

A Franciscan Plea for the Soul of America

The Franciscan Friars (OFM) of the U.S.
On the Feast of St. Francis, October 4, 2018



Justice for the poor, respectful care for the environment and courageous peacemaking have been the hallmarks of the Franciscan Movement since its beginning 800 years ago.

St. Francis of Assisi freely chose to live a radically simple lifestyle among and with the poor; called himself a brother to all creatures and to the earth itself; and crossed religious and cultural frontiers to dialogue with a Muslim leader in an attempt to prevent another bloody war. St. Francis rejected the societal-economic shift of his time that valued financial success over human dignity.

Today these values continue to inspire and guide Franciscans. They also inspire millions of people in the U.S. and beyond—people of faith and other people of good will. They demand action in promoting a consistent ethic of life that embodies a Common Good built on the foundation of full respect for all stages and types of life, and without a false ranking of these stages of life.

The current direction of the United States is diametrically opposed to these values. Impoverished people are dismissed from our public discourse. People of color continue to experience a system of racial oppression. Refugees seeking haven in this country are refused a fair hearing, are separated from their children, and are confined in jails or cages before being sent away. Modest steps to heal our suffering planet are dismissed or undercut by short-sighted public policies. The warnings of science regarding air, land and water, and the very survival of humans as part of the earth community are ignored. And constant belligerent rhetoric, including threats of nuclear devastation, issue forth from current U.S. American politicians.

Equally ominous is the gradual but purposeful dismantling of U.S. political values. Freedom of speech and an independent media are vilified; judicial processes are ridiculed; and respectful public discourse is a lost art. Some public leaders would rather provoke outrage than provide accurate information. It is more common to dehumanize, demonize and marginalize the most vulnerable of our world rather than to address difficult and complex issues. A seemingly-successful economy for some people is perched on the vast and growing disparity of wealth in the U.S. and wider world, and on total disregard for ecological sustainability. We are witnessing an untenable situation where all political sides find it impossible to dialogue with civility, reach workable compromise and move a public agenda forward to address the challenges of our day. For the Common Good to be realized, change is needed across the political spectrum.

As Franciscan friars living and working in the United States at this moment in history, we feel obliged to reject—and to speak out loudly and clearly against—all such policies and practices that so flagrantly violate our Franciscan values and the basic principles of Catholic social teaching. We feel compelled to live out our Franciscan charism of repentance in response to the profoundly unjust and destructive public policies our country is adopting. This will require soul searching and the contemplative discomfort that leads to transformative action. We, who love the United States of America, must act against an all-encompassing threat to the very soul of our beloved country. We will increase our work for justice in the public arena, including in the electoral process, clearly setting ourselves at the side of those who are excluded—namely, immigrants, women, people of color, the earth community and impoverished people—and supporting their full engagement in the public discourse.

We pledge anew to live the Gospel boldly, so as to ensure public and private respect for the dignity of every person and the integrity of creation. In the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi, where there is hatred, we will attempt to sow love; where there is injury, healing, where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is injustice, reform; and where there is sadness, joy.