

Chapter 1

Dark Clouds Over A Closed World



Credit: Dudarev Mikhail

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. Didn't using the masculine noun show that the Catholic Church is still out of touch with today's realities? In fact, Church language is not known for keeping up with the times. 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.

This document would once have been called "an encyclical of the Holy Father Francis on fraternity and social friendship." Somewhere down the line people started referring to papal documents, such as encyclicals, bulls, etc., by their incipit, the first two or three words of the document itself, making it easier to remember and discuss them.

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.

Basically, the Holy Father is encouraging all of us to discover what Francis did after that fateful day when he stripped himself and said, "Now I can truly say, 'Our Father.'" If we are all children of one father, we are then all brothers and sisters.

Sr. Nancy Celaschi, OSF

How to Use This Guide

1. This guide can be used with small or large groups and for personal reflection.
2. Feel free to share with others the URL where you found the guide. You are free to print it for others who prefer a printed text. This guide is **free**.
3. This guide serves as an overview to the chapter featured but cannot in the space available do justice to the richness of each chapter.

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Margaret Carney, OSF and Pat McCloskey, OFM coordinated this study guide series.

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 the 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 culture 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 increase 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.

Caryn Crook, OSF

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 Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

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?

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