



*Office of Presiding Bishop
Ecumenical Catholic Communion*

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Christmas Message

December 23, 2017

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Greetings and a very merry Christmas to each of you!

It was St. Francis of Assisi who is thought to have invented the manger scene. He liked being graphic about the birth of Jesus. Let's think about the manger scene.

If you remove from the scene the foreigners, the aliens, who come from other cultures and practice other religions, you wreck a huge part of the meaning. And after that if you remove the Jewish people from the scene, there are no humans left.

If you remove the fear generated by a powerful and oppressive king, causing Mary and Joseph to flee for their lives to another country, and become aliens themselves, you have a manger in Pleasantville, which it surely was not. This was a place where the lives of children were sacrificed for the desires of the powerful.

Jesus lived his life standing with the poor, the excluded, and the oppressed. In this he manifested the expansive heart of God, whose heart includes all and excludes none. To honor his birth today, we can do no less. To make the birth of Christ graphic today, we must do the same.

Let's look for opportunities to participate this year in saying "yes" to inclusion. God's love embraces everyone. For the rest of us, that is often a stretch. Let's look for opportunities. One I would like to remind you of, or tell you about if you haven't heard, is the march on Washington on April 4th, 2018, sponsored by the National Council of Churches. We are marking the 50th Anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It is an opportunity for all of us to cry out for an end to racism and for we, who are white, to say an emphatic "No!" to the lie that whites are somehow superior to blacks, to say we will not participate in this dividing, this deprecating any more. We will not participate in feeling better about ourselves by feeling worse about others. There is no superior race, we will proclaim. In fact, race is a social construction; we are all one people, despite our various particularities. We will celebrate and live the inclusive love of the living God!

Circle your calendars for April 4th, 2018, a few days after Easter, and plan if you can to go with your friends and family to the National Mall in Washington, DC. Don't think there are no opportunities to make the birth of Christ graphic this year.

My hope is that you and your families and friends will have blessed, joyous gatherings this year, that you will know the divine reality of human oneness, and that you will desire to make it spread!

Your brother,

+Francis