**PROMOTERS OF PEACE**

**Mike Fowler OFM**

***Fr Michael Perry OFM, Minister General, presented a lecture on 30 January 2018 to a packed auditorium at Washington University, in St Louis, MO, USA.***

Fr Michael shared his thoughts on the topic, *“What do Francis of Assisi and Francis of Buenos Aires have in common? A Franciscan perspective on the common good.”*

Fr Michael began his presentation with some reflections from his recent travel to Syria to visit the Franciscan friars serving in the midst of that country’s war and violence.

Through seeing first-hand and hearing of the tremendous hardships people are enduring, he also spoke of the great respect that people of all faiths have for the presence of the *“brown-robed”* friars in that war-torn land.

He stated that he was at a Mass where not only Christians, but also Muslims, were present. They were not seeking to convert one another, but trying to build peace and foster the common good with one another in the midst of violence.

Fr Michael affirmed that the presence and witness of religious men and women is making a contribution towards bringing peace to others in that troubled area.

Fr Michael related that both St Francis and Pope Francis have experienced difficult times of war, persecution and fear of others. Both St Francis and Pope Francis share a world view of wanting to promote a common vision of peace, each drawn to the poor of our world and showing a willingness to cross boundaries of nations and ideologies to promote understanding of others.

He said that both show a vision of belief that human beings are capable of making change happen and that dialogue is possible among people.

St Francis and Pope Francis have expressed the belief that fraternity among humans and all creation is the plan of God. St Francis, in the midst of serious illness, composed the *Canticle of the Creatures*. The Canticle reminds us that we need to listen to God’s creation, that humans have sometimes broken faith with one another and that, ultimately, we will confront death and we need to embrace Sister Death as a part of the cycle of life.

Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si’*, challenges humanity to interact with one another and to respect all of creation. The increasing presence of *“gated communities”* throughout the world reflects a growing trend of not engaging with others and returning to a more tribal mentality in the world, where fear of the *“other”* is more present than an openness to dialogue.

St Francis is the model of looking at what is essential. He leaves his comfortable home life, he literally strips and leaves everything behind, and he reaches out to the most neglected and despised of his time in order to be open to all people as he sought to follow *“the poor, humble crucified Jesus.”*

Jesus is God, who humbles himself to live among us and suffers the most humiliating death on the cross. And Pope Francis, on Holy Thursday, who kneels before a young Muslim woman and washes her feet, gives us an example of humble witness to others.

Fr Michael concluded his lecture by affirming the many students at Washington University whom he had met during his time on the campus. He told the audience that he sees great hope in the actions of many young adults throughout the world who desire to break down divisions between people and to promote peace.

He expressed the hope that Franciscans and other religious communities can make a powerful contribution to world peace by witnessing to the ability to live together in diversity and to interact peacefully with others.