Opinion
Guest Voices
Pope Francis walks with Joe Donnelly, new U.S. ambassador to the Holy See, during a meeting

Pope Francis walks with Joe Donnelly, new U.S. ambassador to the Holy See, during a meeting for the ambassador to present his letters of credential, at the Vatican April 11, 2022. (CNS/Vatican Media)



by Joe Donnelly

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Ten years ago, my family and I watched Pope Francis walk onto the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica and introduce himself to the world. From the first moments of his papacy, I was struck by his warmth and genuine concern for others.

As a U.S. government official, I am profoundly grateful for Pope Francis' close relationship with the United States. He believes, as I do, that the United States and the Vatican are close friends and partners.

At the U.S. Embassy to the Holy See, we seek to partner with the Vatican. A strength of the Holy See is its ability to reach powerfully and poignantly around the world. Together, the Vatican and the United States can be a tremendous force for good.

Pope Francis and President Joe Biden share a strong and special connection. This close friendship allows our diplomatic mission to look for areas of tangible collaboration with the Vatican and work toward closer alignment in the places we

don't quite see eye to eye.

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We have many successes to celebrate. Thanks to Pope Francis' advocacy and passion, the church has expanded its outreach to Jewish and Muslim communities around the world. The United States stands with the Holy See to encourage religious freedom and respect through interreligious dialogue. Pope Francis' teachings are a model for the promotion of religious understanding, tolerance and cooperation among people everywhere.

The promotion for respect for and protection of human rights is a shared value that is evident in the way Pope Francis upholds the dignity of every person. He shepherded recent changes in procedures to pave the way for women to reach some of the highest leadership ranks of the Vatican. He expressed remorse and apologized to Indigenous peoples for past abuses. The Holy Father has shifted the church's relationship with the LGBTQIA+ and disability communities by opening the door for all to participate in the church.

The Holy Father has harshly denounced human trafficking and the scourge of modern slavery. We have done tremendous work together, especially in partnership with Catholic non-governmental organizations, to educate and prevent trafficking and protect victims' lives and their human dignity.

Pope Francis has worked tirelessly in the sphere of diplomacy, promoting peace and dialogue through many critical moments in history. He was a crucial mediator between the United States and Cuba in 2014 and hosted an important meeting between Israeli and Palestinian presidents at the Vatican gardens that same year. He has visited refugee camps all over the world, bringing awareness and interest to issues on the world stage.

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His Holiness has written poignantly on the dignity of the human person, and the integral nature of ecological and economic realities. In my view, Pope Francis' second encyclical *Laudato Si*' with the subtitle "on care for our common home" is a plea for us to all stay connected. This theme has new meaning today, through the lens of a recent global pandemic, Russia's brutal war against Ukraine, mounting bad news on the health of the Earth, and social and political unrest around the globe. The United States and the Holy See are united in our concern for the Earth, our fragile island home.

A year into Russia's savage aggression against Ukraine, the United States is united with those around the globe who are committed to a sovereign and independent Ukraine. Pope Francis has spoken of the bravery, courage and dignity of the Ukrainian people. We are grateful for his moral leadership.

Ten years into his remarkable papacy, Pope Francis has truly transformed many aspects of the church and the world. His work continues and the United States remains his friend, ally and partner. I look forward to deepening our connections and growing our commitment to each other, and to the world.