

# Remembering + Pope Francis

**A reflection from Bishop Emeritus Gerald Barnes**

At hearing of the death of Pope Francis I felt myself in profound sadness. Knowing that he had been in the hospital and that his health was delicate had not prepared me for the sadness I experienced. It was like a close family member had died. In the grieving I also experienced a deep sense of gratitude to God for the gift Pope Francis had been for our Church and the world.



I had three occasions to be with Pope Francis. One was on his visit to our country, the World Meeting of Families. He met with a small delegation in Philadelphia, and I was a part of that delegation. He later had a gathering with the bishops in Philadelphia and we were present with him at the canonization of St. Junipero Serra in Washington D. C. While in Washington he also addressed the Congress, and I was blessed to be there at that gathering.

The second time I was with His Holiness was at the Mass he celebrated at the border. On his visit to Mexico, he visited the border town of Ciudad Juarez and there across the Rio Grande River viewing El Paso Texas, the Holy Father celebrated Mass. Bishops were on both sides of the border concelebrating. We prayed for migrants and refugees, a concern so dear to the Holy Father and to the bishops.

The last time I saw Pope Francis was at our Ad Limina meeting in 2020 at the Vatican. The bishops of California, Nevada and Hawaii gathered with him for three hours for an open discussion on any topic the bishops wished to discuss.

At each of these meetings the Holy Father imbued a profound sense of hospitality. It made you feel welcomed in his presence. No sense of intimidation or unapproachability, but a sense of warmth, caring and belonging. It reminded me of our diocesan core value of hospitality, in which we say all are welcomed, as Pope Francis would say, "todos, todos, todos."

In conversations with the Holy Father, he always showed an interest in what we had to say. It gave me a sense that all of us have a voice; an important part to play. I equated that with our diocesan core goal of collaboration.

The Holy Father demonstrated our core value of reconciliation by his asking for forgiveness of those the Church had hurt today and in times past, Indigenous peoples, abuse victims, the forgotten, marginated and persecuted.

Pope Francis entire life was a life of faith sharing, another diocesan core value. He called us all to encounter the Lord in one another and especially among the lost, the last and the least. He called on us to accompany them and one another, to go out into the world, to the peripheries and live the Gospel. He was about taking action, about "get up and go," about combatting complacency and indifference, and about being Pilgrims of Hope.

I am so blessed and grateful that God gave us Pope Francis as our Holy Father for 12 years. He was a blessing to our diocese, to the Church and to the world. May he rest in God's peace and may all of us continue the message of the Gospel which he personified with his life. Adelante, siempre adelante.