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***In God's House, There Are Many Rooms:
A University Minister Reflects Upon
Fratelli Tutti***

Melanie-Préjean SULLIVAN ♦

Abstract: For over fifty years, Roman Catholics who are interreligious leaders have been guided by the Second Vatican Council document, *Nostra Aetate*. The author, a retired university lay minister in the United States, was one such interreligious leader who worked with students, faculty, and staff of all faiths and none on a small Catholic campus to create an atmosphere open to diversity, inclusion, and respect for all. Her office facilitated campus programs that encouraged service, dialogue, and spiritual growth. In twenty years, campus ministry involvement grew from three dozen primarily Catholic students to over 400 students of many different faiths. Scripture studies, retreats, peer ministry training, social justice initiatives, service trips, and interfaith worship experiences contributed to a sense of how God prepares rooms for all of us in the Divine mansion that Jesus mentions in John 14:2. This article is a reflection upon some of the interreligious events on the campus where she served, and how they now can be seen as embodying the spirit of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*.

♦ The author is a former director of campus ministry at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky, USA.

Keywords: interfaith, interreligious, interspiritual, campus ministry, university ministry

[摘要] 在過去五十餘年，有志於進行宗教交談的天主教徒，均以天主教教會於梵蒂岡第二次大公會議所發佈的《教會對非基督宗教徒態度宣言》為指引。筆者於退休前，曾於美國一所大學出任平信徒牧者一職，帶領屬於不同宗教或無宗教信仰的學生、教職員及職員，進行宗教交談活動，旨在於其所屬的具天主教背景的校園中，建立一種對不同背景人士均持開放、包容和尊重的氣氛。筆者策劃校園活動，鼓勵參與服務、交談及促進參與者靈性上的成長。在二十年間，在校園內參與這些活動的人數，由最初的三十餘人，增至超過四百人，而參與者也由主要是天主教徒學生，擴展至包括持不同宗教信仰的學生。透過聖經研習、退省、同輩牧職訓練、社會公義行動、服務及跨宗教祈禱敬拜等活動，讓大家感受到耶穌在聖經中所提及的，天主在父家裏，為我們預備了許多住處（若 14:2）。此文章旨在反省筆者所參與的其中一些宗教活動，如何展現教宗方濟各在《眾位弟兄》通論中所提倡的精神。

關鍵詞：跨信仰、跨宗教、跨靈修、校園牧職、大學牧職

1 Introduction

As the world entered lockdowns and doubts about the future of humanity in the earliest months of the Covid-19 pandemic, many of us working within interfaith communities began to pray that the fears of the virus might be transformed into invitations to recognize how interconnected we are. It was extremely heartening to see some of our experiences reflected by Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti*. As he has so often done, he offered hope when it seemed that only stormy, dark clouds were gathering in the sky.

This happy coincidence or what one of my former students calls a “God-sequence” provided a welcome time of reflection for me on how much my work in the past fifty years has been affirmed by Pope Francis in this social encyclical. It reminded me of John’s gospel verse in which Jesus referred to God’s house as having many rooms (Jn 14:2). Diversity is at the heart of it, as well as connection.

As a social encyclical, Pope Francis calls us to look carefully at our society, at the world in which we live. He comments on social, political, and spiritual subjects in a language that is easily accessible to both professionally trained theologians and to laypeople. He offers his readers insights and challenges in a tone that does what all good homilies do, “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable”.¹

1 This is one of the famous quotes about the press comes from a fictional 19th century Irish bartender named Mr. Dooley who says that this is

Similar kinds of comforting and afflicting events have occurred throughout my life, God-sequences that I discerned were calls to pursue a particular type of work. While I reflected upon the words in *Fratelli Tutti*, they often reminded me of what I had gleaned from *Nostra Aetate*. I had fashioned my life around these ideas from my earliest collegiate years, volunteering in campus ministry and working with youth on retreats in area parishes. As I entered graduate school and my first careers, my commitment to the ideas from *Nostra Aetate* affected my everyday relationships with organizations and people of all faiths as I worked in the museum field and as a teaching counselor in secondary education.

The fundamental concepts in *Nostra Aetate* included the idea that we are one community with a common destiny, God whose “providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all humankind” (*NA* 1).² Another aspect of our shared humanity was that we all sought answers to life’s ultimate questions of meaning and purpose. Within those diverse answers from various faith traditions, the second section affirmed that, “The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions”.

one of the primary tasks of a newspaper. I’ve often heard it said of homilies, too. Cf. <https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2014/today-in-media-history-mr-dooley-the-job-of-the-newspaper-is-to-comfort-the-afflicted-and-afflict-the-comfortable/>.

- 2 Austin Flannery, ed. *The Basic Sixteen Documents of Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*. (Newport New York: Costello Publishing) 1996: 569.

Further, and perhaps most critical to me personally, was the encouragement “to enter with prudence and charity into discussions and collaboration with members of other religions” (NA 2).³ I was a member of several Jewish-Catholic dialogue groups while I was in my 20’s and 30’s. I worked closely with members of many of our Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim families in the school where I taught, especially when there were critical events that required my counseling skills, like untimely deaths.

Also, I found in *Nostra Aetate* a statement that aligned with my personal belief and one which became my guidepost for decades, “We cannot truly pray to God the Father of all if we treat any people as other than sisters and brothers, for all are created in God’s image” (NA 5).⁴ This quote is most clearly reflected in the tone and title of the social encyclical I am considering for the remainder of this paper, the subtitle of the encyclical, “fraternity and social friendship”. Our human family is destined to dwell in one heavenly house, even if we might have separate rooms.

Having this familial theme in mind and weighing it against my self-awareness of the ways in which *Nostra Aetate* influenced my own formation and first careers, I consider how *Fratelli Tutti* might also be used to examine the work in my last professional career as a university minister. To do so, it might help to present a picture of the context of

³ Flannery, *The Basic Sixteen Documents of Vatican Council II*, pp. 570-71.

⁴ Flannery, *The Basic Sixteen Documents of Vatican Council II*, pp. 574.

that ministry and to comment briefly on the history of the institution that I see reflected in *Fratelli Tutti*.⁵

My last professional career was as a lay minister for a Catholic university, one whose founding priests were deeply grounded in Catholic Social Teaching. Some were diocesan priests who fully embraced the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and some were Franciscans whose spiritualities embraced all of Creation. In the mid-1960's the college inherited the archives of Thomas Merton and merged with a women's college, founded by the Ursulines. Later Sisters of Charity of Nazareth as professors and Passionist seminarians as students, lent their respective charisms to the mix. Named for a Jesuit saint, the college was never run by that order, in fact the Archdiocese of Louisville designated the college, "independent" with leadership in the hands of a self-perpetuating Board of Trustees. This broad combination of charisms and independence was often referred to on the campus. This very Catholic notion of inclusivity is reflected in the subsections of *Fratelli Tutti*. I notice connections to concepts in the encyclical within the history of the university and within my own life story. I hope that my humble thoughts will inspire my readers to seek how their own lives and careers are also reflected in the encyclical.

5 For the remainder of this paper, all indicators in parentheses and sectional numbers e.g., (FT 1) are from Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti. On Fraternity and Social Friendship* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020).

2 Dark Clouds

At the time of its release, *Fratelli Tutti* seemed to articulate what many of us were noticing about connection. As the Covid-19 virus spread throughout our planet and we were reading obituaries and mounting death statistics, it seemed the world was collapsing. Those of us who were students of history were clearly reminded of what we had learned about the disastrous Black Death in the Middle Ages. The spread of the virus was in some ways, also an affirmation of what I had always believed about the interconnection of creation. Whether the virus had been formed in a laboratory as an experiment in disease prevention or developed from some natural mutation via bats in a marketplace across the world from me,⁶ its rapid spread illustrated the interconnectedness of Creation to me. Pope Francis clearly pointed out the error of not realizing this interconnectedness, “Aside from the different ways that various countries responded to the crisis, their inability to work together became quite evident. For all our hyper-connectivity, we witnessed a fragmentation that made it more difficult to resolve problems that affect us all” (*FT* 7).

6 Carolyn Kormann, “The Mysterious Case of the Covid-19 Lab-leak Theory”, *The New Yorker*, 12 October 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/science/elements/the-mysterious-case-of-the-covid-19-lab-leak-theory>; Associated Press, “WHO Says Covid-19 Origins Unclear but Lab Leak Theory Needs Study”, *South China Morning Post*, 10 June 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/news/world/article/3181104/who-says-covid-19-origins-unclear-lab-leak-theory-needs-study> [accessed 10 November 2022].

The history of the campus on which I served as the director of campus ministry for nearly twenty years, was a history filled with stories of gospel inclusion, especially in its earliest years when there were dark clouds of negativism, racism, and militarism. Bellarmine College was founded as a diocesan Catholic college for men in 1950. Combatting racism, it was among the first colleges in the state of Kentucky to enroll students of color and its first full professor was an African-American chemist, Dr. Henry Wilson.⁷ Over a decade before the civil rights acts of the 1960's, the leaders of the college recognized that the color of one's skin was not the measure of one's character. Pope Francis refers to the reaction of "hesitant and fearful" suspicion to migrants in our day (*FT* 41). In the 1950's, in America, it was African-Americans who were treated as other, when the college took a stand against fearful racism, against such suspicion.

The college's original *Statement of Purpose* was clearly anchored in Catholic Social Teaching. It reads, "The College does not accept the notion that a school's responsibility is to teach students simply to fit into the society in which they live. *It submits that students must be taught to evaluate this society and to exercise their trained human powers to change it whenever necessary*".⁸

"War, terrorist attacks, racial or religious persecution,

7 Clyde F. Crews, ed., *In Veritatis Amore: A Concise History of Bellarmine University in Louisville* (Louisville, Kentucky: Bellarmine University Press, 2017), p. 83.

8 Crews, *In Veritatis Amore*, p. 75. Italic emphasis added by editor.

and many other affronts to human dignity are judged differently, depending on how convenient it probes for certain, primarily economic, interests” (*FT* 25). When the college’s founding president, Msgr. Alfred Horrigan was asked about the negative reaction of donors to his support of students protesting the war, he “acknowledged that it could cost the school financial contributions and some community support”.⁹ This did not stop the administration from continuing its work of social justice. Economic interests were not more important than the call to the gospel.

In the early 1960’s, students were excused from class if they chose to be part of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s *March on Frankfort*, which was a protest in Kentucky’s state capital over the issue of fair housing. In the late 1960’s, the college president and the dean continued their involvement in supporting students protesting the war in Vietnam.¹⁰

During this crucial decade in American history, I was a young student in a Catholic women’s secondary school, nine hundred miles away. My first encounters with the issues of social justice had occurred during the administration and 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy. By the time I reached ninth grade, the documents of Vatican II had been published and our teachers, the Marianite Sisters of the Holy Cross were embracing the ideas and bringing them into our religion classes.

⁹ Crews, *In Veritatis Amore*, p. 93.

¹⁰ Crews, *In Veritatis Amore*, p. 93.

Sr. Cyprian showed us documentary films of the liberation of the concentration camps after World War II. We were studying moral attitudes, complicity, and the quote attributed to Edmund Burke, “The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good (people) to do nothing”. We were young women, 15 years of age in a Catholic school and we were observing the results of the actions of men in Europe only a couple of decades before. We were shocked, nauseated by the images, facing such vile state-sanctioned actions toward other human beings and we asked Sister, “What did the Catholic Church do about Hitler?” We wanted to be assured that our church leaders had been upstanding men, not dispassionate observers. We wanted to know if Catholics in Germany had helped kill millions of Jews, Roma, and others labeled as “inhuman” by the Nazis. We wanted answers Sr. Cyprian could not give us.

In some ways, the charism of her religious order typifies the place where many stand, with Mary at the foot of the Cross. How did our Blessed Mother reflect upon what was happening to her beloved son? How do we witness the persecution of those around us? What can we do and how courageous are we in embracing the call to justice?

This small segment of my life was pivotal. It led me to lifelong study and work with members of the Jewish community. I met the local rabbi and studied many of the books he recommended. As the documents of the Council were published, I pondered *Nostra Aetate*. It became a

reinforcement, a voice of affirmation that I could remain a faithful Catholic and work with people of other faiths, that I might have a small hand in preventing what happened in Nazi Germany from ever happening again. Our response must be one of building the fraternity Pope Francis recommends, and it “can only be undertaken by spirits that are free and open to authentic encounters” (*FT 50*).

3 Strangers on the Road

Placing the story of the Good Samaritan in context, Pope Francis reminds readers of the story of Cain and Abel with God’s question to Cain asking about Abel (Gen 4:9). “By the very question he asks, God leaves no room for an appeal to determinism or fatalism as a justification for our own indifference. Instead, he encourages us to create a different culture, in which we resolve our conflicts and care for one another” (*FT 57*).

Such care limits no one from the definition of “sibling”. We are all children of God, whether we are Samaritan or Judean. Historian of religion, Stephen J. Patterson notes that this question about who is the “other” or about who is not our sibling, is encapsulated in Paul’s response to the Galatians, “there is no Jew or Greek; there is no slave or free; there is no male and female”. Patterson proposes that this was our first creed, Christianity’s first confrontation with what it understood Jesus’ message to have been, His teachings

against prejudice and diminishment of any person.¹¹

Modern media presents a challenge to social justice work. While claiming to unite and keep all informed in pathways that should lead to a united planetary family, Pope Francis notes that modern media and communications can give us an illusion of solid communication (*FT* 42-43) and affect the way we think. For those of us in ministry, we also need to find ways to help those we serve find the good where it exists in media, and even in television fiction.

A new television series debuted in America in 2003. The lyrics of a song by Joan Osborne formed the underlying theme of the series, “What if God was one of us ... just a stranger on the bus trying to make his way home ...”¹² The series, *Joan of Arcadia* focused on the experiences of a young woman whose family was in the early months of their move to a new town. She was a teenager, upset to have left her friends in their old hometown. Joan’s brother had been paralyzed in an automobile accident; he was grieving through the toxic emotions of apathy and bitterness. Her father was adjusting to his new job, and her mother was encountering her own crisis of faith. Meanwhile, Joan was meeting many strangers who hinted that she had a mission, that they were God in disguise, giving her little assignments to help others.

11 Stephen J. Patterson, *The Forgotten Creed: Christianity’s Original Struggle against Bigotry, Slavery, & Sexism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

12 Joan Osborne, Lyrics of “One of Us”, <https://genius.com/Joan-osborne-one-of-us-lyrics>.

In each episode, Joan had to discern whether she was insane or chosen to be part of a Divine mission, not unlike St. Joan of Arc.

At our weekly Catholic students' meetings, we watched and discussed aspects of discernment within each episode of the television show. How likely was it that a stranger might appear to us and require something of us that made us wonder if we might have unconsciously welcomed angels, messengers of God (Heb 13:1-2)? Our dialogue was rich with pondering, with questions about how we can know what God is calling us to do and how unlikely situations or God-sequences were part of our discernment.

Just as Pope Francis mentions strangers and Samaritans in the encyclical, we found everyday examples of Samaritans around us on campus. As director of the office of campus ministry, my responsibility included teaching about our full mission, articulate by my colleague Fr. Ron Knott. We were “deliberately Catholic, consciously Christian, and unapologetically ecumenical and interfaith”.¹³ Our ministry was known to be welcoming to all, though we knew that there were people who “felt” that they were on the margins (like students who identified as gay or lesbian, students who were non-Christian, students whose first language was not English). Our campus ministry office made special efforts to assure these tentative visitors to the office or participants in our programs were made to feel welcome and invited to

¹³ Crews, *In Veritatis Amore*, p. 144.

return. It couldn't be tokenism. We had to "advance together toward authentic and integral growth" (*FT* 113).

4 Vision of an Open World and Heart Open to the Whole World

Pope Francis notes that love is "more than just a series of benevolent actions" towards others. We must be moved "to seek the best for their lives" in order to "make possible a social friendship that excludes no one ... a fraternity that is open to all" (*FT* 94). His words, "Love also impels us toward universal communion" (*FT* 95) is a deliberate call to action. To respond to such a call requires planning and expertise.

About ten years before the publication of *Fratelli Tutti*, our ministry was empowered and enhanced by professional interfaith leaders and publications of guidelines for interfaith dialogue. In our earliest endeavors, we consulted the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.¹⁴ For specific recommendations, we distributed copies of a small brochure published by the International Movement of Catholic Students, that included steps, reflections, and pointers from Catholic priests and Protestant leaders.¹⁵ As more of our students requested advanced interfaith training, we joined the

14 <http://www.usccb.org/seia/dialogues.htm>.

15 International Movement of Catholic Students – Pax Romana. *Principles and Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue: Speaking and Listening with Respect: Students, Faith and Dialogue*. Cairo, Egypt, 2008.

Interfaith Youth Core (now called *Interfaith America*) and benefitted from their leadership institutes in Chicago each summer.

One of the most beneficial methods of encounter we learned in those institutes was the method of authentic storytelling. Instead of speaking about teachings or dogmas of our faith, we invited others to tell the stories from their favorite family gatherings or their favorite religious tradition. Instead of focusing on theological explanations of a religious holiday, we would listen attentively to descriptions of food or of special activities that a tradition used to invite children into the holy days and customs.

It reminded me of the Jewish tradition of placing honey on the tongue of young children whenever they listen to stories from the Torah. It helps them understand that the study of God's word is sweet, enjoyable, and special. Through our storytelling, for example, we learned about hiding the *afikomen* in a Passover Seder so that the children can search for it and receive a little reward. Because the ritual meal is long, the distraction of the game keeps the children engaged and gives the adults a little rest, too. It does not diminish the theological importance of the ritual, it simply creates an atmosphere for experiencing God's love, not merely talking about it.

In Pope Francis' call for promoting the moral good, he writes, "Let us return to promoting the good, for ourselves and for the whole human family, and thus advance together

toward an authentic and integral growth” (*FT* 113). Besides the personal interfaith encounters we learned to facilitate, we also knew we were called to a wider campus effort. The American Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU) also responded to this in 2017, when it invited the founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, Eboo Patel and his colleagues to consider how interfaith studies could be part of the curriculum. In their article, they highlighted several examples of curricular endeavors. Their very practical recommendations included practical applicability, intersectionality, and rigorous assessment.¹⁶

To solve the problems of inequality and inequity in the world, Pope Francis calls us to “an alternative way of thinking. Without an attempt to enter into that way of thinking, what we are saying here will sound wildly unrealistic” (*FT* 127). Without efforts like the ones proposed by Patel within the curricula of Catholic higher education, there is little hope of systemic change. Education is critical to the kind of fraternal thinking that Pope Francis envisions. Campus ministries must work alongside faculty to consider the whole student: body, mind, and spirit to facilitate moral development for the good of the world and all her sisters and brothers. This is a sound way of educating for a full understanding of the need for “guaranteeing religious

16 Eboo Patel, Noah Silverman, and Kristi Del Vecchio, “In Our Time: Advancing Interfaith Studies Curricula at Catholic Colleges and Universities”, *Engaging Pedagogies in Catholic Higher Education*: Vol 3: Iss.1, Article 1. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18263/2379-920X.1023>

freedom” of all persons (*FT* 130).

As Patel and ACCU recognize, sometimes it takes an intellectual approach to change the heart. When I read what Pope Francis wrote in his plea to avoid “the risk of succumbing to cultural sclerosis” (§134), I recalled more than a few very contentious conversations about what we were attempting to do in our interfaith and inclusive approaches to ministry. Sometimes I worked with faculty, staff, and students who were either filled with religious zeal for their respective traditions, filled with anger at religion in general, or somewhere on the continuum between the two. I listened to all their voices and encountered wrath for being either “too Catholic” or “not Catholic enough”.

I was heartened in the years after my retirement remembering those venom-filled accusations to read what Pope Francis wrote about the need for solidarity rather than rejection, “We need to develop the awareness that nowadays we are either all saved together or no one is saved. Poverty, decadence and suffering in one part of the earth are a silent breeding ground for problems that will end up affecting the entire planet” (*FT* 137). Our ministry was intentional in its planning, to operate effectively where there could be no place for an “us vs. them” mentality in our world or in our faith.

Our office hosted interfaith Seders and introductions to the Mass. We sponsored roundtables, panels, and retreats for students of all faiths and none. We prayed with the monks

at the Abbey of Gethsemani, visited mosques and Hindu temples, hosted Tibetan monks to create a sand mandala, and attended a massive assembly to welcome the Dalai Lama to our city. Without ever compromising our Catholic identity, we knew we must be open to dialogue and storytelling, to become more like a “culture of encounter”.¹⁷ We could never be narrow in our thinking because of the reality of the sclerosis to be avoided because “as our minds and hearts narrow, the less capable we become of understanding the world around us” (*FT* 147).

We also understood that we could not be engaged in openness without a sense of how our Catholic identity formed our core mission. As Pope Francis wrote, “I cannot truly encounter another unless I stand on firm foundations, for it is on the basis of these that I can accept the gift the other brings and in turn offer an authentic gift of my own” (*FT* 143). To understand our sense of Catholic identity, I return to Bellarmine’s history.

Msgr. Horrigan had become friends with Fr. Louis, OSCO (Thomas Merton) and respected this prolific Catholic writer. They shared social justice concerns, and so it was no surprise that at Merton’s untimely death in 1968, his papers were deposited at Bellarmine. These papers became the seeds of the archives now housed in The Merton Center that

¹⁷ Pope Francis, “For a Culture of Encounter,” Morning Meditation in the Chapel of Domus Sanctae Marthae, p. 13 September 2016. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2016/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20160913_for-a-culture-of-encounter.html

includes over 45,000 items by and related to Merton and is the home of the International Thomas Merton Society.

Merton's writings highlighted social justice concerns. His views on the gospel call to social justice promoted involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and the anti-war protests held against the War in Vietnam. Merton understood the call from the *Rule of St. Benedict* to "treat all visitors as Christ". For a contemporary Benedictine view of *Fratelli Tutti*, I refer to the Alliance for International Monasticism (AIM) newsletter in 2021 that contains commentary on the encyclical. Sr. Ann Hoffman, OSB notes, "Listen! It is the first word of the Rule of St. Benedict. It is a key word identified by most of our writers (in this issue of the newsletter). It is used by Pope Francis throughout his encyclical".¹⁸ This was how we treated all on campus as Christ; we listened.

5 Better Politics

Pope Francis calls attention to how some politicians misuse terms to advance their own agenda. He is particularly concerned with the way in which people are treated in both populist and liberal movements, especially how "people" and "neighbor" are treated in the abstract (*FT* 163). "Education and upbringing, concern for others, a well-integrated view

¹⁸ The United States Secretariat of the AIM USA, *Alliance for International Monasticism Newsletter*, vol. 30, no. 1 (2021). https://aim-usa.org/sites/default/files/newsletters/2021_AIM_NL_Vol_30_No_1.pdf.

of life and spiritual growth: all these are essential for quality human relationships and for enabling society itself to react against injustices” (*FT* 166).

Bellarmino’s founding president and administrators were advocates for civil rights and social justice, encouraging students to voice their opinions through peaceful demonstrations. Msgr. Horrigan served as the city’s chair of “the Louisville Human Rights Committee during some of its most difficult days of de-segregation in the 1960’s”.¹⁹ Following his tenure as college president, he became the founder of the Peace and Justice Commission for the Archdiocese of Louisville.²⁰ His legacy of social justice continues at the college and in the campus ministry office.

6 Dialogue and Friendship

The motto of the campus ministry office during my tenure was “Many Faiths, One Ministry”. We worked intentionally to help members of the various constituents of our campus, the faculty, staff, and students, to understand that we were all part of that one ministry. We were all called to live the mission of educating the mind, body, and spirit. We celebrated each fall with a “Blessing of Animals” on the feast of St. Francis of Assisi. Our guests were pets of all descriptions from cats to corn snakes and goldfish to golden retrievers. Within the ritual we shared the legend of St. Francis and the wolf of Gubbio.

¹⁹ Crews, *In Veritatis Amore*, p. 67.

²⁰ Crews, *In Veritatis Amore*, pp. 95-6.

Another important episode in the life of St. Francis was used by Pope Francis to illustrate “his openness of heart, which knew no bounds and transcended difference of origin, nationality, color or religion” (*FT* 3). This event was the visit of Francis with the Sultan Malik-el-Kamil in Egypt at the time of the Crusades. Although it was a dangerous and expensive undertaking, Francis was faithful to God’s call in the love for his fellow sisters and brothers.

Our fidelity to the same call within our ministry was answered in sometimes unexpected ways. Our campus chapel became the home for an emerging Reform Jewish community, when they used it as their worship space in 1979, as they waited for their new Temple to be completed.²¹ Following the devastating aftermath of the 9/11 bombings, our campus became focused on the needs of the Muslim community and the necessity of education so that our community understood that the Koran was not a guidebook for terror.

We advocated for our Jewish students to have access to special foods and matzah during Pesach as well as for special take-away meals for our Muslim students during Ramadan. We hosted Baha’i educators to explain the persecutions rampant in Iran and shared news stories about the Christians in jeopardy throughout the Middle East. We worked with our colleagues in residence life to create additional sacred spaces on campus for private or small group prayer, besides the

21 Crews, *In Veritatis Amore*, p. 111.

Catholic chapel.

As a laywoman, my ministry was met with many questions in the beginning. I was asked if I was allowed to lead public prayer, even though I was not ordained. This was quickly answered when I led the university in prayer, within an hour after the Twin Towers fell in New York on 11 September. Once that question was settled, we moved forward.

In 2000, there were approximately thirty students involved in campus ministry at Bellarmine College. As the campus celebrated its 50th anniversary and changed its name to Bellarmine University, our goals were for a new paradigm. Maintaining our Catholic identity with confidence, we encouraged students to form faith-based groups under our care. By the time I retired in 2018, there were nine faith-based groups and over 450 students involved in the active and conscious development of their traditions.²² We can only echo what Pope Francis stated, “A journey of peace is possible between religions. Its point of departure must be God’s way of seeing things” (*FT* 281).

7 Renewed Encounter

“Working to overcome our divisions without losing our identity as individuals presumes that a basic sense of belonging is present in everyone” (*FT* 230). Over the nearly two decades that I directed the work of the campus ministry

²² Crews, *In Veritatis Amore*, p. 144.

office, I felt a strong sense of call to the mission of the university, to increase that sense of belonging through the education of the whole person. During orientation for new students, I ended my tour of Our Lady of the Woods Chapel with a focus on a bronze relief that depicts the Holy Family.

I would explain that the campus was built on three hills, each illustrating an aspect of life: the body through the fields and hill for athletics; the mind through the hill with the library; and, the chapel on the hill for the spirit. The biblical quotation on the plaque beneath the relief reinforces this idea, where Jesus “grew in wisdom, age, and grace” (Lk 2:52). Decades later, students tell me that this image of the mind, body, and spiritual growth of Jesus was the most meaningful aspect of the tour, one they still remember.

Fratelli Tutti has been a marvelous invitation to remember. It enabled me to connect my earliest understanding of *Nostra Aetate* with the spirituality of Pope Francis in his letter. I was able to consider my ministry and the history of the campus on which I served. With gratitude for the many rooms of God's house, I have been enriched through a lifetime of interfaith encounters, anchored within the gospel and my Catholic education.



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