



INTERNATIONAL FRANCISCAN CONFERENCE

of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The song of the angels at Christmas to the shepherds of long ago and to us today: Glory to God in the highest! and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests Luke 2.14. For Francis of Assisi, Christmas was the ultimate reminder of how much God loved us, to come to us, to become one of us and show us the way to be truly human. The Incarnation is the true compassion of God that Francis perceived so clearly.



Pope Francis states in *Fratelli tutti* (FT) #8, "Let us dream as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all."



As Franciscan sisters and brothers, we welcome these words, which find an echo in the actions and words of St. Francis as he greeted everyone he met with the words: "May the Lord give you peace!" Testament 23. Francis' faithful witness teaches us that this is not just a greeting, but a way of thinking, reflecting, conversing, doing... What Francis gave was a testimony that envisioned fraternity in God – in today's language, universal brotherhood and sisterhood. We are inspired and challenged by our Brother Francis who plumbbed the depths of the Spirit and showed us such clarity of vision and understanding of the intertwining of self, others, and creation into the one reality of

the heart of God. He enjoins us in our Rule of Life: "Within themselves, let them always make a home and dwelling place for the one who is Lord God almighty, Father and Son and Holy Spirit so that, with undivided hearts, they may grow in universal love by continually turning to God and to neighbor." TOR Rule #8.

With undivided hearts, let us be an incarnation of God's love in the heart of every person. Let us live this, not only as a moment in spiritual history, but as the eternal insertion of God, an ever-deepening penetration of love, in our sacred history. We are part of the Incarnation in our world, God-with-us in our time. As Franciscans, we have chosen to follow in the footprints of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, who gave his life for the very things our world is most in need of now: human community/solidarity, love and compassion for our brothers and sisters, earnest searching for the truth and doing God's work. May our choices echo the song of the angels long ago that peace and love dwell in our world in the lives of all good people. Glory to God in the highest!

Wishing you a blessed Christmas season and God's richest blessings,

Sr. Deborah LOCKWOOD, President IFC-TOR
Sr. M. Magdalena SCHMITZ, Vice-President
Sr. Joanne BRAZINSKI, Councilor

Sr. Benigna AOKO, Councilor
Sr. Dolores CANEO, Councilor
Bro. Franco KANNAMPUZHA, Councilor