



Credit: Migrant-Refugee Section/Vatican

Fratelli Tutti and Migration

Discussion Guide



Fratelli Tutti - Discussion Guide

“There is always the factor of ‘gratuitousness’: the ability to do some things simply because they are good in themselves, without concern for personal gain or recompense. Gratuitousness makes it possible for us to welcome the stranger, even though this brings us no immediate tangible benefit.”

The Catholic bishops of the United States have consistently called for just and welcoming immigration practices recognizing the importance of welcoming our sisters and brothers, promoting their well being, protecting them from harm, and integrating them more fully into our national and local communities. Pope Francis’ newest encyclical, *Fratelli tutti*, speaks to these and other concerns, and is worth studying closely. With that in mind, this guide provides direction (1) how to prepare a small group discussion of the papal encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, (2) an overview of some of the key themes and important takeaways in *Fratelli tutti*, and (3) some discussion questions that can be used to help guide your small groups. It is also ideal for personal reflection, if a small group discussion is not possible.

I. Logistics and Meeting Planning

MATERIALS

At least a week in advance, make sure that everyone has access to the following items:

- A full copy of Pope Francis’ encyclical [Fratelli tutti](https://www.vatican.va/encyclicals/2020/05/20200513_fratelli-tutti_en.html). You can order copies of the encyclical from store.usccb.org or get the text of the encyclical online at www.vatican.va.
- An advance copy of this guide so that people can prepare themselves for small group discussion.
- If able, bring to the session a few extra copies of the encyclical.

ROOM SET-UP

Given the certain circumstances related to COVID-19, if an in person meeting is not possible then use Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or some other online format to connect the group. If an in-person meeting is viable, arrange the chairs in a circle so that everyone is facing each other. You might also want to have a whiteboard available if you think it worthwhile to take notes while people are talking.

MEETING OUTLINE

I. Introductions – 5 minutes

Invite everyone to briefly introduce himself or herself, and to share why he or she came. Keep the introductions brief.

II. Opening Prayer & Introductory Reflections – 5 minutes

Invite everyone to place herself or himself in the presence of God. You can either use one of the prayers provided by Pope Francis at the end of the encyclical or use one of your own:

Lord, Father of our human family,
you created all human beings equal in dignity:
pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit
and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter,
dialogue, justice and peace.
Move us to create healthier societies
and a more dignified world,
a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war.

May our hearts be open
to all the peoples and nations of the earth.

May we recognize the goodness and beauty
that you have sown in each of us,
and thus forge bonds of unity, common projects,
and shared dreams. Amen.

III. Background Information and Discussion – 30 minutes

Welcome everyone and remind them that the purpose of the gathering is to reflect on the theme of migration in Pope Francis' encyclical, *Fratelli tutti*. Provide some guidelines for the discussion. Remind the participants that the purpose of the discussion is to explore our faith and how we are to live it out in the world, not to debate with one another. Feel free to use the discussion questions as a way to get people to start talking about the encyclical and migration.

We understand that migration can be a contentious subject in which emotions run high and disagreements often quickly arise. It is important as you discuss migration-related questions to try to keep the conversation civil. Here are some tips that might help you to do that:

1. Listen first and seek to understand the whole picture that your conversation partner is trying to get across.
2. Ask questions for clarification before interjecting your own opinions on the subject.
3. Use 'I' statements and try avoid statements that are overly declarative or absolute
4. Pay attention to your conversarion partner's body language so as to make sure they remain comfortable.
5. Listen to what feelings are present in yourself and pay attention to how you respond to them. Try to stay calm
6. Summarize what you've heard to ensure that you understand what is being said and ask for feedback.

IV. Follow up Action – 10 minutes

- Invite members of the group to discuss and share ways they can act on what they have learned as family members, workers, owners, consumers, and voters.
- Reflect on some of the ways in which participants can take action in their local community so that they can better welcome immigrants who live in their midst.
- Invite participants to sign up for the Justice for Immigrants listserv so that they can keep abreast as to what is going on with respect to migration and Catholic teaching. To do this the organizer can either take their name and email addresses and send this information to Tony Cube (ACube@uscgb.org), or direct them to www.justiceforimmigrants.org where they can sign up on their own.
- Close with a discussion of any next steps that this group can do together moving ahead and be sure to exchange contact information for those involved at the meeting.

II. Overview of *Fratelli tutti*

Signed on October 3, 2020, at the tomb of St. Francis of Assisi, *Fratelli tutti* is Pope Francis' third encyclical. The document serves as the Holy Father's commentary on human fraternity and social friendship in the present age. Its title is taken from St. Francis' Admonitions, in which the saint addressed his fellow friars on matters of spirituality and the challenges of religious life. Throughout his pontificate, Pope Francis has drawn inspiration from the life of St. Francis, especially his openness to seeing all human persons as members of the same family, regardless of cultural and religious differences. *Fratelli tutti* is the embodiment of that approach.

As is the case with most encyclicals, *Fratelli tutti* begins with a discussion of the problems currently plaguing the world: geopolitical tensions; economic and social opportunism; the "throwaway" culture; the COVID-19 pandemic; rejection of foreigners; and divisive rhetoric in digital communication. Pope Francis describes these as the "dark clouds over a closed world." Yet, the Holy Father goes on to conclude this first part of the encyclical with a message of hope—"[f]or God continues to sow abundant seeds of goodness in our human family." In that same vein, Pope Francis characterizes the encyclical overall as a roadmap of hope.

III. On the Subject of Migration

“So this encounter of mercy between a Samaritan and a Jew is highly provocative; it leaves no room for ideological manipulation and challenges us to expand our frontiers. It gives a universal dimension to our call to love, one that transcends all prejudices, all historical and cultural barriers, all petty interests.”

Pope Francis provides special consideration for migrants in *Fratelli tutti*, particularly addressing conceptions of migrants as “other” or strangers in a foreign land. In creating a foundation for this, Pope Francis dedicates the encyclical’s second chapter (“A Stranger on the Road”) to discussing the parable of the Good Samaritan, wherein he speaks of “neighbors without borders.” With this well-known parable, the Holy Father describes how Christ “challenges us to put aside all differences and, in the face of suffering, to draw near to others with no questions asked. I should no longer say that I have neighbors to help, but that I must myself be a neighbor to others.” In doing so, the Holy Father does not disregard the rights of nations to preserve their borders but instead emphasizes the metaphorical boundaries of human existence, which our common heritage requires us to transcend.

Along this line of thought, Pope Francis also warns against “instances of a myopic, extremist, resentful and aggressive nationalism” which is emergent in many parts of the world. Such sentiments tend to breed xenophobia and contempt for those who are different, for those on the margins, and for migrants. To counter these trends, it is critical that catechesis and preaching speak “about the social meaning of existence, the fraternal dimension of spirituality, our conviction of the inalienable dignity of each person, and our reasons for loving and accepting all our brothers and sisters.” In other words, a healthy patriotism must be set against a recognition of the inherent dignity of all people.

The fourth chapter of the encyclical (“A Heart Open to the Whole World”) speaks most specifically on the subject of migrants, and Pope Francis incorporates many previous statements he’s made on their behalf. Acknowledging the “complex challenges” that arise when our neighbor happens to be an immigrant, the Holy Father summarizes our response to the arrival of migrants in four words: welcome, protect, promote, and integrate. The use of these four verbs recalls his [2018 World Day of Migrants and Refugees](#) message, where he called on Catholics to demonstrate solidarity with migrants “at every stage of the migratory experience – from departure through journey to arrival and return.” In *Fratelli tutti*, the Pope cites specific steps that should be taken to achieve these goals, from “increasing and simplifying the granting of visas” and “opening humanitarian corridors for the most vulnerable refugees” to “establish[ing] in our societies the concept of full citizenship and to reject the discriminatory use of the term minorities, which engenders feelings of isolation and inferiority.” Meanwhile, Pope Francis maintains that “unnecessary migration ought to be avoided; this entails creating in countries of origin the conditions needed for a dignified life and integral development. Yet until substantial progress is made in achieving this goal, we are obliged to respect the right of all individuals to find a place that meets their basic needs and those of their families, and where they can find personal fulfilment.”

Pope Francis also highlights the “fruitful exchange” that occurs when migrants are welcomed in a new land. Here, he quotes from [The Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together](#), a joint statement he signed with Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, which states, “Immigrants, if they are helped to integrate, are a blessing, a source of enrichment and new gift that encourages a society to grow.” Nevertheless, the Holy Father cautions against an overly utilitarian view. God, he says, “gives freely, to the point of helping even those who are unfaithful.” “The true worth of the different countries of our world is measured,” Pope Francis says, “by their ability to think not simply as a country but also as part of the larger human family. . . Immigrants are seen as usurpers who have nothing to offer. This leads to the simplistic belief that the poor are dangerous and useless, while the powerful are generous benefactors. Only a social and political culture that readily and ‘gratuitously’ welcomes others will have a future.”

IV. Key Takeaways

While borders may be justified, they must not be used to divide families.

Unnecessary migration should be avoided—but only when countries of origin provide conditions necessary for a dignified life and integral development.

Four key responses to migrants: welcome, protect, promote, and integrate.

Reflect on some of the steps that countries can take when engaging migrants:

- Increasing and simplifying the granting of visas;
- Adopting programs of individual and community sponsorship;
- Opening humanitarian corridors for the most vulnerable refugees;
- Providing suitable and dignified housing;
- Guaranteeing personal security and access to basic services;
- Ensuring adequate consular assistance and the right to retain personal identity documents;
- Equitable access to the justice system;
- The possibility of opening bank accounts and the guarantee of the minimum needed to survive;
- Freedom of movement and the possibility of employment;
- Protecting minors and ensuring their regular access to education;
- Providing for programs of temporary guardianship or shelter;
- Guaranteeing religious freedom;
- Promoting integration into society;
- Supporting the reuniting of families; and
- Preparing local communities for the process of integration.

Uplift the importance of citizenship so that others not born in your country can find full inclusion in the national community: “For those who are not recent arrivals and already participate in the fabric of society, it is important to apply the concept of ‘citizenship’, which ‘is based on the equality of rights and duties, under which all enjoy justice.’”

Embrace the reciprocal gifts of cultural exchange and seek to better understand the values of other cultures.

Practice generosity with respect to your time and possessions with migrants in need of help, as a way of imitating God’s generosity toward you.

V. Discussion Questions

When reflecting on Fratelli tutti on a personal level or engaging in small group discussions regarding how it can apply to your lives, the following questions can help to inspire your thinking on the issue of migration in the thought of Pope Francis.

1. In what ways does your faith guide your thinking on the migration question?
2. How does the theme of nationalism play out in political life today? How can it be both an obstacle to care for the migrant? Are there ways in which highlighting national identity, such as a history of welcoming and being a nation of immigrants it also bring benefits to political life?
3. What are some of the gifts that different cultures can exchange with one another? What things from your own culture do you seek to share?

4. What are some real life examples of accompaniment that you can do in your parish, community and with your elected officials?
5. What are some of the obstacles that prevent us from creating a culture that is more welcoming and which seeks to protect, promote, and integrate migrants?
6. How can we as Catholics respond to the increasingly dehumanizing global rhetoric regarding immigrants and refugees? What can we do differently so that we can counter this kind of rhetoric and the culture that grows out of it?

Please provide any feedback that you have on this study guide to Todd Scribner at TScribner@uscgb.org, and let him know what worked, what didn't, and what we can do to help make these kinds of resources more user friendly for you. If you have not done so already, please follow us on twitter @uscgbjfi and join our listserv at www.justiceforimmigrants.org so that you can keep up to date on issues related to migration and Catholic thought.