**MESSAGE OF THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY**

**IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

**FOR THE JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY**

"This is our vocation: to heal wounds, to bind what is broken, to bring home those who are lost."

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August 2, 2016 | Feast of the Portiuncula

Last May (2015), Pope Francis held a special audience with OFM friars participating in their General Chapter. During that meeting, the Holy Father offered words to the friars, but they were truly words for all members of the Franciscan family. He said, "You have inherited authority with the people of God with your minority, fraternity, meekness, humility, and poverty. Please preserve this! Do not lose it. The people love you."

At the heart of his words was a message of mercy. He said, "Minority calls us to be and to feel small before God, relying totally on his infinite mercy. The perspective of mercy is incomprehensible to those who do not see themselves as 'minor', that is, small, needy and sinners before God...It is important to recover a consciousness of being carriers of mercy, carriers of reconciliation and carriers of peace. Fruitfully realize this vocation and mission and you will be more and more a congregation that goes out."

This vocation of mercy is in the very DNA of all those who follow the Lord in the way set forth by St. Francis and St. Clare. We commemorate this in a special way this year as we mark the 800th Anniversary of the Pardon of Assisi. The inspiration of this Pardon came from the generosity, tenacity and persistence of St. Francis to plead with the Pope on behalf of the people of God to grant this indulgence so that the mercy and forgiveness would be superabundant. This was the vocation of Franciscans then, and it remains the vocation of Franciscans today. We are to be, in words of Pope Francis and spirit of St. Francis, carriers of mercy, reconciliation and peace.

In the more than eight centuries of our Franciscan tradition, the daughters and sons of Francis and Clare have grown into a diverse family of men and women, of lay, cleric and secular. But, especially in this Jubilee Year of Mercy, we hope to speak with one unified voice. And so, we joyfully heed the call of our Holy Father Pope Francis and pledge to renew that vocation to be carriers of mercy, reconciliation and peace as a united Franciscan family today.

We pledge with the same fervour and generosity of our founder to be the men and women who echo the words of the famous prayer often attributed to St. Francis. Where there is hatred, we pledge to be agents of love. Where there is injury, we pledge to be agents of pardon and mercy. Where there is doubt, we pledge to be agents of faith. Where there is despair, we pledge to be agents of hope. Where there is darkness, we pledge to be agents of light. Where there is sadness, we pledge to be agents of joy.

St. Francis and St. Clare both lived lives defined by mercy. They were conscious both of the mercy they were recipients of and strong agents carrying that mercy to others - in their communities and in the world; especially among those on the margins. Francis and Clare handed that legacy of mercy on to all of us, their spiritual daughters and sons.

Let us paraphrase the words of St. Francis in his Letter to a Minister and make them new for our time: In this way you will show if you love the Lord: that there is no one in the world who, after looking into your eyes, would ever depart without your mercy. And if they were not looking for mercy, you would ask if they want mercy. Always be merciful with one another.

May the Lord give you peace and mercy.

**Members of the Franciscan Family in the United States of America**