

October 1, 2021



Dear Sisters and Brothers in St. Francis and in Christ,

This message is being sent to you right in the middle of National Hispanic Heritage month, celebrated from September 15 to October 15. National entities such as the Library of Congress, the National Gallery of Art, the Smithsonian Institution, just to name a few, join in paying tribute to the many Hispanic Americans who have enriched our nation and society.

As I joined my voice to many others in prayer, I thought of the advocacy of Cesar Chavez and Delores Huerta, the legal achievements of Associate Supreme Court Justice Sonya Sotomayor, and the wonderful literature of Julia Alvarez and Carlos Fuentes, among others. I also held in my prayers the faces and names of many I have traveled with, worked near, served, or just hung out with over the years, who carried the joy of the Hispanic culture in their hearts and in their lives.

But as I sat down to write this note to you, I felt a shyness. I could not name it exactly, but it was a sense of not being sure I had the right to announce these prayers. I am not Hispanic, and our culture has become so polarized, I felt afraid I would offend my Hispanic sisters and brothers by some awkward sentence or turn of phrase. Take, for example, that although the month is still proclaimed as "Hispanic Heritage," I am aware that the new language suggests we use the broader, more inclusive word "Latinx." Rather than slip into verbal paralysis, however, I called our sister Lisa Hernandez, OFS, and asked her advice. We had a deep, rich, thoughtful conversation, surrounded by our Saint's love.

As a result of this conversation, I have come to a deeper understanding that the cry within the culture is a cry by everyone to be respected and a call for all of us to be respectful of everyone we encounter, either in person or when reading a news event. Our Saint and our Rule call us to "...a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ." (Chapter Two, Article 13). We show our love and desire to honor the dignity of all by knowing who they are and using language that

reflects our respect. We are called to learn about other's cultures and to ask questions. If the conversation is uncomfortable, that is also all right. God is in the discomfort as well as in the comfort of the camaraderie we have with our friends. Saint Francis calls us out of certainty and into uncertainty. We remember well his travels to the Sultan. Saint Francis was following in the path of our Lord and Savior, who also wandered away into lands He did not know and encountered people with whom He did not share a common earthly heritage.

Whatever we do, sisters and brothers, we know we ground in scripture and prayer and walk forth always with the love of Christ in our hearts. To borrow Lisa's words, the conversations may be uneasy, but they will always be fruitful if entered into with the Loving Lord in our hearts and on our lips. They will be fruitful because we remember in all that we do we embrace the fruits of the Spirit and walk forth with love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.

Deep gratitude to Lisa for helping me articulate this message. Deep gratitude to all of you who share this Franciscan journey with me.

Peace and All Good,

Patricia Grace, OFS
JPIC Animator
St. Francis Region