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Fratelli Tutti Offers Hope, Guidance for Catholic Higher Education

The newest encyclical from Pope Francis offers encouragement during a dark year

By Kenya McCullum

As this challenging and tumultuous year comes to a close, many Catholics are drawing hope and wisdom from *Fratelli Tutti*, the recently released encyclical from Pope Francis.

The document addresses social, economic, and political ills while giving hope that these tribulations can be healed through a dedication to mission and Catholic Social Teaching. Some scholars suggest that there are specific ways that *Fratelli Tutti*

(http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html) can be applied to Catholic colleges and universities, and how institutions can implement actionable steps on their campuses that are inspired by the encyclical.

From the Classroom to the Community

“It has to do with our daily efforts to expand our circle of friends, to reach those who, even though they are close to me, I do not naturally consider a part of my circle of interests.” (Fratelli Tutti, paragraph 97)

Although there are some obvious disciplines that can incorporate *Fratelli Tutti* into the curriculum, such as religious studies and theology, a wider array of areas can also integrate the document into classroom learning. For example, political science can use the chapter, “A Better Kind of Politics,” while environmental science classes can bring the pope’s discussion of ecological justice into the classroom. The Holy Father’s ideas for interfaith cooperation can be applied to Jewish and Islamic studies courses.

However, this is not the only way that professors can use *Fratelli Tutti* as a guide, according to Sister Margaret Carney, OSF, president emerita of St. Bonaventure University and recipient of the 2017 Monika K. Hellwig Award for Outstanding Contributions to Catholic Intellectual Life (/awards). For Carney, the document is something institutions can use for interdisciplinary discussions among professors, as well as discussions with members of the greater community in order to find solutions to shared problems.

“One of the tasks of our universities is not only to bring [*Fratelli Tutti*] into the classroom, but some of our universities are in an ideal position to convene conferences or seminars or study think tanks that bring together the leaders of the different religions, bring together government leaders, bring together the people who shape opinions in this country,” she says. “We all have a standing in our local communities and I think we should be inviting leaders in our local communities, when we can do it, to come together and reflect on this. I think it would be a gift to leaders, especially given the terrific division we have in this country right now. So maybe this is a starting point, let’s bring some people together to hear the voice of Francis — Francis the Pope and Francis the Saint.”

Training the Next Generation of Good Samaritans

“In the face of so much pain and suffering, our only course is to imitate the Good Samaritan.” (para. 67)



The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has created several infographics that explain the main themes of *Fratelli Tutti*.

For Fr. David Couturier, executive director of the Franciscan Institute at St. Bonaventure University, *Fratelli Tutti* provides an opportunity to instill the lessons of the Good Samaritan into the business leadership training he provides, which is a collaboration between the Theology Department and the university's School of Business. During this training, he stresses how students can navigate their future careers and the world of business by remembering that they should always conduct business with mission and the common good in mind, not just profit and career advancement.

"It sounds simplistic, but if you think about it, universities and colleges are really prime places for creating good neighbors, creating students who are going to be committed to being good neighbors in a global world and good neighbors to the planet," he explains. "It's not just being a responsible leader, it's being an intentional leader based on a Catholic sense of mission and purpose."

Opening Borders Through Recruitment

"A living and dynamic people, a people with a future, is one constantly open to a new synthesis through its ability to welcome differences." (para. 160)

Outside the classroom, Kate Ward, assistant professor at Marquette University's Department of Theology, says that *Fratelli Tutti* can help guide Catholic institutions in their approach to student recruitment and enrollment, as the encyclical stresses the importance of embracing differences. As Catholic colleges and universities continue their efforts to attract students from different cultural, racial, and economic backgrounds and give them opportunities to receive a high-quality education, the document can remind administrators how important it is to promote diversity on their campuses.

"I think the first thing that means is that Catholic colleges need to keep working to enroll a diverse student body, an economically diverse student body, and to be places where all types of differences among students can be owned and celebrated," Ward says. "Instead of being seen as a charity model or place where one type of student is coming into a space controlled by others, it can really be a space where it's clear that every type of student belongs here."

Collaboration Among Catholic Colleges

"In the name of God and of everything stated thus far, [we] declare the adoption of a culture of dialogue as the path; mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard." (para. 285)

Demographic shifts in certain parts of the country have resulted in fewer students applying to college, causing Catholic institutions to vie for a smaller pool of enrollees. Despite this seemingly competitive situation, Kevin Ahern, associate professor of religious studies at Manhattan College, believes that *Fratelli Tutti* can remind administrators that Catholic colleges should support and collaborate with one another.

"At its fundamental core, *Fratelli Tutti* is trying to challenge people to think beyond our narrow, myopic ways of looking at ourselves throughout the world. We live in a culture which is highly individualistic, and despite the best efforts, a lot of times higher education — Catholic higher education included — can fall victim to that same culture," he says. "One of the challenges is for colleges to think not of each other as competitors, but to think beyond competition to cooperation. We live in the highly competitive marketplace of higher education, but I think the document is trying to emphasize cooperation, rather than competition, as the starting point for our relationship with others."

Although there are ways that Catholic higher education can use *Fratelli Tutti* to improve campus operations, Carney stresses that in many ways, they already have been the embodiment of what Francis teaches in the document. What's needed is for Catholic campuses to continue on the path of mission as they move forward through these difficult times.

“In point of fact, many of our ACCU members are doing the kind of work the encyclical calls for,” she explains. “It’s not like they’re not doing it and all of a sudden they have to get in gear. They have been developing along these lines and for some time.”

Additional Resources

- Read the encyclical:
http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html
(http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html)
- The USCCB has created an online resource devoted to *Fratelli Tutti*:
<https://www.usccb.org/fratelli-tutti>. (<https://www.usccb.org/fratelli-tutti>)
- The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns has developed a study guide on *Fratelli Tutti*:
https://maryknollogc.org/sites/default/files/fratelli_tutti_study_guide_final5.pdf
(https://maryknollogc.org/sites/default/files/fratelli_tutti_study_guide_final5.pdf)
- The Franciscan-centric “Breaking in the Habit” channel offers this short, humorous video explaining the encyclical: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bzz6oc4C_sQ
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bzz6oc4C_sQ)

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 (<http://twitter.com/catholicighred>)

 (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQ1rx4aaqOKhPRwCAbkyOicg>)

 (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/117208874@N04/>)

Leadership Development

Annual Meeting (</Programs-Events/AnnualMeeting>)

Mission Leadership Institute (</Programs-Events-Mission-Leadership-Institute>)