

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE



Message for the 2015 World Tourism Day

(September 27th)

“One billion tourists, one billion opportunities”

1. It was 2012 when the symbolic barrier of one billion international tourist arrivals was surpassed. Now the numbers continue to grow so much that the forecasts estimate a new threshold of two billion will be reached in 2030. To this data even higher figures related to local tourism must be added.

For World Tourism Day we want to concentrate on the opportunities and challenges raised by these statistics, and for this we make the theme proposed by the World Tourism Organization our own: *“One billion tourists, one billion opportunities”*.

This growth launches a challenge to all the sectors involved in this global phenomenon: tourists, businesses, governments and local communities and, of course, the Church too. The *billion tourists* should necessarily be considered above all in their *billion opportunities*.

This message is being made public a few days after the presentation of Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato si'* dedicated to care for our common home.¹ We need to take this text into great consideration because it offers important guidelines to follow in our attention to the world of tourism.

2. We are in a phase of change in which the way of moving is changing and consequently the experience of traveling as well. Those who go to countries different from their own do so with the more or less conscious desire to reawaken the most hidden part of themselves through encounter, sharing and confrontation. More and more, a tourist is in search of direct contact with what is different in its extra-ordinariness.

By now the classic concept of a “tourist” is fading while that of a “traveler” has become stronger: that is, someone who does not limit himself to visiting a place but in some way becomes an integral part of it. The “citizen of the world” is born: no longer to see but to belong, not to look around but to experience, no longer to analyze but to take part in, and not without respect for what and whom he encounters.

In his latest Encyclical, Pope Francis invites us to approach nature with “*openness to awe and wonder*” and to speak “*the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world*” (*Laudato si'*, No. 11). This is the right approach to adopt with regard to the places and peoples we visit. This is the road to seizing *a billion opportunities* and making them bear even more fruits.

3. The businesses in this sector are the first ones who should be committed to achieving the common good. The responsibilities of companies is great, also in the tourist area, and to take advantage of the *billion opportunities* they need to be aware of this. The final objective should not be profit as much as offering travelers accessible roads to achieving the experience they are looking for. And businesses have to do this with respect for people and the environment. It is important not to lose awareness of people's faces. Tourists cannot be reduced only to a statistic or a source of revenue. Forms of tourist business need to be implemented that are studied with and for individuals and invest in individuals and sustainability so as to offer work opportunities in respect for our common home.

4. At the same time, governments have to guarantee respect for the laws and create new ones that can protect the dignity of individuals, communities and the territory. A resolute attitude is essential.

¹ FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* on care for our common home, May 24, 2015.

Also in the tourist area, the civil authorities of the different countries need to have shared strategies to create globalized socioeconomic networks in favor of local communities and travelers in order to take positive advantage of the *billion opportunities* offered by the interaction.

5. From this viewpoint, also the local communities are called to open up their borders to welcome those who come from other countries moved by a thirst for knowledge, a unique occasion for reciprocal enrichment and common growth. Giving hospitality enables the environmental, social and cultural potentialities to bear fruit, to create new jobs, to develop one's identity, and to bring out the value of the territory. *A billion opportunities* for progress, especially for countries that are still developing. To increase tourism, especially in its most responsible forms, makes it possible to head towards the future strong with one's specificity, history and culture. Generating income and promoting the specific heritage can reawaken that sense of pride and self-esteem useful for strengthening the host communities' dignity, but care is always needed to not betray the territory, traditions and identity in favor of the tourists.² It is in the local communities where there can grow “*a greater sense of responsibility, a strong sense of community, a readiness to protect others, a spirit of creativity and a deep love for the land. They are also concerned about what they will eventually leave to their children and grandchildren*” (*Laudato si'*, No. 179).

6. *One billion tourists*, if well received, can become an important source of well-being and sustainable development for the entire planet. Moreover, the globalization of tourism leads to the rise of an individual and collective civic sense. Each traveler, by adopting a more correct criterion for moving around the world, becomes an active part in safeguarding the earth. One individual's effort multiplied by *a billion* becomes a great revolution.

On a voyage, a desire for authenticity is also hidden which is realized in the spontaneity of relations and getting involved in the communities visited. The need is growing to get away from the virtual, which is so capable of creating distances and impersonal acquaintances, and to rediscover the genuineness of an encounter with others. The economy of sharing can also build a network through which humanity and fraternity increase and can generate a fair exchange of goods and services.

² To prevent this from happening, “*Tourism activity should be planned in such a way as to allow traditional cultural products, crafts and folklore to survive and flourish, rather than causing them to degenerate and become standardized*” (World Tourism Organization, *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism*, October 1, 1999, art. 4, §4).

7. Tourism also represents a *billion opportunities* for the Church's evangelizing mission. “*Nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts*” (Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, No. 1). First of all, it is important for the Church to accompany Catholics with liturgical and formative proposals. She should also illuminate those who during the experience of traveling open their hearts and ask themselves questions and in this way make a real first proclamation of the Gospel. It is essential for the Church to go forth and be close to travelers in order to offer an appropriate and individual answer to their inner search. By opening her heart to others, the Church makes a more authentic encounter with God possible. With this goal, hospitality by the parish communities and the religious formation of tourist personnel should be enhanced.

The Church's task is also to educate to living free time. The Holy Father reminds us that “*Christian spirituality incorporates the value of relaxation and festivity. We tend to demean contemplative rest as something unproductive and unnecessary, but this is to do away with the very thing which is most important about work: its meaning. We are called to include in our work a dimension of receptivity and gratuity, which is quite different from mere inactivity*” (*Laudato si'*, No. 237).

Moreover, we should not forget Pope Francis' convocation to celebrate the Holy Year of Mercy.³ We have to ask ourselves how the pastoral care of tourism and pilgrimages can be an area to “*experience the love of God who consoles, pardons, and instils hope*” (*Misericordiae vultus*, No. 3). A particular sign of this jubilee time will undoubtedly be the pilgrimage (Cf. *Misericordiae vultus*, No. 14).

Faithful to her mission and starting from the conviction that “*we also evangelize when we attempt to confront the various challenges which can arise*”,⁴ the Church cooperates in making tourism a means for the development of peoples, especially the most disadvantaged ones, and setting in motion simple but effective projects. However, the Church and institutions should always be vigilant to prevent a *billion opportunities* from becoming a *billion dangers* by cooperating in the safeguard of personal dignity, workers' rights, cultural identity, respect for the environment, and so on.

3 FRANCIS, Bull *Misericordiae vultus* of indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, April 11, 2015.

4 FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, November 24, 2013, No. 61.

8. *One billion opportunities* also for the environment: “*The entire material universe speaks of God’s love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God*” (*Laudato si’*, No. 84). Between tourism and the environment there is a close interdependency. The tourist sector, by taking advantage of the natural and cultural riches, can promote their conservation or, paradoxically, their destruction. In this relationship, the Encyclical *Laudato si’* appears to be a good traveling companion.

Many times we pretend we do not see the problem. “*Such evasiveness serves as a license to carrying on with our present lifestyles and models of production and consumption*” (*Laudato si’*, No. 59). By acting not as masters but with “*responsible stewardship*” (*Laudato si’*, No. 116), each one has his or her obligations that must be made concrete in precise actions that range from specific, coordinated legislation down to simple everyday actions,⁵ passing through appropriate educational programs and sustainable and respectful tourist projects. Everything has its importance,⁶ but a change in lifestyles and attitudes is necessary and surely more important. “*Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little*” (*Laudato si’*, No. 222).

9. The tourism sector can be an opportunity, indeed, *one billion opportunities* for building roads to peace too. Encounter, exchange and sharing favor harmony and understanding.

⁵ “*There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle. Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us, such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices. All of these reflect a generous and worthy creativity which brings out the best in human beings. Reusing something instead of immediately discarding it, when done for the right reasons, can be an act of love which expresses our own dignity*” (*Laudato si’*, No. 211).

⁶ “*We must not think that these efforts are not going to change the world. They benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread*” (*Laudato si’*, No. 212).

There are *one billion* occasions to transform a voyage into an existential experience. *One billion* possibilities to become the makers of a better world, aware of the riches contained in every traveler's suitcase. *One billion tourists, one billion opportunities* to become “*instruments of God our Father, so that our planet might be what he desired when he created it and correspond with his plan for peace, beauty and fullness*” (*Laudato si'*, No. 53).

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