



JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS — ONE BROKEN SOUL AT A TIME

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The priorities for the National Fraternity for the next three years are **Vocations, Relationships, and Communications**. All are incredibly important to who we are as Franciscans. At a brainstorming session at our recent in-person National Executive Council meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, I shared my thoughts on the three priorities: “We must build **relationships** with better **communications** in order to bring in **vocations**.”

As the National Animator for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, I see many instances of broken relationships and a lack of communications, which will not lead to many vocations. This is not only with our Order, but with any religious order or community. If relationships are not built, nourished, and sustained, then we are merely a dying breed. As an outlier, I remain in this Order because of the beautiful relationships I have built and sustained over the past twenty plus years.

“A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people...” (OFS Rule, Art. 13)

One dictionary definition of relationship is *the way in which two or more concepts, objects, or people are connected, or the state of being connected*. Another definition states: *“the way in which two or more people or groups regard and behave toward each other.”* I love those words: *regard* and *behave*. These are two basic ingredients of building relationships, creating connections. How would you regard and behave towards your supervisor? Your pastor? Another person in authority? Respectfully, honoring the dignity of the person as you actively and deeply listen to them. You exercise kindness and a certain reverence, knowing they are a child of the Most High God – just as you are.

So, why are there so many broken relationships – so much disrespect and unkindness, with people who don’t want to listen to one another? The truth of the matter is we have forgotten who we are in the Lord. We have lost that sense of connection with one another because we have lost that connection with who we are in Christ. You cannot behave kindly and respectfully toward another if you are not kind and respectful to yourself. After the global pandemic, many of us have become isolationists. It is all about me, myself, and I. The “we” has either been demoted or removed completely. We serve a relational God, who created us to be in relationship with one another as well as with creation. We are never meant to be alone on the journey. Although Jesus spoke of the narrow path, it is wide enough for two; since he sent us out two by two.

We must remember that we are all broken souls on this journey towards holiness – broken by sin, broken by grief, broken by illness, broken by life’s challenges. I believe we are so focused on our brokenness that we have lost sight of our connectedness. Relationships are also about our state of being connected. We are all connected because we belong to a triune God who models that connectedness; thus, we belong to one another. It is in that state of belongingness that we live and move and have our being. Our beingness informs our belongingness. We belong to one another because we belong to the God who first called us into relationships. Let us build those relationships as we continue to build up the kingdom of God. *“We are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively” (OFS Rule, Art. 14).*