

Impressions: Reflections for a New Year

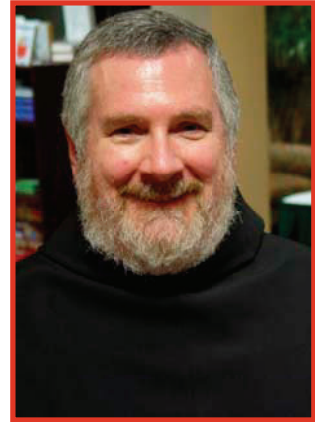
By Father Kevin Queally, TOR

Each year for several decades now, the Holy Father has issued a message on January 1 for the celebration of the World Day of Peace. When this document crossed my desk, along with the statement from the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Conference on the war in Iraq, it seemed a propitious time to reflect on peace and our commitment to it as Franciscans.

It is clear that not all of us have the same thinking as regards the war in Iraq. No doubt many will disagree with the U.S. bishops' call for a "responsible transition" there. At the same time, we are all Catholics and Franciscans, so it would be helpful for us to think and pray about the messages from our Holy Father and bishops. Perhaps we can all grow together if we have a common reflection. The documents, easily available and distributed on the SFO Justice and Peace Network, could serve for our fraternities' use in continuing formation.

Pope Benedict entitles his message "In Truth, Peace." It is a challenging message in many respects, even though relatively brief at sixteen paragraphs. While there is much that is worth reflecting on, a quote might help to focus the discussion: "In view of the risks which humanity is facing in our time, all Catholics in every part of the world have a duty to proclaim and embody ever more fully the 'Gospel of Peace,' and to show that acknowledgment of the full truth of God is the first, indispensable condition for consolidating the truth of peace." (Paragraph 11) Earlier in the letter, our Holy Father reflects on the necessity of truth for peace, and even says: "...wherever and whenever men and women are enlightened by the splendor of truth, they naturally set out on the path of peace." (Paragraph 3)

Clearly, we, as Franciscans, are also called to the "truth of peace," just as Pope Benedict says all Catholics have this duty to proclaim the "Gospel of Peace." Probably every day, each of us prays, "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace." We love to sing the song as well. These words may not be words written by Saint Francis himself, but we all like to claim that they embody his teachings and his spirit. So the challenge is clearly ours. We want to proclaim peace, embody peace, in our homes and in all our relationships, in our communities and parishes, in our workplaces and in our neighborhoods. Yet, our yearning for peace cannot end there. We are called to be instruments of peace on earth as well, fulfilling the duty the Holy Father mentions. In what way can each



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of us and all of us together be instruments of peace? There are many ways to do that, but the message is that we can all do something. First and foremost, of course, is prayer. Very often, prayer leads to action, and in light of the gospels and the Church's teachings, we can each discern how we are to live this call.

However, the whole Order is called to be involved in peacemaking as well. One might say that there is the scandal of divisions among us. How many fraternities and regions find themselves with a lack of peace! One might recall what Saint Paul said: "Brothers and sisters, in the name of God, be reconciled!"

Additionally, there must be some outreach. One way in which this is being furthered is in the work of Franciscans International. This is an organization open to all Franciscans worldwide. The work of this group at the United Nations is supported and reviewed by the Ministers General of the OFMs, Capuchins, Conventuals, TORs, SFOs and the IFC-TOR (International Franciscan Conference – TOR, the organization comprised of all the sisters groups following the TOR rule worldwide). As a non-governmental organization at the United Nations, it has received the highest level of recognition and has become well known for its work furthering the goals of the Franciscans which are in keeping with the Charter of the United Nations, specifically, peacemaking, care for creation and concern for the poor. It might be good for fraternities that have not done so to look into joining Franciscans International, receiving the materials and cooperating with the projects when possible and appropriate.

The document "Toward a Responsible Transition in Iraq" is a statement by Bishop Thomas Wenski of Orlando. He is chair of the USCCB Committee on International Policy. He is very direct as he calls for meaningful dialogue. "Our nation cannot afford a shrill and shallow debate that distorts reality and reduces options to 'cut and run' versus 'stay the course.'" It would be helpful to apply our Holy Father's admonition here about truth and peace. The forthright discussion with an honest assessment called