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# Service-learning pedagogy and the teachings of the Catholic Church

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Educating to the spirit of Fratelli Tutti  
through Service-learning

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## 5. EDUCATING TO THE SPIRIT OF FRATELLI TUTTI THROUGH SERVICE LEARNING: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract

*Fratelli Tutti* is the third encyclical of Pope Francis on fraternity and social friendship. In this encyclical, the Pope invites 'all brothers and sisters' to an improved global cooperation, human fraternity, and universal solidarity. How can this noble philosophy trickle down to the younger generation? The document proposes education and formation of young people. The objective of this chapter is to explore the potential of service learning in building the spirit of *Fratelli Tutti* among learners in institutions of higher learning. This aim is realised in five major sections of the chapter.

The first section of the chapter presents an overview of the basic tenets of *Fratelli Tutti*. It offers a summary which is a synthesis of the eight chapters of the document. The second section reflects on those parts of *Fratelli Tutti* that refer to education and formation of young people. In order to achieve the goals of education as envisaged by *Fratelli Tutti*, the third section of the chapter proposes service learning as an effective methodology.

Writing from Africa, in the following section, we contextualise the concept of solidarity within the framework of the African social philosophy of *Ubuntu* – I am because we are! The fifth section of the chapter narrates a concrete experience of service learning in the African context that demonstrates the possibility of achieving the spirit of 'gratuitousness' among the learners. We conclude by linking our reflection to the vision of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as proposed by UNESCO in its pillar: 'Learning to live together'.

### Introduction

On 4<sup>th</sup> February 2019, during the Papal visit to the United Arab Emirates, Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahamad al-Tayyib signed a declaration entitled 'Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together.' The document called for fraternity among nations, religions and races. It also expressed the resolve to work together to fight extremism

among religions. This watershed event worked as a backdrop for Pope Francis to publish on 3 October 2020, his encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship*.

*Fratelli Tutti (FT)* is the third encyclical of Pope Francis, in which he invites all brothers and sisters to an improved global cooperation, human fraternity, and universal solidarity. Thus, the document goes beyond dialogue among religions to a global agenda of establishing fraternity among all peoples. Education and formation play an important role in the implementation of the spirit of *FT*. Focusing on higher education, in this chapter, we ask, how can the noble philosophy of *FT* trickle down to the younger generation? The primary objective of this chapter is to explore the potential of service learning in building the spirit of *FT* among learners in institutions of higher learning. This objective is further enhanced by reflecting on service learning in relation to *FT* within the framework of *Ubuntu* philosophy emerging from the African context. We also intend to present a concrete experience of service learning and relate it to the primary objective of the chapter. This chapter is developed in five sections and a conclusion.

The first section presents an overview of *FT*. It offers a concise summary of the eight chapters in a sequential manner. The second section of the chapter reflects on those parts of *FT* that refer to education and formation of young people. It is the formation of young people that will build the spirit of *FT* in the next generation. Specifically, education is seen by *FT* as the task of cultivating or building fraternity, dialogue, solidarity, and integration. In order to achieve these goals of education as envisaged by *FT*, the third section of the chapter proposes service learning as an evidence-based methodology. In this section, service learning is defined and expounded from the perspective of social transformation aimed at fraternity and solidarity.

Writing from the African context, in the fourth section, we make a specific contribution to the conversation on the service learning, by contextualising the concept of solidarity within the framework of the African social philosophy of *Ubuntu* and pointing out to its possible relationship with service learning! The fifth section of the chapter narrates a concrete experience of service learning as implemented in a course of 'Ministering to People with Disabilities' at a university college in Kenya that demonstrates the possibility of achieving the spirit of 'gratuitousness' and *Ubuntu* among the learners as envisaged by *FT* through service learning. We conclude by linking our discussion to the UNESCO document, "*Learning: The Treasure Within – Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*" (Delors, 1996), which includes 'learning to live together' as one of the pillars of education. We suggest that service learning provides the methodology for young people to learn to live together in the spirit of fraternal, friendship, solidarity and *Ubuntu*.

## Fratelli Tutti: A Bird's-Eye View

*Fratelli Tutti* is a strategic and consistent expression of the agenda of Pope Francis in “rebuilding the Church” (Hastings, 2019) and in enhancing the world and the rest of creation in the spirit of Saint Francis of Assisi. Just as ‘*Laudato Si*’, the title of the encyclical of Pope Francis on the care of our common home, was borrowed from St Francis, and which reflected the spirit of the saint in his closeness to creation, ‘*Fratelli Tutti*,’ another borrowed expression from St Francis, echoes the saint’s dedication to world-peace and unity among religions. In 1219, even as the Fifth Crusade was raging, Saint Francis travelled to the Middle East to meet Sultan Malik Al Kâmil, the nephew of Saladin. It is this spirit of reaching out that transcends all geographical and racial barriers that the encyclical by Pope Francis now reiterates.

In the course of eight chapters and 287 articles, *FT* invites all brothers and sisters to fraternal love with an aim of forming a single human family. The first chapter of the document begins by pointing out the “dark clouds” that threaten the collective communion in the globalised world. Among them is the increasing tension between attempts at greater integration of nations as in the formation of continental blocks and at the same time forces that desire isolation with their narrow aim of asserting their unique identities. Then there is the growing loss of the sense of history whereby people desire, as it were, to start everything from zero. In a use-and-throw society that we live in there is an emerging utilitarian attitude in relationships, that threatens the dignity of the human person.

In Chapter 2, the document goes on to present the Parable of the Good Samaritan as the framework for our reflection and action on

*the social meaning of existence, the fraternal dimension of spirituality, our conviction of the inalienable dignity of each person, and our reasons for loving and accepting all our brothers and sisters* (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 86).

The heart of Pope Francis, as expressed in the encyclical, goes out to the migrants (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 41), victims of religious fanaticism (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 46), and all vulnerable members of the society (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 64).

In the spirit of discernment, which is typical of his Pontificate, Pope Francis proposes a manifesto for a new world order that is marked by open societies that integrate everyone, built on liberty, equality, and fraternity (chapter 3). He envisages a universal horizon that goes beyond “*local narcissism*” (chapter 4), and a new and better politics grounded on the common good (chapter 5). His dream for the world is that “*social friendship*” becomes the hallmark of every city and country (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 99). Throughout these sections, Pope Francis is heavily

critical of some of the contemporary ideologies and practices, such as, the absolutisation of right to private property (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 120), market economy that is encouraged by “the dogma of neoliberal faith” (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 168), and the extreme solutions offered in war and death penalty (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 255-270; see also, Sniegocki, 2021).

The Pope goes on to offer meaningful alternatives to these contemporary ideologies in values and practices such as dialogue, consensus and kindness (chapter 6), and the process of renewed encounter expressed in forgiveness and reconciliation (chapter 7). Dialogue situates itself between “feverish exchange of opinions” (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 200) which are mere monologues and an irresponsible tolerance of all opinions that leads to relativism. “Authentic social dialogue involves the ability to respect the other’s point of view...” (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 203) and allowing individuals and communities to defend their values and convictions. This will surely benefit the society. In its proposals, *FT* is realistic and concrete. Speaking of forgiveness, the Pope points out, “Forgiveness is precisely what enables us to pursue justice without falling into a spiral of revenge or injustice of forgetting” (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 252).

The Pope concludes the encyclical (chapter 8) by reiterating the responsibility of “religions at their service of fraternity in our world,” as the title of the chapter indicates. Pope Francis repeats here what he said in his address to the civil authorities at Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2015:

*Religious convictions about the sacred meaning of human life permit us ‘to recognize the fundamental values of our common humanity, values in the name of which we can and must cooperate, build and dialogue, pardon and grow; this will allow different voices to unite in creating a melody of sublime nobility and beauty, instead of fanatical cries of hatred’* (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 283).

Throughout the work, the Pope’s invitation to all people of good will is to go beyond words to concrete expression of reaching out to others in the spirit of the Good Samaritan.

## Education to the Spirit of Fratelli Tutti

As summarised in the above section, *FT* offers a programme for building global solidarity in the contemporary world by inviting religions, nations, and cultural institutions to a spirit of fraternity and social friendship. In order to achieve this agenda, there is a need for education of people, especially those who are young. Therefore, in this chapter contribution, we ask: what type of education is needed for fraternity and social friendship? To begin with, in this section of the chapter, we focus on the question: what does *FT* itself say about education?



Surprisingly, there is no precise section on education in the document. However, concepts related to education run through the whole document. Different terms are used in reference to education. Terms such as ‘cultivating’ (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 94, 243), ‘forming’ (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 229), and ‘building’ (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 227, 233) are punctuated throughout the document, in addition to the word ‘education’ itself which is used eleven times in the document. These terminologies are employed in relation to growth in fraternity, dialogue, solidarity, and cultural, economic and political integration.

To begin with, Pope Francis reiterates that fraternity does not come about in a society just by chance. It has to be consciously cultivated through formal education, dialogue, and recognition of values of reciprocity and mutual enrichment (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 103). In a similar vein, speaking about cultivating dialogue, Chapter 7 of the document points out:

*What is important is to create processes of encounter, processes that build a people that can accept differences. Let us arm our children with the weapons of dialogue! Let us teach them to fight the good fight of the culture of encounter!* (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 217)

Another aspect of education envisaged by *FT* consists in cultivating solidarity. Solidarity is the product of personal conversion, the document contends, which could be achieved by means of education and formation. It goes on to point out that the process of formation to solidarity must begin at the level of the family. As children grow to be adolescents and young adults the responsibility of learning to live together shifts to institutions of formal education without replacing that of the family. And throughout every stage of growth, the media plays a deep responsibility towards the formation to solidarity (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 114).

Pope Francis also considers the cultivation of cultural, economic, and political integration as an urgent need. He says,

*Cultural, economic and political integration with neighbouring peoples should therefore be accompanied by a process of education that promotes the value of love for one’s neighbour, the first indispensable step towards attaining a healthy universal integration* (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 151).

In summary,

*Education and upbringing, concern for others, a well-integrated view of life and spiritual growth: all these are essential for quality human relationships and for enabling society itself to react against injustices, aberrations and abuses of economic, technological, political and media power* (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 167).

Picking up salient passages from *FT*, the above section has focused on aspects of education that are relevant to cultivating fraternity and social friendship. How can these be concretely achieved? Education to fraternity and social friendship could be content-based, that is, teaching specific topics related to the spirit of *FT*; or it could be praxis-oriented where young people are involved in meaningful activities of fraternity and solidarity that offer them an opportunity for experience and reflection. The praxis-oriented approach will have to integrate learning about theories of solidarity with concrete practices of the same. This approach would not only generate motivation among the learners towards a commitment to solidarity but also create a habit that leads to character strengths of compassion and social responsibility. To achieve such an end, the next section of the chapter goes on to propose service learning as a way of promoting the spirit of *FT* in the context of formal education, especially in institutions of higher learning.

## Service Learning in Promoting the Spirit of Fratelli Tutti

In *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* that has now become a principal set of guidelines for Catholic education at the university level, Pope John Paul II asserts that the aim of Catholic education is to promote social justice through the Christian spirit of service to others. This is of particular importance for each Catholic University, and this is “*to be shared by its teachers and developed in its students*” (Pope John Paul II, 1990, 34). In other words, the directive insists that students in Catholic institutions of higher education must be formed to be agents of social transformation. Commitment to social transformation is a concrete expression of Christian charity, which in turn is the expression of Christian faith.

This instruction from Pope John Paul II becomes even more urgent in the light of the agenda proposed by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, whose key teachings and their implication for education we have discussed in the preceding sections of this chapter. In this current section, we would like to propose service learning as a method of teaching and learning that is ideally suitable to realise the goals of *FT*. In this section, we begin by defining service learning, then we go on to discuss the potential of service learning in imbibing the spirit of *FT* among graduates in institutions of higher learning. We also highlight the circularity among spirituality, solidarity and intrinsic motivation, which Pope Francis refers to as “*gratuitousness*” (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 139).

Service learning, that is distinct from sporadic community service and professional career-oriented internship, is a reciprocal relationship (Sigmon, 1979) between the learner and the beneficiary (Jacoby, 1996), in which, the learner is accompanied to integrate the encounter with the beneficiary into their mainstream learning, by means of systematic

reflection (Kolb, 2014). It consists in linking the classroom learning to the world of praxis and to learn theories and models from such experience. In this way, formal education integrates the head, heart and hand of the learners, as Pope Francis envisages it to be (Pope Francis, 2020b).

*In service learning, the learners are not merely educated to serve but service itself becomes the means of education. That is, service is both the goal and the means of education. Therefore, it is especially important to recognise that service learning is not a sporadic social engagement but the integration of learning and service in such a way that there is a reciprocity between them.*

In order to implement the teachings of Pope Francis, particularly those expressed in *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*, the 'Global Compact on Education' is a project launched by the Congregation for Catholic Education at the Vatican. In the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Global Compact on Education, the Congregation for Catholic Education (n.d,

p.17) sees service learning as a powerful tool for building a spirit of fraternity and solidarity. This is because, in service learning, the learners are not merely educated to serve but service itself becomes the means of education. That is, service is both the goal and the means of education. Therefore, it is especially important to recognise that service learning is not a sporadic social engagement but the integration of learning and service in such a way that there is a reciprocity between them.

In practice, service learning consists in: (a) selecting a certain number of courses/modules in an academic programme in the institution of higher learning; and (b) planning the delivery of the selected courses in such a way that classroom learning and concrete engagement with a community are integrated. What is learnt in the classroom is put into practice in the field, and what the learner encounters in the field is brought to the classroom to reflect on and to abstract theories and models, while relating them to literature available (Kraft, 1996; Jones et al., 2005; Stanton, 2014). In this model, the beneficiaries of the concrete developmental or transformative project carried out by the students also become teachers from whom the students humbly learn. Thus, learning is not only taking place in the classroom but also out in the fields. It is not only the lecturer who is the teacher, but also the person(s) in the field who is benefiting from the service offered by the student(s).

Since this chapter is part of a book that is in a series of books targeting people who already carry out or intend to carry out service learning, we assume that they will have

access to manuals that provide guidelines on the implementation of service learning in different contexts. Therefore, it is not within the scope of this chapter to describe in detail the nature or the strategies involved in implementing service learning. Hence, in the light of our discussion on *FT*, we would like only to discuss here the efficacy of service learning in carrying out the formation or education of learners in the spirit of *FT*. We provide evidence from literature to support the role of service learning in promoting fraternity and social friendship, and its related virtues and dynamics.

In *FT*, Pope Francis invites educators to train youth, even in institutions of higher learning, in the conscious responsibility that “*extends also to the moral, spiritual and social aspects of life*” (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 114). There is an ample body of literature that demonstrates the obvious association between service learning and solidarity understood as social responsibility (Jones et al., 2005). For instance, examining the impact of service learning carried out by international visiting students in El Salvador, Baker-Boosamra and colleagues (2006) point out that unlike the usual social service that perpetuates or tolerates the dependence of Salvadorans on others, service learning exhibits a service of solidarity in an act of partnership. Here solidarity is understood as a “*practice of partnership, focused on collective social action, with the goal of positive social change as a result*” (p.1). Other studies have suggested that by means of critical reflection, humility, and openness to learning, service learning has the potential to promote mutual solidarity that goes beyond service (Cameron et al., 2018; Heldman, 2012).

*Pope Francis extends a plea to welcome “strangers in an attitude of gratuitousness, even if they bring no immediate benefit”. Service learning is a powerful means of cross-cultural exchange and learning that reduces the gap between the host and the visitor.*

One precise expression of solidarity, particularly in the globalised world, is cross-cultural sensitivity. Pope Francis extends a plea to welcome “*strangers in an attitude of gratuitousness, even if they bring no immediate benefit*” (Pope

Francis, 2020, *FT*, 139). Service learning is a powerful means of cross-cultural exchange and learning that reduces the gap between the host and the visitor. It is an evolved educational model that implements the Freirean concept of liberative education (Freire, 1996; Baker-Boosamra et al., 2006). In relation to this, Kraft (1996, p.139) recommends,

*The opportunities for cross-cultural learning are greatly enhanced if the service partners (visitors and hosts) are engaged in written and verbal reflection that is shared with each other throughout the service experience.*

*Service learning has a cyclic relationship with spiritual/religious commitment and social transformation. While spiritual motivation might prompt a faculty member or a student to get involved in service learning, service learning in turn provides a greater motivation for commitment to social transformation and also develops the learners' spirituality.*

Service learning has a cyclic relationship with spiritual/religious commitment and social transformation. While spiritual motivation might prompt a faculty member or a student to get involved in service learning, service learning in turn provides a greater motivation for commitment to social transformation and also

develops the learners' spirituality (O'Meara & Niehaus, 2009). Pope Francis (2020, *FT*, 167) himself points out to the circularity among education, concern for others, and spiritual growth. He says,

*Education and upbringing, concern for others, a well-integrated view of life and spiritual growth: all these are essential for quality human relationships and for enabling society itself to react against injustices, aberrations and abuses of economic, technological, political and media power (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 167).*

Literature on service learning that capture concrete experiences of faculty members and students attest to this circularity (Sikula & Sikula, 2005; Welch & Koth, 2009).

In this connection, it is important to consider that the transformative process brought about by service learning has a dual dimension: personal and social (Meyers, 2009). Those who involve in service learning go through a personal transformation in terms of motivation, compassion, and spirituality. Prompted by this personal transformation, they commit themselves to reach out to others with an aim of bringing about social transformation.

Reflecting deeper on the aspect of motivation, it is also possible that service learning with its relationship with spirituality, as pointed out above, has the potential to accompany a learner from an extrinsic motivation towards social commitment to an intrinsic motivation (Dickerson et al., 2017). Initially, the learning opportunity and the grades might be the extrinsic motivation for the learner to engage in service learning. Eventually, it is the connectedness and altruism that might motivate the learner. Ultimately, the higher purpose of participating in the creative and redemptive work of God or a Higher Being would provide the basis for intrinsic motivation. At this level, the learner gets involved in social transformation as an end itself and because they just find an inner gratification in it.

According to psychologists (Deci & Ryan, 2010), intrinsically motivated people engage in certain activities because they are interested in them, and perceive the activities as providing novelty, challenge, and personal gratification. Unlike extrinsically motivated behaviour, intrinsic motivation does not rely on external reward or praise. Eventually, intrinsically motivated behaviour begins to provide identity to those individuals and what they are engaged-in provides a sense of who they are.

Pope Francis refers to this as “gratuitousness” which consists in

*“the ability to do some things simply because they are good in themselves, without concern for personal gain or recompense. Gratuitousness makes it possible for us to welcome the stranger, even though this brings us no immediate tangible benefit”* (Pope Francis, *FT*, 2020, 139).

In the context of institutes of higher education, often the temptation is to focus on employability and career. However, to form agents of social transformation, as it has emerged from the above discussion, the institutions of higher education must integrate the spiritual dimension in order to achieve a motivation for a long-term commitment to the society. Spirituality is often seen as the domain of campus ministry. While this might as well be necessary, it runs the risk of separating one’s religious life from social commitment. On the other hand, involvement in service learning could promote spirituality that sustains intrinsic motivation for social transformation (Welch & Koth, 2009).

## **African Spirit of Ubuntu, Service Learning and Fratelli Tutti**

In this section of this chapter, we contextualise the concept of solidarity within the framework of the African social philosophy of *Ubuntu*. We propose that service learning is a methodology that carries the potential to socialise the future citizens of any nation in the implementation of the spirit of *Ubuntu*, which is synonymous with solidarity and fraternity. It is not by chance that the Pope himself lists the South African Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu, among others, as an inspiration for his encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti* (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 286). Bishop Tutu has frequently elaborated the meaning of *Ubuntu* in his writings and speeches (Tutu, 2004; Hailey, 2008). Therefore, writing from the context of Africa, we would like to make a unique contribution through this chapter by conceptually bringing together African *Ubuntu* philosophy, fraternity and social friendship as espoused by Pope Francis, and service learning. To begin with we expound the meaning of *Ubuntu*, then we go on to discuss the relationship between *Ubuntu* and *Fratelli Tutti*, and finally, we consider the association between *Ubuntu* and service learning.

*Ubuntu* is a traditional African philosophy that offers us an understanding of ourselves in relation to the social world we live in. The word ‘*Ubuntu*’ or ‘*umunthu*,’ or similar expressions found in most Bantu languages, literally mean, ‘personhood’. However, in South Africa, it began to be used in a philosophical sense drawing inspiration from the Zulu aphorism, *Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu*, which could be rendered as, “A person is a person because of others” (Lundin & Nelson, 2010, p. 27; Fraser-Moloketi, 2009, p.243; Tutu, 2004, p.25-26). The *Ubuntu* philosophy considers the success of the group above that of the individual proposing that we exist because of our connectedness to the greater human community. According to *Ubuntu*, there exists a common bond between us all, and it is through this bond that we discover our own individual human identity. *Ubuntu* implies social responsibility, deliberative engagement, and an attentiveness to others.

The African concept of *Ubuntu* is in direct contrast to the Western individualism encapsulated in Descartes’, “*I think, therefore I am.*” To Descartes, his identity is drawn not only from the consciousness of one’s own cognition, but also the givenness of the individual self. On the contrary, in the African worldview, one’s identity is drawn from their interconnectedness to the rest of the society, as captured in John Mbiti’s (1969/1994, p.108), “*I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.*”

To Gaylard (2004), *Ubuntu* is the African equivalent of the Western humanism, which has been rendered with different nuances among the various postcolonial African thinkers. It can be traced in Kenneth Kaunda’s ‘African humanism’ in Zambia (Elejo, 2014), Julius Nyerere’s *ujamaa* in Tanzania (Fouéré, 2014), and in the Ghanaian leader Kwame Nkrumah’s concept of ‘conscientism’ (Addo, 1997), among others across the continent. These versions were founded on the African social and spiritual value systems in order to implement a homegrown version of democracy and economics.

For Orobator (2020), the Nigerian-born theologian who is currently based in Kenya, *FT* is just another name for *Ubuntu*. He observes that *FT* elaborates the *Ubuntu* philosophy in a Christian/Catholic context, when Pope Francis says,

“Each of us is fully a person when we are part of a people; at the same time, there are no peoples without respect for the individuality of each person” (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 182).

In other words, we are “*brothers and sisters all*” (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 8); this is the literal meaning of ‘*fratelli tutti*’ as St Francis used it (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 1). Thus, the link between *FT* and *Ubuntu* is obvious enough, and the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity can truly transform the world. Orobator (2020) further writes,

*For Francis, the radical mutuality of Ubuntu is achievable through love without borders that transforms humanity into a community of neighbours without borders. Like Ubuntu philosophy, Francis argues for a social premium on rights and duties on account of the relationality of humanity, whose deepest manifestation is the ability to transcend the self and create a solidarity of service of others (see also, Pope Francis, 2020, FT, 87, 88, 111).*

Moving the discussion on *Ubuntu* even further, Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru and Makuva (2014) of Zimbabwe suggest that *Ubuntu* could provide an indigenous philosophy of education for teaching and learning in Africa today. Within the focus of our paper, we suggest that the transformed world, as envisaged by *FT* and *Ubuntu*, can be facilitated through higher education that integrates service learning. Institutions of higher learning can facilitate the implementation of *Ubuntu* and *FT* by embracing service learning. Education to the spirit of *FT* needs to have a concern for others, with a well-integrated view of life and spiritual growth (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 167). As the spirit *Ubuntu* envisages, education has to promote the value of love for one's neighbour (Pope Francis, 2020, *FT*, 151).

In the African indigenous education, a learner was formed to be more conscious of their community (Mosha, 2000). This formation was not necessarily a result of a formal education, even though there was such a period of formal training in many ethnic communities prior to initiation (Mosweunyane, 2013), but it was more a 'service learning' that was carried out in the context of individuals' extended families and their village. This learning was guided by the African social philosophy of *Ubuntu*.

Evidence suggests that the knowledge and competencies acquired through service learning transforms the learners. It empowers even members of minority groups (Jones et al., 2005) giving them an aspiration beyond the self. Learners who have engaged in service learning also attribute an experience of personal gratification in reaching out to others and developing a closer personal relationship (Eyler & Giles, 1999). This is the spirit of *Ubuntu* philosophy and *FT*.

## **Impact of Service Learning on Ubuntu: An African Experience**

Having delineated the educational agenda of *FT* and having argued that teaching and learning that integrates service learning is the best suited method of promoting the spirit of *Fratelli Tutti* in institutions of higher education, we proposed that the *Ubuntu* philosophy is the African perspective on solidarity and fraternal friendship that is facilitated by service learning. In the present section, we would like to narrate the experience of a group of



students and the lecturer of a course delivered at Tangaza University College, Kenya, that integrates service learning as part of its methodology. We reflect how this experiment facilitates compassion for people, passion for social transformation, and commitment to solidarity in the African spirit of *Ubuntu* that is nothing but the spirit of *FT*.

'Ministering to Persons with Disability' is a core course in the curriculum of the undergraduate degree in Social Ministry, at Tangaza University College, Nairobi. The academic programme prepares professionals who engage in social transformation with a Christian perspective in any context. The general objective of the course which integrates service learning is to facilitate the learners with knowledge and skills that will transform them into agents of social transformation with a preferential option for people who are vulnerable especially those with disabilities. To achieve this objective, the lecturer of the course 'partially' integrates the classroom lectures with service learning. As part of the course, the students are offered two opportunities to visit a special school for students with intellectual disabilities and a home for persons with disabilities. The learners are then required to write a personal reflection paper as part of their course assessment. We refer to the implementation of service learning in this course as 'partial,' because it only integrates two visits and interactions with people with disabilities during which the students give out some gifts that they buy with their personal funds; they do not carry out any long-term project throughout the semester or year that would have offered them a longer commitment.

In any case, the reflections by the students do express a deep compassion for people living with disabilities, improved passion and motivation for reaching out to them, and a commitment to develop solutions in alleviating the difficulties of people with disabilities. We begin with the description of one of the visits from the lecturer, and then include extracts from the submissions of two students that demonstrate an inner transformation and motivation for social transformation in their expression of *Ubuntu*.

Below is a narrative from the lecturer on the students' reaction for the first service learning visit to a school of children with intellectual disabilities, followed by some of the student's personal reflection.

*On arrival, the visiting class found the children eagerly waiting for them. This special school, with residential facilities, caters to children with cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and other developmental delays. The children were all excited to see the university bus parked in their school compound. Perhaps it was the excitement of having visitors or the anticipation of what goodies the visitors will bring. Whatever it was, the air of excitement quickly infiltrated among the visiting students as well. However, from the look of things, some of the university students*

were hesitant to mingle with the children. Why? It had probably come as a shock that life could be different for some people. Whispers could be heard from within the group, "We need to thank God, and appreciate life... This condition is not an easy one." Clearly, this was going to be an eye-opening experience.

The murmurs went on for a few minutes but soon enough the students became bold and begun dancing, playing and doing different activities with the children with intellectual disabilities. At first, it was not easy, but within an hour everything looked normal. Everybody was smiling and interacting with the children, teachers, and the Principal of the school.

The students were briefed by the Principal on the situation of the children in their institution. She indicated that most of the children come from extremely poor homes and live in slum areas. She added that poverty and disability are twins - meaning that the two are inseparable. That statement could easily be quantified through observation. The children's dressing was evidence enough that their parents are not able to provide them with good uniforms.

After the briefing, the time for sharing came. The visiting students had carried some snacks to share with the children. It was a happy hour! As the goodies were served out, the children were smiling all through. Some tried to talk but it was not clear what they were saying. We assumed they were appreciating our good gesture.

After the sharing, the visiting class assisted the school in cleaning and feeding the children who could not do anything for themselves. Though it was the first time for most of the university students to interact with such children, they made a lot of effort to be as empathetic as possible.

Apart from this specific visit described, the students of this course had another opportunity for such a visit. These visits were prepared for by a reflection during the lecture hour, followed by the groups making the logistical preparations outside class. After the visits, the students made a personal reflection and shared it with colleagues in the following class. This exercise was in an attempt to integrate the visits into the course material. Finally, the students had to submit a written reflection paper for grading.

In general, reflections carried out by the students suggest that they had been transformed from being passive recipients of knowledge to active participants in engaging with the society with that knowledge. The service learning

*visits transformed the students to view the world of persons with disabilities empathetically, thus impacting lasting change in their lives.*

*A concrete example of the practical nature of this change was that one of the students in that course launched an intervention for caregivers of children with intellectual disability. The project supports the caregivers through skills building, as well as providing knowledge about disability and offering counselling services. This is a concrete expression of Ubuntu, and a direct outcome of the course 'Ministering to Persons with Disability' that integrated elements of service learning (Extract from the reflection from the lecturer, who is the second author of this chapter).*

Similar expressions feature consistently in the reflection papers written by other students of that course that has experimented with service learning. We include two verbatim extracts from students' reflections – we maintain the original language of the students. A male student after his experience of the visit to the school for children with intellectual disabilities notes in his reflection:

*It was an eye-opening experience and made me realise that there is still much to be done to integrate disabled persons into the whole society. Not much can be done if only a few are working towards doing something and advocating for them, it is a process that requires everyone to take part in it. It includes the family, the teachers, government, and the rest of society to work together, including me, to give everyone an opportunity to involve and create a conducive environment for those persons with disabilities to live a normal life (Extract from the student submission for evaluation).*

Similarly, after their experience in a special school for children with disabilities, another student wrote,

*The visit enabled me to think outside the box and more broadly on how in diverse ways and means as a social minister I can help children with disabilities and make them feel accepted in the society. I felt for them because of their physical status due to the unique physical disabilities they had, some unable to maintain themselves and as a result they were unclean. They say, "only the person wearing the shoe knows where it pinches". Indeed, unless you have gone through a certain situation, it is very hard to understand the struggles faced by children living with physical and mental handicaps. It took me a lot of time to feel free to share and interact with them as a sign of love. My personal insight and experience with these mentally handicapped children were that they require to be assisted in all aspects of life (Extract from the student submission for evaluation).*

The above narratives provide ample evidence that service learning indeed transforms the learners. Service learning has the potential to generate gratuitousness among graduates from institutions of higher education. Gratuitousness is at the heart of Pope Francis' *Fratelli Tutti* (Pope Francis, *FT*, 139). It is also a concrete expression of the philosophy of *Ubuntu*.

## Conclusion

In 1996, UNESCO proposed a manifesto for education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, in what is called the "Delors Document," which was the result of the discussions of a Commission that was led by Jacques Delors. The document proposed four pillars of education:

- ▶ *Learning to know*: that formal education should not focus merely on imparting knowledge, but offer methodologies of learning, and create in the learners the desire for, and the pleasure in, learning how to learn.
- ▶ *Learning to do*: The document said, *In addition to learning to do a job or work, it should, more generally entail the acquisition of competence that enables people to deal with a variety of situations, often unforeseeable...* (Delors, 1996, p.21).
- ▶ *Learning to live together*: *by developing an understanding of others and their history, traditions and spiritual values and, on this basis, creating a new spirit which, guided by recognition of our growing interdependence...to manage conflicts in an intelligent and peaceful way* (Delors, 1996, p.20).
- ▶ *Learning to be*: besides knowledge and skills, education needs to focus on imparting formation of learners in the ability to make sound moral judgements, and to build a set of value-based character that will be part of the identity of the individual.

It is the third pillar that has been the subject of this paper. The agenda of learning to live together is close to the heart of Pope Francis as he has expressed it throughout his pontificate. In his first Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Pope issued a clarion call to, what he called, the "*mystique' of living together*" (Pope Francis, 2013, *EG*, 87). Here he proposed that the advances in modern means of communication should be

used to bring people together as pilgrims who experience fraternity and solidarity. And if we follow this path the world would be more liberated and hope-filled. In his encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'*, the Pope recommends that the education to the care for our common home becomes an inevitable expression of solidarity (Pope Francis, 2015, *LS*). The theme of learning to live together was also revisited in the Global Compact on Education (Pope Francis, 2019) as we discussed earlier.

On account of these explicit references to learning to live together and its implication for service learning as expressed in the teachings of Pope Francis, this chapter contribution has a valid entry to the present book that focuses on service learning and the teaching of the Church. More precisely, in this chapter we have focused on the theme of education to solidarity as implied in Pope Francis', *FT*. In the light of this, we have contended that educating young people to the spirit of fraternity and solidarity, consists in accompanying them towards learning to live together – not only with their immediate neighbours but with strangers, and especially those who are vulnerable in the society. We have suggested that service learning carries the potential to realise this ideal within the framework of the formal curriculum of the institutions of higher education.

Without going into the details of how service learning could be implemented in these institutions, we have provided some evidence drawn from literature for its impact on the emergence of the components of solidarity and fraternity among the learners. We have also attempted to offer an African perspective of this relationship between the spirit of *FT* and service learning in the light of the African social philosophy of *Ubuntu*. Finally, as a specific sample, we have included a set of narratives from the lecturer and the students of one course that was delivered in the African context integrating service learning. The narratives suggest that service learning facilitates the spirit of *FT* and *Ubuntu* philosophy so spontaneously and powerfully among students in higher education.

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***“We will not change the world,  
if we do not change education”***

*Pope Francis*

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