



**Statement on the 10th Anniversary of 9/11  
The Franciscan Friars (OFM) of the United States and  
Great Britain**

***As we remember and honor, may we move away  
from fear and toward "the other"***

Throughout the liturgical year, as Catholics and Franciscans we are called to remember events in the life of Christ, the Church and the holy men and women who served the Church. Likewise as Americans, we annually remember those individuals and events that have significantly shaped our nation. These days of remembrance – both religious and civil – invite us to examine where we've been as a Church and as a nation, where we are now, and where we need to go.

For the past ten years since September 11, 2001, we have remembered the men, women and children – our family members, our friends and co-workers – who lost their lives on that tragic day. For many, the process of healing from that trauma continues to this day. In addition to summoning us to solemnly honor the dead and gratefully remember the many compassionate "first responders," these annual commemorations also have underscored the urgent need to understand the complexity of our world in terms of politics, economics, culture and religion, particularly that of Islam.

To this end, many of our ministries have developed close relationships with local Muslim communities in order to learn from one another, to address common concerns, and to stand in solidarity with one another. The desire to know "the other" as friend is an essential challenge and a necessary aim for those who endeavor to follow Christ in the manner of St. Francis. We need only recall Francis' encounter with the Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil in which he chose to engage Muslims peacefully and respectfully in a time of violence and hatred<sup>1</sup>.

Such an effort on the part of friars and their partners in ministry is needed now more than ever, for while September 11 has generated an interest in Islam for some, it has engendered excessive fear and hatred for Muslims in others. Left unanswered and unchecked, these fears can lead to prejudice, racism, hate-speech and even violence against our Muslim brothers and sisters. In the past decade, this has sometimes taken the form of attacks on Muslims in the U.S., their houses of worship and their Scriptures.

Many of these fears are based on perceived differences of values and faith. Yet, if the recent revolutions and uprisings in the Middle East are any indication, the vast majority of Muslims in the world fervently desire many of the rights and privileges that we enjoy under the U.S. Constitution.

These "spring uprisings" in the Middle East highlight for us a second challenge since September 11: the urgent need to develop effective policies and strategies to deal with global violence and international terrorism through non-violent means. Ten years ago, the dominant belief was that the only way to respond to the attacks of September 11 was by means of military force. We lacked the non-violent tools of robust diplomacy and crisis resolution which, coupled with an internationally-shared strategy for police action, might have brought the perpetrators of the attack to justice without massive military intervention and additional loss of lives. Regrettably, seeking the non-violent tools of robust diplomacy and crisis resolution is not an easy road to follow, but we must always seek the patience and discipline to pursue this path as a first option. We remain challenged to find responses that can unlock the full potential of the human imagination for good.

As we move into the second decade after the tragedy of September 11, we must, as people of faith, remember the words of Jesus who tells us: "be not afraid." Actions based solely on fear are rarely fruitful, and frequently destructive. We are at a crossroads as a nation and world. We can choose to remain primarily on a path of excessive fear and the use of force, or we can choose to find new ways of building communities of respect and cooperation across faith traditions and national boundaries.

As brothers and sisters committed to living the Gospel in the way of St. Francis, we encourage you, your partners in ministry, and your families and friends to:

- Increase and deepen your efforts to understand and build relationships with our Muslim brothers and sisters, and indeed with all those from faith traditions different from our own.
- Stand firmly against all forms of prejudice and discrimination, including Islamophobia.
- Stay informed about world events through reliable sources of information in order to better access American foreign policies and their impact on others.
- Call for deeper investments in diplomacy and development so that options beyond military violence are employed.
- Take time for prayer, both private and communal, asking God for peace in your hearts and minds, for wisdom and understanding, for healing and forgiveness.

Followers of the Gospel and, in particular, followers of St. Francis must never be timid or satisfied with lesser "solutions" born of fear and prejudice. Rather, let us be inspired by the bold example of our brother Francis who, obeying Jesus' new commandment to "love one another," reached out to the Sultan and thereby created new paths of peace.

Assumption BVM Province,  
Franklin, WI, U.S.A.

Sacred Heart Province,  
St. Louis, MO, U.S.A.

Holy Name Province,  
New York, NY, U.S.A.

Saint Barbara Province,  
San Francisco, CA, U.S.A.

Immaculate Conception Province,  
New York, NY, U.S.A.

Saint John the Baptist Province,  
Cincinnati, OH, U.S.A.

Our Lady of Guadalupe Province,  
Albuquerque, NM, U.S.A.

Immaculate Conception Province,  
London, England

---

<sup>i</sup> In 1219, as the Fifth Crusade was being fought, St. Francis of Assisi crossed enemy lines to gain an audience with Malik al-Kamil, the Sultan of Egypt. It is believed that St. Francis was attempting to find a peaceable solution to the conflict. Although we do not know what Francis and the Sultan discussed exactly, by all accounts, it was a mutually respectful encounter, and one which seems to have deeply affected Francis as evidenced by his subsequent writings. When Francis returned home, he proposed that his Order of the Friars Minor live peaceably among the followers of Islam—a revolutionary call at a moment when Western Christendom believed it would overcome Muslims by war. Francis' encounter with the Sultan was clearly an example for its time, and for ours as well, of how persons of different faith traditions and political agendas, could communicate with respect and dignity for the other. For more on this historical encounter, please reference Paul Moses. *The Saint and the Sultan*. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2009)