

## The Papal Visit – A Reflection

“God of Peace, bring your peace  
to our violent world:  
peace in the hearts of all men and women  
and peace among the nations of the earth.  
Turn to your way of love  
Those whose hearts and minds  
Are consumed with hatred  
And who justify killing in the name of religion”

So prayed Pope Francis in one of seven petitions in a prayer for Remembrance at a Multi Religious Gathering on Friday, September 25, 2015 at The National September 11<sup>th</sup> Memorial and Museum at which The Holy Father prayed for and spoke in compelling and urgent words for peace.

Early on the day before, The Pope addressed the two Houses of Congress ; the Senate and the House of Representatives on the concerns of the environment and immigration and poverty. He told Congress that they must cooperate “generously for the common good”. In addressing 300 Bishops he urged them to be “Pastors close to the people, pastors who are neighbors and servants”.

Throughout his visit he addressed the groups to whom he spoke with conviction and yet care, with firmness and gentleness, in a profoundly pastoral manner.

My encounter with the Papal Program for Peace began on Thursday evening September 24<sup>th</sup>. I had been directed to appear at the entrance to the Museum at 8:30 when seating was to begin. My wife Mary and I journeyed to Manhattan early enough to share dinner. Then she made her way East on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street to our apartment where no vehicle traffic was permitted due to 178 heads of state were visiting The United Nations. Meanwhile I taxied to the Seafarers and International House to spend the night on East 15<sup>th</sup> Street to get a “head start” for the morning on Friday.

Arriving at the security gate, at the appointed time, and I was “approved” by security. Then, I was pleased to walk the distance to the Museum with the newly installed Bishop of the Atlantic District of the Missouri Synod Pastor Derrick Leecake. Inside the Museum I was greeted by several colleagues in the ministry, and was soon warmly greeted by our Metropolitan New York Synod, Bishop Robert Rimbo.

Representing The Lutheran Care Network was CEO Mr. Frank Tripodi. It was through the offices of TLCN and The Chancery Office of the New York Diocese that made it possible for me to also represent TLCN.

At 10:00am we were ushered into an adjacent room where a stage had been constructed along a slurry wall of the former south tower and chairs for 400 were placed in such a way that most of the guests were 40 feet or closer to the stage. After much conversation with friends and new acquaintances, we all sat down. I was seated next to the President of The New Brunswick Theological Seminary the Rev. Dr. Gregg Mast at my right and the Rev. Eric Hall, CEO of The Healthcare Chaplancy Network.

Promptly at 10:15 leaders of six religions entered the stage. Represented were Hindu, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist, Muslim and Jewish faiths.

There followed a long period of silence. During this time the Pope was outside offering prayer and greeting families whose loved ones died in the 9/11 disaster.

Music again began and the Pope was surrounded by dignitaries, the secret service, and accompanied also by Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York. The Cardinal welcomed Pope Francis. This was followed by devotions and reflections by Rabbi Elliot Cosgrove and Iman Khalid Latif.

Pope Francis then offered a prayer in English of seven petitions calling upon God to look upon us with compassion, a petition for those who sacrificed their lives and for healing for the bereaved and another for those wounded in 9/11. Finally, a petition for peace, understanding and comfort.

Then followed were readings from the sacred writings of five of the religion traditions present and then The Jewish Prayer in Honor of the deceased – beautifully sung by the Jewish Cantor.

Pope Francis then delivered a profound homily for peace – in Spanish – translated by electronic earpiece for all. It was moving, challenging and calling upon all for action.

The beautiful finale came as a Choral piece by the Young People's Chorus of NYC sang:  
"Let there be Peace on Earth"

All shared in the exchange of peace and at that Pope Francis departed.

The audience then dispersed to the majestic strains of Widors Organ Concerto #6.

The Final Petition in Pope Francis' prayer:

"Comfort and console us  
Strengthen us in hope  
And give us wisdom and courage  
To work timelessly for a world  
Where true peace and love reign  
Among nations and in the hearts of all"

John R. Heller  
Pastor