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## Crossing Roads

The Editorial Board

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# Crossing Roads

The Editorial Board

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In many ways, the entire parable of the Good Samaritan serves as a hermeneutical key to the thought and approach of Pope Francis. It was very much a part of his early writings when he compared the Church to a field hospital at the forefront of tending to the immediate needs of all. This same parable took pride of place in *Fratelli tutti* as well, filling an entire chapter while having us consider how this is “constantly retold” (FT 69) each and every day of our lives. It begins with the question, “Who are our neighbors?”, a question that challenges us to reconsider differences and boundaries which may prevent us from truly being the loving beings that we are created to be. The encyclical does much more than ask questions—it is a call to action and one which makes us consider which side of the road we want to walk on.

Both the priest and the Levite in the parable famously saw the injured man and passed by on the other side of the road, putting distance between them and the problem, using the road as a buffer that separated them from someone in need. This image is particularly apt when we consider the number of people who have walked in protest in recent months, passing through streets in solidarity with those who are most in need of representation, proclaiming not just that Black Lives Matter, but that this recognition is but the start of greater change that has to happen in our society. And so, during dual pandemics of systemic racism and COVID-19, we are called to creative, intimate, and new forms of connection, to be close in radically different ways so that we can engage meaningfully and with love.

The act of not passing by on the other side, of stopping and aiding those most marginalized, lies at the heart of *Fratelli tutti*. Much more can be said about this, and deeper, more profound readings of the encyclical are bound to come, but two aspects stand out at this time with urgency: the need for relationship and for dialogue, both of which require the closeness that comes from bold and countercultural road crossings. This “speaks to us of an essential and often forgotten aspect of our common humanity: we were created for a fulfilment that can only be found in love.” (FT 68) This is the acknowledgment of the fundamental truth that we are all children of God and that we cannot remain isolated from the suffering that is experienced around us. This also allows us to recognize that love is more than just a series of actions but has its “source in a union increasingly directed towards others, considering them of value, worthy, pleasing and beautiful apart from their physical or moral appearances” (FT 94). This love for others moves us closer to each other in spirit even as we remain physically distant, forming dignified relationships and starting meaningful dialogues.

## Editorial Board: Crossing Roads

Human persons are, by nature, open to relationships. We have a deep call within us to transcend our individual selves through encounters with others (FT 111). This comes through the rejection of radical individualism and the promotion of social friendship and universal fraternity, affirming the worth of every human person through the relationships that we have (FT 106). Relationality can thus be seen to be the basis for solidarity; we cannot help but be moved when faced with the visceral reality of difficulties and suffering of others. The encyclical helps us recognize that the antidote to the fragmentation that comes with rampant individualism lies in the solidarity or “solidity” which relationships bring (FT 115). The turn toward relationality that is grounded in love pushes us to expand our vision of who our fellow children of God are, inviting us to cross the road to be with those in need or of different social positions than our own, standing together because there is no other alternative if we claim to follow the Lord.

The concrete help that we can give and the solidarity with those in need are but the start of something more. The importance of dialogue emphasized in the encyclical could not have come at a better moment. Political and social discourse over the past months has descended into polarized polemics, becoming not dialogue but merely parallel monologues (FT 200). These catch one’s attention but do little to actually bring us into contact so that we can begin to understand one another. This has to change, and the monologues have to be transformed into an authentic conversation that “involves the ability to respect the other’s point of view and to admit that it may include legitimate convictions and concerns” (FT 200). Dialogue, thus described, is about listening and being attentive to others, crossing roads so as to be closer with and understand those with whom we speak. Authentic dialogue not only increases the possibility of being understood but also aids in the building of relationships, a grave necessity in these days.

The building of relationships and engaging in dialogue also requires a deep examination of where we are as a church. Recognizing and remembering our past, our complicity with systemic racism, and our failures at protecting the most vulnerable can be the first step. Even the title of the encyclical, being less gender inclusive than it should be, points to the distance between where we are and where we should be as a church. By taking a long look at the reality of who we are as church and by making the courageous step to begin reconciliation within, our church can begin the slow and difficult step of crossing the road. And we realize that the crossing is in itself a continuing process, because as a pilgrim church, we are always on the move, walking forward together. The many pictures of people protesting in the middle of roads and streets all over the world, standing up for the underrepresented, are potent images for us as church. In order to cross the road, we need to pause and gather in solidarity while always looking to the other side, toward the visions of those who seek justice.

## Editorial Board: Crossing Roads

The need for relationship and authentic dialogue, even in these difficult times, brings us back to the original questions, “Who are our neighbors and who are our siblings?” Building relationships and engaging in dialogue allow one to see what Jesus wanted us to see—that our neighbors and siblings are present all around us, as long as we are willing to cross the road to meet them. And that crossing of roads is, perhaps, the whole point of the question. Being neighbors is not a one-way street (pun somewhat intended) as we become recognized as neighbors to others, too. By seeking to be in relation and dialogue with others, we act in love and realize how we are loved in return. It is this spirit of reciprocal love that prevents us from thinking that we have all the answers and to recognize that just as we cross roads to be with others, they do the same with us. *Fratelli tutti* reminds us that we are not only all siblings in the Lord, but that we are also invited to work with Jesus, our brother, to build a world that is at once fraternal, equal, and loving.

It is apt to end here with the second part of the prayer that ends Francis’s encyclical, asking for open hearts to achieve our shared dreams, dreams that begin with our writings in this journal and that will be carried out as we actively cross roads to be with our neighbors, sisters, and brothers.

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.