



Chapter 2017 Recommitment

Called to New Consciousness

God of Mercy, Wisdom and Mystery, who do you desire us to be now for one another and for our suffering world in order to continue our transformation toward greater integrity of word and deed?

The Sixth Institute Chapter has come to believe that the God of Mercy, Wisdom and Mystery is calling us, as Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, an international and intercultural community, to deepen our relationship with God and one another, and to intensify our work in communion with others who seek a more just and inclusive world. We recognize a yearning for oneness in all of creation, in all peoples and within our Institute. Our suffering world calls us to speak and act with integrity and clear intention.

Relationship

We hear a call to strengthen our relationships with one another through

- ❖ reverence for our international and intercultural community;
- ❖ greater availability to one another;
- ❖ healing of personal and communal wounds;
- ❖ contemplative dialogue;
- ❖ integration of contemplation and action;
- ❖ a simple lifestyle;
- ❖ governance that calls forth the voice and engagement of each member.

Critical Concerns

We hear a demand to embrace anew our Critical Concerns through the lens of nonviolence, and

- ❖ to grow in our personal practice of nonviolence and peacemaking, actively collaborate with communities and organizations that foster peace and nonviolence and work to change violent systems and structures;

- ❖ to work zealously toward the sustainability of all life by caring for Earth’s ecosystems, addressing global climate change, advocating for the fundamental right to clean water and committing ourselves to an integral “ecological conversion”¹;
- ❖ to continue our commitment to eliminate personal, communal and institutional racism while working to dismantle structures, policies and processes that oppress;
- ❖ to advocate for the intrinsic value of women’s lives and to promote equality of women in Church and society;
- ❖ to act in solidarity with migrants, immigrants, refugees and victims of human trafficking, seeking with them a more just and inclusive world.

Calls to Respond

We hear the cry of our suffering world. The impoverishment of peoples, the devastation of Earth, and oppressive social norms and systems call us in this moment to act

- ❖ to become better educated and to participate in engaged dialogue on gender identity and sexual orientation;
- ❖ to continue to assure that financial decisions are consistent with our mission and our needs;
- ❖ to intensify efforts to align our investments with our values and, especially now, to pursue education and action against practices of extractive industries that are destroying people, communities and Earth.

In order to respond to the urgent needs of our day, this Sixth Institute Chapter commits us to a renewed exploration and fuller expression of our communal documents². We welcome all to join us in a “revolution of tenderness.”³ In Catherine McAuley’s spirit of union and charity we voice the call of Jesus, “that all may be one.”

¹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*

² *Constitutions; 1991 Founding Document and Direction Statement; 2005 Critical Concerns; 2011 Chapter Declaration*

³ Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel, Art.88*



Encuentro Definitions

In English when we use the word encounter it has a limited meaning however in Spanish the word 'encuentro' has many different meanings in the context in which it is spoken.

Encontrase:	A getting together
Encuentro:	Gathering in a meeting, conference, or assembly
Encuentro:	Butting heads, or a conflict
Encuentro:	A sports match
Re-encuentro:	A second meeting, second chance
Encontronazo:	A crash or big clash
Llevarse al encuentro:	To drag along, away
Desencuentro:	A failed gathering or conversation

Encuentro is what happens afterwards, it's an experience.

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It's time for a theology of encounter

by Mike Jordan Laskey

Young Voices

Today in Rome, a eucharistic procession for the feast of Corpus Christi will wind its way from the Basilica of St. John Lateran to the Basilica of St. Mary Major. On Sunday, Catholics here in the United States will celebrate this solemnity that's about the ways we can encounter God in the world -- specifically in the Eucharist, of course, but also in the other sacraments, in Scripture, in the created universe, and in the community.

That word, "encounter," is one of Pope Francis' favorites, popping up often in his public addresses and used 32 times in his apostolic exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*. He talks about encounter as an antidote to our "throwaway culture," in which people who are seen as useless are cast aside: the unborn, the elderly, immigrants, the poor. If we encounter Christ in those people who are usually marginalized and get to know them, then we won't be able to throw them away. You don't ignore and neglect a friend.

I use "encounter" all the time when introducing Catholic social teaching to parish and school groups. It seems to hook people with an accessibility and emphasis on relationship that other terms like "human dignity," "solidarity and subsidiarity," "call to participation," and "preferential option" lack. I talk about these essential concepts, too, but using encounter first lets people start with a person instead of with an encyclical or a bullet-point list of teachings.

Following Pope Francis' lead, we Catholics should develop a "theology of encounter." The term is too rich, and the current "Pope Francis moment" is too big, to miss this opportunity. So here is a call for professional theologians to think and write about encounter, for ordained and lay ministers to create and share pastoral initiatives around encounter, and for the rest of the faithful to talk about and practice encounter in our daily lives. I think a robust "theology of encounter" might be a key to helping Catholic social teaching finally shed its sad tagline as the "best-kept secret" of the church.

For my own first contribution to the conversation, here are five quick thoughts inspired by one of Scripture's finest examples of encounter: the parable of the good Samaritan.

1. Encounter requires physical movement across traditional boundaries.

In the parable, the two religious leaders notice the beaten man, but they pass him by on the other side of the road as if they were horses with blinders on. The Samaritan traveler, however, "[comes] near" the victim after he saw him. He moves toward the suffering, not away from it. Also, the fact the hero of the parable is a Samaritan would have challenged Jesus' audience, as Samaritans and Jews were enemies. Perhaps in our own time, this story could be about the "good radical Islamist." The Samaritan does not let man-made social boundaries prevent him from extending mercy.

2. Encounter requires a willingness to change plans.

I have a list of a few friends I start with when I need a late-night ride home from the airport. There are some people who are so generous that they really don't care about being inconvenienced. Too often, I am not one of those people. The Samaritan had somewhere to be, but he takes a significant detour that costs him time and money. I get the feeling he was the type of guy who did this sort of thing all the time, whenever he saw someone hurting. Encounter means putting our own wants aside when we see the needs of another.

3. Encounter requires careful discernment.

The Samaritan sizes up the situation and responds accordingly. He notices the traveler's wounds and bandages them. He realizes the man won't be able to walk, so he puts him on the Samaritan's own animal. He recognizes that the severity of the beating will require longer-term care than he can provide, so he brings the man to an inn. Attentive learning from those affected by a social ill is a necessary step to address the problem. Asking questions and listening is best, which wasn't possible in the case of the unconscious traveler.

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4. Encounter requires follow-through.

To make sure the traveler was cared for well, the Samaritan invites and empowers the innkeeper to participate in the work of compassion. He gets others involved. Also, he promises to return on his return trip. Encounter is not a one-time, feel-good moment, but a series of faithful responses over and over and over again.

5. Encounter requires systemic change.

Martin Luther King Jr. said it best: "On the one hand we are called to play the Good Samaritan on life's roadside, but that will be only an initial act," he told a crowd at Riverside Church in 1967. "One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho Road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see than an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring." As we get to know those who have been beaten down, we are called to work to change the social, economic, and cultural systems that are oppressing them.

My call for a theology of encounter would be incomplete without the words of our indefatigable Holy Father himself: "When you meet those most in need, your heart will begin to grow bigger, bigger and bigger! Because reaching out multiplies our capacity to love. An encounter with others makes our heart bigger. Take courage!"

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What Pope Francis Means By a Culture of Encounter

JULY 1, 2015 BY THOMAS J. EGGLESTON



In a homily given on his first Pentecost as our pontiff, Pope Francis suggested that the word “encounter” is central to the way he thinks of Christian relationships. In the homily he encourages the faithful to be fearless in the ways in which they look beyond their own needs and wants to those of others. He says that “in this ‘stepping out’ [of ourselves] it is important to be ready for encounter. For me this word is very important. Encounter with others... Because faith is an encounter with Jesus, and

we must do what Jesus does: encounter others.” With this line of thinking, Christians encounter other people in their imitation of Christ, but on top of that, the disciple encounters other people as a *response* to having an encounter with Christ in the first place. Francis on a regular basis has spoken of a Culture of Encounter as a goal for human society. A society that espouses a Culture of Encounter facilitates right relationship among humans and involves a spirituality that emphasizes a personal friendship with God who first encounters us in love.

The Meaning of Encounter

In Spanish, the pope’s first language, the word *encuentro* is often used in spiritual terms, and in this pontificate it is being translated into English as “encounter.” The term in Spanish, however, is packed with more meaning than a literal translation to the English cognate is able to convey. An encounter between God and one’s self begins first and foremost by acknowledging that we are *being encountered* by our Creator who loves us infinitely—an encounter requires a dynamic back and forth between two entities. In his pastoral exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, Francis urges the faithful to “a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them” (3). Underscored here is an important point about the dynamism of an encounter. Christ is constantly reaching out to all persons, but the *event* of an encounter happens when that invitation is acknowledged and responded to by a human being. There is a divine vulnerability to reaching out, an eager waiting in hope of a response.

The philosopher Enrique Dussel, who hails from Argentina along with the pope, adds much to an understanding of encounter. In his book *Introducción a la filosofía de la liberación* (Introduction to the Philosophy of Liberation), Dussel explains that two people encountering one another involves action, a give and take. But even more importantly, it involves openness to mystery and relationship. To encounter another person is to realize that no matter the depths to which we may get to know each other, the well of mystery will never be exhausted, a strange fact that long-time married couples know well. Interpersonal encounter in the Christian sense is thus both active and relational—it occurs between two or more persons or between a person and God. An encounter between two people is a graced experience in which one realizes a strange paradox: the seemingly contradictory human situation of the utter connectedness within which we live in solidarity with each other and at the same time the wild otherness which makes us our own beings living in solitude.

Dussel, a Catholic, notes that only sentient beings may encounter one another. He explains that a person may look at an insect, even examine it under a microscope; the bug might, in turn look back, but the person and the bug do not have the experience of actively encountering each other because the action lacks a certain depth and mystery of which the insect is incapable. The mystery of an encounter occurs between persons. On top of that, the philosopher notes that there is an analogous quality to encountering the *other*. Certainly to encounter another person is to experience the grace of the living God. But in encountering “the other,” the event also mimics our encounter with the Divine Other. To put it another way: to encounter a living-breathing friend, to

embrace a child, or to share a meal with a hungry person is to have an experience which is in essence the way which we encounter the intangible and invisible God.

The Culture of Encounter is simply then, the structuring of a society in which persons encounter each other and because of this are able to encounter the living God.

The Culture of Encounter Denounces Exclusion and Isolation

Any system or relationship that is not based off of human encounters which respect the dignity of both persons is an affront to both persons' human dignity. The Culture of Encounter thus denounces such situations as well as any system that promotes structures in which the poor and marginalized. Thus any inter-human communication, law, exchange, conversation, or interaction whatsoever must respect the inherent dignity of both parties. In such a culture there are macro and interpersonal implications. In short, all interactions with other people must underscore the notion that that person is human. In *Evangelii gaudium*, Pope Francis stresses this challenge by noting the daunting particulars of our current global situation. He writes, "today, when the networks and means of human communication have made unprecedented advances, we sense the challenge of finding and sharing a 'mystique' of living together, of mingling and encounter, of embracing and supporting one another, of stepping into this flood tide which, while chaotic, can become a genuine experience of fraternity, a caravan of solidarity, a sacred pilgrimage" (87).

Francis points to how the possibility of encounter has risen massively of late, while our human attempts to encounter seem to have diminished. He notes in a recent address celebrating World Communications Day that "it is not enough to be passersby on the digital highways, simply 'con-nected'; connections need to grow into true encounters. We cannot live apart, closed in on ourselves...The digital world can be an environment rich in humanity; a network not of wires but of people." The possibilities for true, human encounter are heightened by technology yet the reality is strikingly opposite—people are having fewer deep encounters than ever.

Pope Francis notes that global capitalism is one such system that inhibits a Culture of Encounter. Indeed one matter at which capitalism succeeds immensely is convincing the consumer that all economic endeavors are private. In capitalism, the consumer may purchase anything he or she can afford; the seller may vend anything that a consumer will pay for. The relationship between the consumer and the seller, however, falls far short of encounter because they are tacitly encouraged to see each other as a means to an end—a way of making a financial gain and a way of getting something one wants respectively. The relationship between bosses and labor is very often one of seeing each other as a means to an end as well; it is a relationship of fear and often coercion rather than one of human encounter between management and employees.

Even if an encounter event takes place between a person purchasing something and a person selling something, capitalism stealthily allows for this to be perceived as a very private matter between the two individuals present. The reality, however, is that in nearly every economic transaction, there are many more humans involved. To purchase a garment in a store never requires one to consider those who worked to grow and harvest the cotton or spin the fibers or the workers in factories who stitched the garment together who much too often work in deplorable labor conditions for paltry pay. To purchase an apple at a supermarket does not require one to encounter the farmer nor the migrant worker who picked the fruit. Capitalism stymies a Culture of Encounter by having us all believe that our economic transactions do not involve anyone but ourselves. The tragic consequences for such a falsehood is the shadowy background in which many persons are persecuted and at the same time the opportunities for genuine human encounter being stymied. The pope, in his animating a Culture of Encounter, denounces a capitalist system which stands in the way of genuine human to human encounter.

The Culture of Encounter Proclaims Relationship

While living in a society that may justly be critiqued using the Culture of Encounter as a lens, it must not be forgotten that along with denouncing injustice, the prophets of encounter also proclaim the goodness of human relationship. One such assertion is that the Culture of Encounter is first and foremost *personalist*. John Paul II in *Love and Responsibility* offers insight into how the philosophy of personalism aids us in thinking of each other as God sees us. He writes, "the term 'person' has been coined to signify that a man [or woman] cannot be wholly contained within the concept 'individual member of the species,' but that there is something more to him, a particular richness and perfection in the manner of his being, which can only be brought out by the use of the word 'person.'" To encounter another person is to realize her inherent human dignity and the manner in which she—and only she—may direct us to the unique way in which God loves her. To see another person as a personalist does is to see that person as an unrepeatable individual whose mystery is limitless, an *other* who points toward the Divine Other in a way that only he can.

The poor hold a privileged place in the Culture of Encounter. In the aforementioned Pentecost homily, Francis notes that in stepping out of ourselves, we will see that other people "have something in common with us: they are images of God, they are children of God. Going out to meet everyone, without losing sight of our own position. There is another important point: encountering the poor." The pope is very critical of a system that would obsess over individual ticks in a stock market yet ignore even a single death of a homeless person. The personalist focuses on the person, not data or vacillations in a market. The poor are of particular importance

because they are the most ignored and seen as the most dispensable. Yet in God's eyes they are equal in dignity and importance to the rich and powerful person. Indeed to encounter the poor person is quite literally to encounter Christ. With this in mind, the Culture of Encounter proclaims the equal dignity imbued in each and every person who is the image and likeness of God.

The Culture of Encounter Is a Journey through Mystery

Lastly, the Culture of Encounter places value on mystery. To see the world through the lens of encounter is to realize the presence of God all around us and that we are connected to each other through ties both visible and invisible. God is mysteriously present in each and every person, and that unique person manifests God's love in a way in which only he or she is able. The spirituality of encounter, while it denounces and proclaims certain aspects of society and human relationship, at its core is a realization of God's immanent presence and an acknowledgement that we experience the love of God in relationship with other people. The Culture of Encounter moves us to walk the journey of our lives tenderly holding each other's hands knowing all the while that it is Christ who is our veiled and shining companion.

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POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

For a culture of encounter

Tuesday, 13 September 2016

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 38, 23 September 2016)

An invitation to work for “the culture of encounter”, in a simple way, “as Jesus did”: not just seeing, but looking; not just hearing, but listening; not just passing people by, but stopping with them; not just saying “what a shame, poor people!”, but allowing yourself to be moved with compassion; “and then to draw near, to touch and to say: ‘Do not weep’ and to give at least a drop of life”. Pope Francis used these words in his homily to describe the message contained in the liturgical readings of the Mass he celebrated at Santa Marta on Tuesday morning.

Focusing in particular on the scene of the widow of Nain, from the Gospel of Luke (7:11-17), the Pope highlighted that this passage from “the Word of God” speaks of “an encounter. There is an encounter between people, an encounter between people who were in the street”. And this, he commented, is “something unusual”. In fact, “when we go into the street, every man thinks of himself: he sees, but does not look; he hears, but does not listen”; in short, everyone goes their own way. And consequently “people pass each other, but they do not encounter each other”. Because, Pope Francis clarified, “an encounter is something else” entirely, and this is “what the Gospel today proclaims to us: an encounter between a man and a woman, between an only son who is alive and an only son who is dead; between a happy group of people — happy because they have encountered Jesus and followed him — and a group of people who weep as they accompany the woman”, who is a widow and is on her way to bury her only son.

“The Gospel says: ‘When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her’”. In this regard, the Pope pointed out that it is not “the first time” the Gospel speaks of Christ’s compassion. “When Jesus saw the crowds, on the day of the multiplication of the loaves”, he was also seized with great compassion, the Pope said, “and before the tomb of his friend Lazarus, he wept”.

This compassion, the Pope advised, is not the same as what we normally feel “when, for example, we go out into the street and see something sad: ‘What a shame!’”. After all, “Jesus did not say: ‘What a poor woman!’”. On the contrary, “he went further. He was seized with compassion. ‘And he drew near and spoke. He said to her: Do not weep’”. In this way, “Jesus, with his compassion, involves himself with that woman’s problem. ‘He drew near, he spoke and he touched’. The Gospel says that he touched the coffin. Surely, however, when he said ‘do not

weep', he touched the widow as well. A caress. Because Jesus was moved. And then he performed the miracle": that is, He raised the young man to life.

Thus the Pope pointed out an analogy: "The only son who is dead resembles Jesus, and he is transformed into an only son who is alive, like Jesus. And Jesus' action truly shows the tenderness of an encounter, and not only the tenderness, but the fruitfulness of an encounter. 'The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus returned him to his mother'. He did not say: 'The miracle has been done'. No, he said: 'Come, take him, he is yours'". That is why "every encounter is fruitful. Each encounter returns people and things to their place".

This discourse also reaches out to the people of today, who are far too "accustomed to a culture of indifference" and who therefore need to "work and ask for the grace to build a culture of encounter, of this fruitful encounter, this encounter that returns to each person their dignity as children of God, the dignity of living". We "are accustomed to this indifference", the Pope said, whether it be "when we see the calamities of this world" or when faced with the "little things". We limit ourselves to saying: "Oh, what a shame, poor people, they suffer so much", and then we move on. Pope Francis explained that an encounter, however, is different: "If I do not look, — seeing is not enough, no: look — if I do not stop, if I do not look, if I do not touch, if I do not speak, I cannot create an encounter and I cannot help to create a culture of encounter".

Returning to the Gospel scene, the Pope highlighted that at seeing the miracle that Jesus performed, "the people were seized by fear and they glorified God. And I like to see here too", the Pope explained, "the day-to-day encounter between Jesus and his bride, the Church, who awaits his return. And every time that Jesus finds pain, a sinner, a person in the street, He looks at them, He speaks to them, He returns them to his bride". Therefore, "this is today's message: Jesus' encounter with his people; the encounter of Jesus who serves, who helps, who is the servant, who lowers himself, who is compassionate with all those in need". And, said Francis, "when we say 'those in need' let us think not only of the homeless", but also "of ourselves, of those of us, who are in need", Pope Francis said, "in need of Jesus' words, of his caress — and also of those who are dear to us". Offering a concrete example, the Pope described the image of a family gathered at the table: "so often people eat while watching TV or writing messages on their phones. Each person is indifferent to that encounter. Even right there at the core of society, which is the family, there is no encounter", he said. Hence his final exhortation "to work for the culture of encounter, in a simple way, as Jesus did".

*...Bonds of union
and charity...*

Community Life

**Sisters of Mercy
of the Americas**

Constitutions

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Community Life

18. By our life in community and by sharing our faith and mission, we come to know ourselves as sisters and to form bonds of union and charity. Reverence for the unique gift of each member—the young and the old, the well and the infirm—helps us to live together in affection and mutual respect. When breaches of charity occur, we encourage each other to speak the truth in love and to bring prayer and patience to the restoration of harmony.

19. Community strengthens us for mission when we listen openly to one another, seek the common good and promote mutual trust. A sign of our union and charity is our personal and corporate willingness to share our lives and resources with the poor and the afflicted.