

My friends, I am honored to be with you today, and to be a part of the faith community in San Antonio helping to support Habitat for Humanity. People of many different churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, and other places of worship come together each year to work in harmony, side by side, in collaboration with Habitat's goal of creating affordable and needed housing. But the truth is that we are not simply building houses, we are creating homes! Recently, Pope Francis spoke about the meaning of a home. He said,

“The "home" represents the most precious human treasures, that of encounter, that of relations among people, different in age, culture and history, but who live together and together help one another to grow. For this reason, the "home" is a crucial place in life, where life grows and can be fulfilled, because it is a place in which every person learns to receive love and to give love.” - Pope Francis

Having a home implies being part of a community, a family, something bigger than one's own self. My faith tradition, the Catholic Church, understands family as the most fundamental building block of society. In a time when individualism is taken for granted in our general culture, we still hold that what creates a home is a communion of persons we call the family, and that it is in this context where, as Pope Francis has said, we “learn to receive love, and to give love.” Receiving and giving is something that happens only among a group of people, not alone, isolated, by one's self.

Additionally, a home should not be a dwelling in isolation, but part of a community we call a neighborhood. A neighborhood is a place of

broader community where we encounter the humanity of others, where we learn to interact with one another, where we share together for the common good, and where civility and offering mutual help is learned. Thankfully, the mission of Habitat is not merely to build isolated houses, but to create neighborhoods where people of differing traditions, needs, and circumstances come together and learn the meaning of being neighbors!

The virtues of family and neighborhood teach the meaning of being a responsible and active member of our greater civic community. And we are certainly in a time when these virtues are very much needed! Stable neighborhoods help to create stable relationships, resulting in more stable families. This results in higher graduation rates for students, and eventually to higher incomes and greater economic stability for the community. So it is in our interest, as a society, to support the aims of Habitat! Even more, as people of faith, and from my own faith tradition of Catholicism, we believe that family life and community are a part of God's plan for the human person. Therefore, it is imperative for us to be active participants in the process of building community, because it is a divine mandate for us!

One of the best aspects of Habitat's approach is what you call "sweat equity," that is, those who will live in the homes being built must participate in the building process, themselves. Additionally, they must help in the building of the places that will be their neighbor's homes. Not only does this help to ensure participation

and a sense of ownership on the part of one family entering a particular home, but even more, teaches the meaning of neighbor helping neighbor — in the old days we called this developing a sense of the common good! This is another virtue much needed in our time and place!

These virtues are needed in our time and place because we all know that a sense of community and common purpose has been eroded in many parts of our culture. Too often this leaves people isolated and stuck in a never ending cycle of poverty. A poverty not simply economic in nature, but a poverty of the human spirit.

These are also challenging and controversial times. As people in the faith community we cannot allow ourselves to grow too comfortable or settle for what is too convenient. Rather, this is our time to roll up our sleeves, grab the hammer and nails, and get to work!

It is gratifying to know that many faithful people participate in the work of Habitat, whether through direct construction work at a building site, or through making financial and personal contributions. It is edifying to encounter whole congregations who engage in these commitments. I want the members of my own tradition, in the Catholic Church, and my brothers and sisters in the many different faith traditions present in our San Antonio community to hear the call! Now is the time to step forward! Now is the time to participate! Now is the time to make our contribution to the creation of a better world!

This will only happen when we become involved. Many people know that in my faith our central religious service is called the mass. In the celebration of the mass we enter into the sacrifice of Jesus Christ by recalling his own words at the Last Supper when he told his disciples that the bread was his body and the wine was his blood. We call this the Holy Eucharist. When Catholic people come forward to receive this consecrated bread and wine, we call it Holy Communion. A few years ago, Pope Emeritus Benedict wrote an important letter called *Deus Caritas Est*— meaning, *God is Love*. In this letter he told our Catholic people that the deepest meaning of Holy Communion was known not simply in receiving it, but when the receiving of Holy Communion resulted in the actions of love — *caritas* — the works of charity and justice. So, this work of helping our brothers and sisters is not just something nice to do, but it is the fulfillment of the call to be holy people. I think this call to godly holiness through charitable and just living is at the heart of every faith tradition. May we *all* be faithful to our calling. Supporting Habitat is one very beautiful way to do it.

May God bless you and keep you! Amen!