

# Valley Interfaith leaders visit the Vatican to meet Pope Francis

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On Friday, October 14, our network (Valley Interfaith and the Industrial Areas Network) had the rare opportunity to visit with Pope Francis at the Vatican.

An interfaith delegation of 20 leaders and organizers from the West/Southwest Industrial Areas Foundation met with him to share our collective work of broad based organizing at a time when the Pope is guiding the global church in a historic Synod listening process.

The Holy Father sat side by side with us in his residence, thanking us for inconveniencing ourselves to come see him. What ensued was a true dialogue, a 90-minute conversation in Spanish with lots of back and forth engagement. The encounter was filled with many graced moments about both the joys and the struggles of our work, and the work of the Church, past, present, and to come.

This invitation to meet was in large part due to the recognition of our work by local Bishops, in particular those involved with the Recognizing the Stranger strategy, which is dedicated to formation and leadership development of immigrant parishioners. As well, our involvement to support the Synod process in multiple dioceses has helped to bring those in the margins to the center of the synodal dialogue.

As we shared our experiences of organizing, we were struck by how carefully he listened, asked questions, and engaged with lots of humor. Early on, he reflected back to us, “*Usaron mucho las palabras ‘ver’ y ‘escuchar,’... Me impresiona que ninguno de ustedes es parte de alguna teoría. Ninguno dice ‘leí un libro y me interesó eso.’*” (You constantly use the words “to see” and “to listen.. I am impressed that none of you start with any theory. No one says ‘I read a book and

that interested me.')

*“El peligro es intelectualizar el problema”* (The danger is when you intellectualize a problem.)

He stressed the importance of being with people and paying attention to their reality, emphasizing *Amor Concreto*, love concretely in action, saying that he understood our work as seeing and hearing of injustice in the real lives of our people, acting to change the situation, and being changed ourselves as a result. He expressed his appreciation for our focus on what we are doing, rather than to complain about what is not being done or to disparage anyone. *“Ustedes no menospreciaron a nadie.”*

Before concluding, he thanked us for our visit, saying that although he had never known of IAF before, he was glad that he knew us now, and he welcomed further conversation around our continuing work with the Synod process.

Some in our delegation were able to meet also with others at the Vatican, including leadership in the Dicastery for Integral Human Development, the General Secretariat of the Synod, and the Pontifical Commission for Latin America. It was a trip that opened many doors.

We are grateful to all of you for your support of this historic visit. Many of you contributed with your prayers, advice, encouragement, and financial investment. We spent a full day in advance of the meeting with Pope Francis by conducting our own synodal process. We all felt our obligation to you and those who came before us in making this pilgrimage possible.

We teach that power recognizes power. For Pope Francis, *“el verdadero poder es el servicio,”* (“true power is service”). Recounting the Good Samaritan, he clearly stated that the Gospel cannot be understood without acting with those who are suffering. He recognized the leaders and organizations of the IAF and the powerful work that is happening every day at the margins. He referred to the IAF as “Good News for the United States.”

We are humbled to represent the many decades of work from those who preceded us, and we are encouraged in the continuation of our work into the future. Please feel free to share this announcement among member institutions and others. We will be reflecting more from this encounter in the weeks to come.