

By the light of faith: dialogue for new hope

Before the Father, the most merciful, and our Lord Jesus Christ, and moved by the Holy Spirit, we Capuchin friars and other Franciscans, by the light of faith, reflected on our presence among people of diverse faiths.

Signs of the times.

“Grant that all the faithful of the Church, looking into the signs of the times by the light of faith may constantly devote themselves to the service of the Gospel.” (Roman Missal)

Gathered in Notre Dame du Puits, Beirut, Lebanon, scholars, religious leaders, Capuchin friars, Franciscan sisters and brothers who work in challenging ways to speak constructively to people of faith from diverse religious traditions came to pray and learn. Political and religious events are difficult in many places that our Franciscan presence is found. We experience hardships brought on by fundamentalism, secularism, sectarianism and ignorance that harm humanity in deep and painful ways. Yet, with a unanimous voice we wish to express a conviction that dialogue with people of diverse religious identities is an urgency we fully recognize as faithful followers of Christ and St. Francis of Assisi.

Franciscan Mission to foster dialogue

Ever hopeful, as participants in the paschal mystery of Him who died and rose again, we enter with hope to the great challenges facing the human condition and the planet that is our home. Vatican II introduced the importance of relationship with others with the document *Nostra Aetate* (25 October 1965). From Lebanon in 2012, Pope Benedict XVI reminded the churches in the Middle East that as seekers of the Truth we are all pilgrims. *“The truth cannot unfold except in an otherness open to God, who wishes to reveal his own otherness in and through my human brothers and sisters. Hence it is not fitting to state in an exclusive way, ‘I possess the truth’. The truth is not possessed by anyone; it is a gift which calls us to undertake a journey ever closer”* (Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *“Ecclesia in Medio Oriente”*n. 27). *“God offers to every person the possibility of being associated with the paschal mystery”* (Cost. GS, 22). Franciscans approach people of other faiths and ideologies as Francis encountered the friendly Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil, in Damietta, Egypt in 1219; with respect and openness, prudence and humility, as servant, not master. It is in the very heart of the Franciscan charism, in our DNA, to engage others in dialogue and not to dominate. The Damietta Peace Initiative is one of numerous examples of Capuchin ministries that exist to promote peace and dialogue. It is our mission as Franciscans to build bridges, welcome strangers, and hold creation with care.

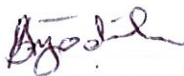
“Speak Lord, your servant is listening.”

Our mission to dialogue with others begins at that place where meals are shared, burdens are carried, needs are made known, mercy is shown and we stand with one another in prayer. Fraternal life prepares us to listen compassionately; it is our first mission. Our Capuchin contemplative tradition prepares us to listen with an open heart to God who speaks in varied ways. Francis, called by grace, saw a leper as someone to embrace and a Sultan as a brother not to fear, and all of creation as further sign of a loving God. Continuing this mission is our earnest desire. We are encouraged in this digital age by the unprecedented opportunities to dialogue and gather with people from other cultures and creeds to proclaim the Good News.

Our gathering in Beirut has shown us the necessity and the risk of dialogue. We all are linked with people of other cultures. Therefore dialogue with people of diverse religions is not an option, it is an imperative. How we engage the dialogue is what we can choose. We are thankful for the witness of brothers and sisters who have accepted an obedience to stand with brothers and sisters of diverse religious identities. We invite you to participate and support these ministries in a critical time. The challenges that we face are not predictable. We do know, however, that when we open ourselves up in a genuine desire for Truth it will transform us.

“May we serve truly after the example of Christ and at his command and may your church stand as a living witness to truth and freedom, to peace and justice, that all people may be raised up to a new hope.” *(Roman Missal)*

On behalf of Capuchin friars and other Franciscan representatives from: Belgium, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, Malaysia, Malta, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Syria, Tanzania, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and United States of America



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21 October 2017, Beirut, Lebanon



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1 November 2017, Rome, Italy