

**CALLED “TO WALK TOGETHER”
with “closeness, compassion, tenderness”**

This powerful invitation comes from our Holy Father, Pope Francis, in his precious message to the whole Church journeying along the Synodal path, on the 31st World Day Of The Sick (February 11, 2023). This annual commemoration calls for prayer and closeness towards those who suffer.” It also underlines the Spirit that should characterise all our efforts directed towards the living out of the Archdiocesan SCC Goal and Vision “NO ONE IN WANT” (Acts 4:34). To my mind, this desired outcome can only materialise gradually when we engage in seeking and creating new pathways to express the third pillar of the SCCs, viz. “Reaching out.” We need fresh eyes and vulnerable hearts to follow the footsteps of our Lord Jesus who came to bring “GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR.” (Ref. Luke 4:18-19)

Pope Francis in his encyclical letter on Fraternity and Social Friendship, ‘*FRATELLI TUTTI*’ (Brothers and Sisters all), as well as in other writings and homilies, highlights this by the undeniable fact that all of us are sisters and brothers of “**GOD’S FAMILY” on earth.** Simple as it may sound, it unravels a world of Challenge when we apply it to our daily life situations, as I have discovered. ‘*Fratelli Tutti*’ urges us to read anew the Parable of the “Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:25-37) which illustrates how we can move from the “dark clouds” of a closed world to “envisaging and engendering an open world.” (Cf. no. 56) In his message on the World Day of the Sick, our Holy Father draws our attention to the importance of recognising the rampant condition of “**loneliness and abandonment.**” He points out to “a profound link between this parable of the Good Samaritan and the many ways in which fraternity is denied in today’s world. In particular, the fact that the man, beaten and robbed, *is abandoned* on the side of the road represents the condition in which all too many of our brothers and sisters are left at a time when they most need help.” We may recall the reminder from St Teresa of Kolkata, that the greatest disease of today is not what we may imagine, but sheer LONELINESS.

The recent worldwide pandemic of COVID-19 “momentarily revived the sense that we are a global community, all in the same boat, where one person’s problems are the problems of all.” (FT 32) Pope Francis in his message for us exposes a revealing fact that through the universal experiences of our own vulnerability and illness, we can understand, empathise and identify with the plight of others in similar or worse situations. “Our vulnerability frightens us and the pervasive culture of efficiency pushes us to sweep it under the carpet, leaving no room for our human frailty... and we are left stunned... We are all fragile and vulnerable, and need that compassion which knows how to pause, approach, heal, and raise up. Thus, the plight of the sick is a call that cuts through indifference and slows the pace of those who go on their way as if they had no sisters and brothers.”

Ongoing plans through SCCs:

During and after the pandemic, our sense of gratitude to those in the fields of healthcare and research has increased considerably. Yet our “gratitude needs to be matched by actively seeking, in every country, strategies and resources in order to guarantee each person’s fundamental right to basic and decent healthcare.” (Pope Francis) This needs to be done individually and collectively. In the context of the parable of the Good Samaritan, following the example of the Samaritan who arranged with the innkeeper to “take care of him.” (Lk 10:35), Jesus exhorts us to “go and do likewise” (Lk 10:37). As given in *Fratelli Tutti* no. 67, this parable “shows how a **community can be rebuilt** by men and women who identify with the vulnerability of others, who reject the creation of a society of exclusion, and act instead as neighbours, lifting up and rehabilitating the fallen for the sake of the common good.” Indeed,

“we were created for a fulfilment that can only be found in love. We cannot be indifferent to suffering” (No. 68).

Conclusion:

The Shrine of Lourdes in France holds out a prophetic lesson to the Church for our modern times: “Sick people are at the centre of God’s people, and the Church advances together with them as a sign of a humanity in which everyone is precious, and no one should be discarded or left behind.” To walk together in the Synodal spirit as caring companions on the way to the Father is a mammoth ideal. How can we ever arrive at a situation where we can ensure “No one in want”? Perhaps, one step at a time may be the only possible solution towards this lofty goal. Our broken yet blessed planet needs deep healing. Let us be HEALERS, wounded though we are, and perhaps *because* we are wounded, as we reach out to others **in need** – be it bodily, mental, spiritual, social, educational. In the aftermath of the global pandemic, the letter of our Holy Father for the World Day of the Sick is a clarion call to conversion of heart and mind, **to be conformed with the Heart and Mind of Jesus** (Ref. 1 Cor 2:16). Jesus invites us to partner with Him in His outreach to all, especially the marginalised. It is a personal invitation to me. What is my answer - Yes or No?

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Questions for Reflection:

- 1) Read Luke 4:18-19.
 - a. Think of concrete examples in the Gospels where Jesus fulfils His “agenda” of ministry as outlined in this passage.
 - b. How can we partner with Him in this ministry individually and through our SCCs?
 - c. In the context of the parable of the Good Samaritan, think of three small steps that you can take in your life to fulfil Jesus’ invitation - “Go and do likewise” (Lk 10:37)
- 2) In our SCCs and Parish, how can we “exercise fraternity” (brotherhood/sisterhood) through “organised care” to ensure “No one in want”?

Conclude with a personal prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to guide your choices and give you the perseverance to fulfil your plans for the Kingdom of God.