcile that with your faith?