



Our Congregational Interculturality

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I'm very pleased to be with you all today to celebrate this 2021 Assembly Day. Together with you I want to honor our life and our healing charism that continue to bear fruits of new life across the globe.

Unfortunately, I cannot be with you for the entire morning, because the Italian assembly is also taking place today, and I'm attending both assemblies. But Sr. Marvi will be with you for the whole morning.

The theme I was asked to present today is **"Our Interculturality"**. I would like to share with you some considerations and reflections that come from our life.

Whether we realize it or not, a form of interculturality is intrinsic to our relationships. When we get to know people within our own cultures, we are called to learn about and deepen our understanding of the conditions of another person's development in their family, among their friends, through their customs, because of their level of education, through their religious beliefs, and so on. But the leap to understanding may seem small, when the experience occurs within our own culture.

We can say that our foundress, Mother Frances, experienced interculturality in her personal life from the beginning. Her mother was French, her father was German, and she learned the languages of both her parents. Her upbringing reflected characteristics of both cultures. Since her birth and the birth of our Congregation, the Congregation itself has moved to different parts of the world to help people in other cultures, and we have been called to engage in interculturality. In our ministries, we have been asked not simply to accept the existence of the different cultures, customs, and languages we encounter but to establish true relationships of connection through deep learning, dialogue, respect, and awareness through experiences of sharing that permit us to understand the truths of these people in order to truly help them.



We have been able to do this through St. Francis' example of deep listening. We listen to the voice of God, to the cry of people who are suffering, to the song of nature, and to one another. In *Fratelli Tutti* (50), Pope Francis calls us to "mature in the encounter of truth." He notes that "Together, we can seek the truth in dialogue, in relaxed conversation or in passionate debate. To do so calls for perseverance; it entails moments of silence and suffering, yet it can patiently embrace the broader experience of individuals and peoples... The process of building fraternity, be it local or universal, can only be undertaken by spirits that are free and open to authentic encounters."

And as our Congregation becomes smaller, our diversity of culture, languages, and ages becomes more apparent, and we look to interculturality as a rising priority within our Congregation, among us, and not simply in our ministries. As a Congregation, we can now distinguish the features and contours of our own intercultural face in a way that we did not in the past, and we want to experience our interculturality with intention. While it is clear that deepening our interculturality is vital to our longevity and to our very existence in the world, our smaller number in this moment is a unique opportunity to cultivate our mutual understanding and interdependence and to strengthen our family in a new way. Through interculturality, God is calling us to create a better, stronger sisterhood that will be able to support and cultivate our relationships in our local communities, our relationships between sisters and associates and in our charismatic family, and our current ministries. By deepening the values of interculturality in our religious family, we will be able to foster new ministries, incarnating the healing charism for today's poverties, and to welcome new young women to follow in our footsteps.

The existence of different cultures within our own Congregation does not necessarily feel new to us. But to this point, it seems that our geographic units were separate from one other, each functioning pretty well on its own. But now, because of the evolution of the world and the global interconnection that make distances much smaller, we as Franciscan sisters of the Poor are called to deepen our interconnectedness and interdependence upon one another. We are a small congregation. Our size, the life in our local communities, and the needs of our ministries drive us to live our interculturality in a new concrete and creative way, in order to more effectively collaborate as agents of God for the healing of Creation, combining together all our cultures, experiences, and abilities for the vitality of our SFP MISSION. By promoting dialogue and interconnection between our different nationalities, languages, communities, age groups, and stages of profession, we can discover, appreciate, and experience who we are and love how different we are. Our richness is such a precious, vital gift!



By investing our energy and hearts in interculturality, we will be able to value equality, respect, freedom, interconnectedness, interdependence, and mutuality across our Congregation. We will intentionally foster reciprocal relationships among us all, who are from different cultural backgrounds, as we work toward encounters of sharing based on trust. As leadership, we have sought to create a variety of experiences that will put us all on this path of intercultural encounters to allow us all to enter into the type of dialogue that generates understanding and respect such as the meetings of the “sister communities,” the formational journey for our temporary professes and prenovices, and the intercultural interviews on video with some of our sisters. These experiences are opportunities for us to develop positive emotions regarding understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promote new behaviors, ideas, and curiosity.

I want to end this presentation with an invitation from Pope Francis:

(55) “I invite everyone to renewed hope, for hope “speaks to us of something deeply rooted in every human heart, independently of our circumstances and historical conditioning. Hope speaks to us of a thirst, an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfillment, a desire to achieve great things, things that fill our heart and lift our spirit to lofty realities like truth, goodness and beauty, justice and love... Hope is bold; it can look beyond personal convenience, the petty securities and compensations which limit our horizon, and it can open us up to grand ideals that make life more beautiful and worthwhile”.[\[52\]](#) Let us continue, then, to advance along the paths of hope”.

Thank you for listening. I want to conclude with a video that shows our intercultural face across the globe. This is a view of our Congregation today during this critical time of the pandemic. Today’s difficulties have not stopped our healing charism or our mission but are propelling us into a new stage of our congregational journey. Thank you for walking together.