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Obama: Francis 'makes us want to be better people'

by David Jackson by USA Today

The Francis Chronicles

Time magazine listed Pope Francis in its annual '100 most influential people' issue and asked a fellow world leader to write a tribute: President Obama.

'Rare is the leader who makes us want to be better people,' Obama wrote. 'Pope Francis is such a leader.'

Obama lauded the pontiff for his 'message of inclusion' and his many acts of kindness, such as 'embracing the sick, ministering to the homeless, (and) washing the feet of young prisoners.'

The president did not mention any disputes he might have with the Catholic Church, such as on abortion or birth control provisions in the new health care law.

Instead, Obama 'who met with Francis last month in Vatican City' cited the issues of poverty and income inequality, and how the pope reminds the world that 'we are bound by moral obligations to one another.'

Francis' example 'challenges us to live out those obligations through work 'to alleviate poverty, reduce inequality and promote peace; to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, care for the sick and open new doors of opportunity and visions of possibility for everyone,' Obama wrote. 'His message of love and inclusion, his regard for 'the least of these,' distills the essence of Jesus' teachings and is a tonic for a cynical age.'

Also making Time's list this year are Episcopal priest and best-selling author Barbara Brown Taylor, described as "a centering voice in the wilderness," and Sister Rosemary Nyirumbe, who runs the St. Monica Girls' Tailoring Center in Gulu, Uganda. "She gives hope for young women scarred by war," the magazine says.

[This story from *USA Today* is available to NCR readers through Religion News Service.]

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