

# VOICE *of* the POOR

The Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship* is an inspiring and beautiful reflection on the need to change ourselves so that we can connect more intimately with our fellow human beings. The Encyclical is particularly appropriate as a guide for Vincentians as we seek common ground in our conferences and with the neighbors we wish to help.

Communication and dialogue are essential to establishing and maintaining fruitful friendship and community. But, as our daily experience demonstrates, current methods of communication may be superficial and lead to isolation, rather than dialogue. Those who think one way communicate only with those who agree with them and join in righteous condemnation of the “other.” In order to establish a genuine community, concerned with the dignity of each human being, we must move into dialogue with those whose views are different from our own and look for common ground. This kind of communication requires respectful listening and genuine exploration between persons for the values we have in common. As the Encyclical points out, change is within our power. We can start the process of respectful listening and we can become agents of kindness and charity whenever we want. We don’t have to wait for government change or government programs. We can change our hearts right now.

We are not designed to live in isolation. We find our meaning and our salvation in communion with others. Our aim here on earth should be to establish a better society, a society where the marginalized are brought into the community, a place where meaningful work is available to all, where the talents of all are utilized for the common good. As Catholics and as Vincentians, we should be moving ourselves and our communities toward a deeper conversation with those around us, looking for ways to develop an open and welcoming community, where we use the Gospel’s gifts to promote justice and charity and to build a community of harmony and understanding for all.

*Fratelli Tutti* returns over and over again to the theme of human dignity, a dignity conferred on all by God as Creator. As Vincentians, we should be acutely and constantly aware of the dignity of those we serve and make respect for that dignity our universal goal. We need to see the beauty and importance of each person and we need to emphasize our connectedness to all men and women. We should find ways to connect with others in working to eradicate hunger and poverty and lack of opportunity.

Our politics should always be directed toward making life better for people. We do not always have to agree on methods but we should agree on goals. Politics can be a way of effective love—of moving toward a more just and compassionate society if those who engage it are motivated by charity. Charity requires that we help those individuals we see suffering and to act on behalf of those we don’t see. We are required to advocate for a just society and to help change conditions within society that contribute to suffering. *Fratelli Tutti* offers concrete ways to overcome the bitterness of current politics and the sadness and isolation of the pandemic. If we focus on the dignity of all human beings and begin to see them as brothers and sisters, we can help establish a society where communication can result in a more just and charitable community which serves to renew us all.