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Pope Francis picks 'fraternity' as theme for his first World Peace Day message

by Carol Glatz by Catholic News Service

Vatican City — An overemphasis on "personal well-being" and general indifference have eroded any sense of responsibility toward others, especially toward the poor, said a note from the Vatican announcing Pope Francis' choice of a theme for World Peace Day 2014.

For the first peace day message of his pontificate, the pope chose the theme: "Fraternity, the foundation and pathway to peace," said a Vatican communique published Wednesday.

Announcing the theme for the Jan. 1 celebration, the Vatican said Pope Francis' message will stress "the need to combat the 'throwaway culture' and to promote instead a 'culture of encounter,' in order to build a more just and peaceful world."

As children of one Father, all human beings are linked to one another in fraternity, and only efforts that are born from a sense of fraternity can overcome the poverty, conflict, inequality, crime, fundamentalism and other ills facing the world today, the Vatican note said.

"The culture of personal well-being leads to a loss of the sense of responsibility and fraternal relationship," it said.

When people don't see others as "being like us," then they are often seen as competitors or enemies and treated like objects, it said.

"Not uncommonly, the poor and the needy are regarded as a 'burden,' a hindrance to development. At most, they are considered as recipients of aid or compassionate assistance," the note said.

Everyone needs to be seen as a brother or sister, who is "called to share the gifts of creation, the goods of progress and culture," it said.

Fraternity is both a gift and a responsibility each human being receives from God the Father, who calls people to fight against "inequality and poverty that undermine the social fabric, to take care of every person, especially the weakest and most defenseless, to love him or her as oneself with the very heart of Jesus Christ," the Vatican communique said.

As the world becomes more and more interdependent, mutual responsibility becomes more essential in every field, "including the economy, finance, civil society, politics, research, development, and public and cultural institutions," it said.

"The globalization of indifference must give way to a globalization of fraternity," it said.

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The Vatican added that Pope Francis' message is "in continuity with that of his predecessors," and "proposes to everyone the pathway of fraternity, in order to give the world a more human face."

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