



## A BETTER KIND OF POLITICS

Civilize It

### Following Pope Francis: Dialogue in *Fratelli Tutti*

Events of the past year point to the reality that we are experiencing a time of deep division in both Church and society. Pope Francis, in his newest encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, and in his recent book, *Let Us Dream*, urges us, in the midst of division, to seek a better way. Key to Pope Francis' approach is a recognition that the ability to dialogue across perspectives is essential in order that social love can inspire "new ways of approaching the problems of today's world, of profoundly renewing structures, social organizations and legal systems from within" (*Fratelli Tutti*, no. 183).

This reflection guide is for those serious about participating in encounter and dialogue as a means of creating "a new kind of politics." What does Pope Francis mean by a "new kind of politics"? He means being actively engaged in our communities and working together for policies that protect human dignity. We respond to the Gospel call to love our neighbors when we overcome our divisions and polarization in order to find creative solutions for the common good. In order for this to become reality, we must actively work towards breaking down barriers that have divided us in the past.

To aid your reflection with this guide, consider having on hand a copy of both *Fratelli Tutti* ([online](#) or for [purchase](#)), especially Chapters 5 and 6, and *Let Us Dream*, especially pp. 68 to 83.

#### Begin with Prayer

Begin your time of reflection by asking God to be present with you. Use the following prayer from the [Fratelli Tutti study guide](#):

#### *Prayer to Listen, Heal and Respond*

Loving God, give us hearts that listen for your word. Let us imitate the Good Samaritan, who does not turn away from suffering.

#### **Help us listen.**

May we listen to those who struggle daily for dignity.

Let us hear your voice in the stories of those on the margins.

Help us always see what binds us together as sisters and brothers.

#### **Help us to heal.**

May we be willing to stand in the place of others.

Let us be open to difference that we may arrive at understanding.

Help us to seek reconciliation that our world may reflect justice.

#### **Help us respond.**

May our faith move us to action in the public square.

Let us work with others of good will, finding solutions together.

Help us exercise political charity, seeking the common good and dignity for all.

Lord, give us the courage to trust in your hand guiding us.

Give us the courage to respond like the Good Samaritan, setting aside divisions to attend to the needs of the other. May we know and see your love present in our communities, made real in the ways we love one another. Amen.

“The path to peace does not mean making society blandly uniform, but getting people to work together, side-by-side, in pursuing goals that benefit everyone. A wide variety of practical proposals and diverse experiences can help achieve shared objectives and serve the common good.”

- Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 228

## Reflect and Read

Next, slowly and prayerfully read the reflection below on Pope Francis’ approach to encounter and dialogue. These points are based on his reflections in *Fratelli Tutti*, especially Chapters 5 and 6, and *Let Us Dream*, especially pp. 68 to 83. Ideally, you should also take the time to read the *Fratelli Tutti* chapters and *Let Us Dream* section in full.

*We must recover “the sense of belonging to a single human family.”*

After all, “we are all in the same boat” (no. 30). This is in stark contrast to the tendency, which has become commonplace, to disengage from difficult conversations and see only our own interests and perspectives. Pope Francis challenges us: “Isolation and withdrawal into one’s own interests are never the way to restore hope and bring about renewal” (no. 30). Instead of “the inclination to be concerned only with myself, my group, my own petty interests” (no. 166) we have to commit to overcoming “every individualistic mindset” and instead “seek the good of all people” including those we may see as different from us (no. 182).

*We must commit to approaching others with love.*

Even those with whom we disagree are children of God. Sadly, such an approach has become counter-cultural. We have become used to efforts aimed more to “discredit and insult opponents from the outset than to open a respectful dialogue aimed at achieving agreement on a deeper level” (no. 201). This is a situation in which we must be prophetic, modeling by example a respectful approach that honors others as made in God’s image. This involves stepping outside ourselves, listening with empathy, and seeking to truly understand another person’s experience.

*We must identify common values based on truth.*

Social love, Pope Francis says, has to be “accompanied by a commitment to the truth” (no. 184) informed by both faith and reason (no. 185). An essential starting place for dialogue is to identify common values rooted in truth and justice, such as the dignity of the human person, or a commitment to fundamental human rights and integral human development. Identifying these common convictions can unite us despite our differences and lead to creative thinking and new solutions.

*We must “learn how to unmask the various ways that the truth is manipulated.”*

We must “learn how to unmask the various ways that the truth is manipulated, distorted and concealed in public and private discourse” (no. 208), and to unmask media sources that are actually “powerful special interests that

“Truth, in fact, is an inseparable companion of justice and mercy. All three together are essential to building peace; each, moreover, prevents the other from being altered.”

- Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no.227



seek to tilt public opinion unfairly in their favor” (no. 201). An important starting point in preparing our hearts for dialogue is to consider from what sources I get my information. Are these sources reputable and long-standing? Are they neutral sources or connected with a particular political party or bias? Is it possible that I or others are being manipulated by persons or groups who have their own interests in mind? How can I check claims that I hear against multiple sources to ensure their accuracy before I share that information with others?

*We must get comfortable with being a polyhedron.*

Pope Francis uses the image of the polyhedron (a three-dimensional shape that has many faces) to “represent a society where differences coexist, complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amid disagreements and reservations” (no. 215). “Authentic social dialogue,” he writes, “involves the ability to respect the other’s point of view and to admit that it may include legitimate convictions and concerns,” that others “have a contribution to make,” and that we can both “be frank and open about our beliefs, while continuing to discuss, to seek points of contact, and above all, to work and struggle together” (no. 203). In his book, *Let Us Dream*, Pope Francis writes that polarization results when we erroneously perceive disagreement as contradiction instead of contraposition. With the former, we create separate “camps” where there is one winner and one loser. With the latter, differences exist but they are capable of interacting in a “fruitful, creative tension” (p. 79). In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis writes that we must seek to identify “shared goals that transcend their differences and can thus engage in a common endeavor” (no. 157). We must be willing to dialogue with open hearts and get comfortable with creative tension as we hold simultaneous points of view

that don’t fit neatly together but which can yield solutions focused on the common good (no. 190).

## Examine Your Heart

*Spend time in prayer examining your heart to see whether it is open and ready for dialogue. Reflect honestly and prayerfully on the following questions:*

- What is my intention in entering into dialogue? Am I genuinely ready to listen with from the heart, and see from others’ perspectives, in order to reach common ground in service to the common good? Or, am I approaching this conversation mainly with an intention to convince others of my position?
- Do I believe that my conversation partner has something to offer? Am I willing to learn from his or her experiences?
- Do I understand our different perspectives as contrapositions? Or do I see them as contradictions? If the latter, how does Pope Francis challenge me to move towards the former?
- Am I committed to truth and justice and what response does this require of me? Have I engaged in a process of conscience formation involving prayerful study of Scripture, Church teaching, guidance from reputable experts, and prayerful discernment? Where do I get information? Are my sources of information reputable and long-standing or do my choices make me vulnerable to manipulation?
- What values do I hold dear that I will bring to this conversation? Do my values reflect the dual call to love God and love my neighbors? What values might I have in common with my conversation partner?



## Take Action

*Having spent serious and careful time reflecting on these questions, you may be ready to dialogue.*

Here are important considerations to keep in mind:

- Dialogue is a two-way street among equal conversation partners committed to finding common ground. Before beginning, the above guidelines for dialogue (see section 2) must be embraced by both parties, and both parties must commit to sincere efforts to abide by these guidelines.
- If both conversation partners are people of faith, it is a good idea to begin a dialogue by sharing a prayer together. The prayer at the start of this reflection guide may be used, or the [Prayer to Fast from Incivility](#). Ecumenical and interfaith prayers are also offered by Pope Francis towards the end of *Fratelli Tutti*.
- Before beginning dialogue, have each person spend some time identifying the core values that he or she brings to the conversation. Examples of core values include: the dignity of the person, basic human rights that should be available to every person, the value of the family, etc. Conversation partners should share with one another the core values that each identified. Comments should remain at a general level and be careful to not yet discuss how those core values lead to certain positions.
- Each conversation partner should listen while the other shares about his or her core values rooted in truth, taking notes if helpful. To create a positive space for sharing, both partners should be sure to:

listen carefully; use “I” statements (take responsibility for what you express); stay on topic; and be respectful and charitable at all times. Then the listener should reflect back to the speaker what he or she heard. If the values the speaker identifies resonate with the listener in any way, he or she should comment on how he or she also sees those values as important. After both partners have shared, listened, and reflected back to the other person, the pair should write down any values they identified that are common between them. Only now are the conversation partners ready to begin dialogue on a particular topic. Agree on a format for exchange. Your dialogue may span multiple sessions.

- If dialogue will occur about a particular issue, it may be a good idea to establish agreed-upon terms or phrases beforehand to avoid trigger words or language that may be offensive. For example, in a dialogue about immigration, conversation partners may agree not to use certain descriptions of persons without status that are offensive and instead use a more neutral phrasing.

Many resources are available to assist you in selecting a format for your dialogue. For example, [the Catholic Common Ground Initiative](#) has many resources, activities and webinars to help Catholics overcome divisions and seek the common good.

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