



ORDO FRATRUM MINORUM



*Letter: Children praying for peace
Aleppo, 27 November 2016
First Sunday of Advent*

To all the friars of the Order of Friars Minor
to the Poor Clares,
to the sisters to the brothers of the Secular Franciscan Order,
and to all women and men of good will

“See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father” (Matthew 18: 10).

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

May the Lord give you peace!

For a long time, as Friars Minor, we have been concerned about the situation that our brothers are experiencing together with the Christians and the entire population of Syria. Not long ago, we called on the international community to intensify its efforts to stop the war and the suffering of the civilian population and to make every effort to achieve peace.

Now, at the beginning of Advent, a time in which the Lord Jesus invites us to insistently watch and pray, we want to propose to all our communities the “Children praying for peace” initiative. It began as an idea from the “Aid to the Church in Need” project, and we wish to join it as the Order of Friars Minor, and to relaunch it on an international level on a monthly basis. This initiative comes from the awareness that the King of the Universe, the King of Peace, is the true source of all peace. Our Parish of St. Francis in Aleppo, which has been strongly affected by the tragedy of war and which has been tenaciously anchored to its hope for peace, has already joined the initiative. From Aleppo, we are now sending out our invitation to the whole world.

Starting in Advent 2016, we wish to join this initiative as the Order of Friars Minor and we want to encourage all of the communities, parishes and schools entrusted to our pastoral care and to all of the organizations close to us [to join in the initiative]; and we also encourage them to spread the word to other ecclesiastical and religious communities in the areas in which the Friars Minor live and operate. We believe that the Lord hears the cry of the “little ones” and that their prayer their will become an opportunity for reflection and conversion for those who are “big.”

We are asking each community to dedicate **their children's mass, or the mass most frequented by children, on the first Sunday of every month, to prayer for peace**, according to what is locally possible. The same thing can be done in a celebration during the Oratory or by involving the schools, thus, in this way giving an ecumenical and interreligious spirit to the initiative.

If a community does not have a children's liturgy or if it does not have a ministry for Oratories or a school, it can make the gesture during the communal Praises or Vespers, or on an occasion created especially for this initiative.

Here are some practical suggestions so as to unify the form of the celebration, taking from the example of how it is done in Aleppo: after the initial greeting and the introduction of the celebration by the priest, some children will process in with a lighted candle, which will be placed near the altar, in a visible place, while all sing, or while they recite the "simple prayer" for peace.

In addition to this, different intentions from the Prayer of the Faithful will be dedicated to peace in people's hearts, peace for the families and peace in Aleppo and all around the world. The songs should also be dedicated to the theme of peace.

If the prayer is carried out outside of the Eucharistic celebration, it can always be adapted to the celebration, maintaining the symbol of the candle lighting, along with the simple prayer and songs for peace (remembering to always explain to the children that this prayer is in communion with all of the children of the world for peace in Syria, especially in Aleppo and for peace in the world).

Simple prayer for peace

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is discord, union;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is error, Truth;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is sadness, joy;
where there is darkness, light.

O Divine Master, grant That I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving That We receive,
it is in pardoning That we are pardoned,
and it is in dying That we are born to Eternal Life.
Amen.

We ask all those who take heed to our proposal, to report it on to our Facebook page:
www.facebook.com/Children-in-prayer-for-peace-1226291644125867

God bless every effort for peace and may he listen to the cry and the prayer of His children.

Faternally,

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Minister General

Fr. Francesco Patton OFM
Custos of the Holy Land