

Some Background and Perspective on “Dignitas Infinita” on Human Dignity

Pope Francis has written:

1. Three **Encyclical** letters: Lumen fidei (Light of Faith, 2013), Laudato Si' (Care of Our Common Home, 2015), and **Fratelli tutti** (Fraternity and Social Friendship, 2020). Although not infallible documents, encyclicals express accepted church teaching; e.g. that care of the Earth is essential to our faith. These are very significant. (The most authoritative are the Documents of Vatican Council II.)
2. Many **Apostolic Exhortations** build on themes of the Encyclicals and add urgency and further meaning to his Encyclicals; e.g. Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium, 2013), Laudate Deum (Cry for a Response to the Climate Crisis, 2015 *“Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change.”*)
3. On April 2, 2024, Pope Francis signed a **Vatican Declaration** (not an Encyclical or an Apostolic Exhortation) written by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, [“Dignitas Infinita” on Human Dignity](#). Uniting Pope Francis’ progressive social agenda with holistic reverence for human life and dignity, it presents a seamless garment of moral and ethical concerns, by respecting and protecting all life from conception to natural death in both private and public spheres of life.

It highlights a number of grave violations of human dignity that we are called to be attentive to including: Poverty, war, travail of migrants, human trafficking, sexual abuse, violence against women, digital violence, abortion, the death penalty, surrogacy, gender theory and sex change, genocide, euthanasia, willful suicide, mutilation, physical and mental torture, undue psychological pressures, subhuman living conditions, racism, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, selling of women and children, degrading working conditions, and the marginalization of people with disabilities.

Finally, this declaration asked that respect for human dignity and the common good be placed at the center of “every legal system,” and that states not only protect this dignity, but guarantee “the conditions necessary for it to flourish in the integral promotion of the human person.” (#64)

“Even today, in the face of so many violations of human dignity that seriously threaten the future of the human family, the Church encourages the promotion of the dignity of every human person, regardless of their physical, mental, cultural, social, and religious characteristics.” (#66)

As a SHALOM team, we certainly support all life and promote careful, prayerful reflection and sharing using the Synod’s way of listening and sharing; namely, that we focus significant personal prayer on issues, that we gather in small groups to listen carefully to each person without responding, that we speak respectfully and courageously and that we repeat this process so that we can come to hear how the Spirit is leading now, in view of the particular

controversial issue before us. Pope Francis calls us to listen, to listen longer. We also note that healthy use of the energy of anger gives us courage to listen longer, to speak respectfully and honestly according to our own best insights, and to act courageously for justice and peace. Burying anger and fears causes illness and divides a community.

In further articles, we will summarize statements by Pope Benedict and the Canadian Bishops about Church teaching and formation/ following our conscience, as well as the significance of these in political realms; e.g. as we vote.

