Dear Speaker Boehner,

As you begin to prepare for Pope Francis’ upcoming visit to the United States, and particularly for his historic address to Congress on September 24th, I wanted to take this opportunity to share with you a few themes that he has raised – issues of great import to me and my Jesuit brothers ministering to the needs of people on the margins whose livelihood is impacted by US policy decisions. As you well know, Jesuit education stresses the ideal of being “men and women for others,” with a particular commitment to those who are most vulnerable. As someone who has answered the call to public service so admirably, you are uniquely positioned to make a profound impact on the common good and well-suited to substantively engage the message of the world’s most famous Jesuit, Pope Francis.

Many of the issues we can expect him to discuss are topics to which he has already lent his voice and energy. I also invite you to work with me and my staff as we reflect on how Pope Francis’ visit provides an opportunity to move past traditional partisan divisions and work towards the promotion of justice and the common good that he commends to each of us. Below are a selection of reflections by Pope Francis I hope can inspire our work for solutions to complex problems moving forward on issues that have been designated as key priorities for the Jesuit network in the United States.

Pope Francis on the role of Political Leaders

“Politics, though often denigrated, remains a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good...I beg the Lord to grant us more politicians who are genuinely disturbed by the state of society, the people, the lives of the poor! It is vital that government leaders and financial leaders take heed and broaden their horizons, working to ensure that all citizens have dignified work, education and healthcare.” (Evangelii Gaudium, no. 205)

Pope Francis on Environmental Justice

“We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.” (Laudato Si’, no. 139)

Pope Francis on Protecting the Human Rights of Migrants

“In an age of such vast movements of migration, large numbers of people are leaving their homelands, with a suitcase full of fears and desires, to undertake a hopeful and dangerous trip in search of more humane living conditions. Often, however, such migration gives rise to suspicion and hostility, even in
ecclesial communities, prior to any knowledge of the migrants’ lives or their stories of persecution and destitution. In such cases, suspicion and prejudice conflict with the biblical commandment of welcoming with respect and solidarity the stranger in need.”  (Message for World Day of Migrants, 9/23/14)

**Pope Francis on Addressing the Root Causes of Children Fleeing Central America**

“I would also like to draw attention to the tens of thousands of children who migrate alone, unaccompanied, to escape poverty and violence: This is a category of migrants from Central America and Mexico itself who cross the border with the United States under extreme conditions and in pursuit of a hope that in most cases turns out to be vain. They are increasing day by day. This humanitarian emergency requires, as a first urgent measure, these children be welcomed and protected. These measures, however, will not be sufficient, unless they are accompanied by policies that inform people about the dangers of such a journey and, above all, that promote development in their countries of origin. Finally, this challenge demands the attention of the entire international community so that new forms of legal and secure migration may be adopted.”  (Mexico Holy See colloquium on human migration and development, 7/14/14)

**Pope Francis on Prioritizing Reconciliation and Rehabilitation in Justice Systems**

“The Church recommends a justice that is humanizing, genuinely reconciling, a justice that leads the offenders, through an educational way and through inspiring penance, to complete their rehabilitation and reintegration into the community.”  (International Conference of the International Association of Penal Law, 5/30/14)

I would like to conclude with words Pope Francis addressed to the College of Cardinals in December of 2013, only months after assuming the papacy. Decrying a global economic system and cultural norms that discard vulnerable human life as worthless or inconvenient, Pope Francis said, “The victims of such a culture are precisely the weakest and most fragile human beings – the unborn, the poorest people, sick elderly people, gravely disabled people… who are in danger of being ‘thrown out,’ expelled from a machine that must be efficient at all costs.”

For the Pope social justice is inextricably linked to our Catholic faith. This poses a challenge to those of us who reside in comfort and health in a land of plenty. The dignity owed to the recently released inmate speaks to the right of all people to enjoy meaningful employment. The degradation of the environment of our common home exacerbates the vulnerability of the very poor. Poverty makes people less resilient in the face of violence and persecution and often spurs migration. The world’s greatest problems are interrelated and are fed by indifference to the pain of our neighbors and other policies that damage the dignity and sanctity of all human life.

Our faith and national values demand that we strive to build a more just society. We look forward to working with you on these many issues that matter so deeply to the Pope and to our entire country.

Sincerely yours,

Timothy P. Kesicki, S.J.

Very Reverend Timothy Kesicki, S.J.
President
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