**Nehemiah meets Pope Francis in Portland**

(from Nehemiah1 and Pope’s address to 2nd World Meeting of Popular Movements2, July 9, 2015)

Imagine Nehemiah, the great rebuilder of Jerusalem five hundred years before Jesus, could meet Pope Francis, a breath of fresh air (and Spirit) in the Catholic Church and world. Hear how their conversation might go:

N: I came from privilege with the king’s blessings and resources to rebuild Jerusalem as a city for all. I was heartened to find many people eager to work for the common good, and surprised to find opposition to seeking ‘the welfare of the people of Israel’ (Nehemiah 2:10b)

F: *“Do we truly realize that something is wrong in a world where there are so many farmworkers without land, so many families without a home, so many laborers without rights, so many persons whose dignity is not respected?”*

N: Yes. I heard in Persia how bad things were among the people of Jerusalem. Then I saw for myself—how the walls were broken down and the gates burned—and more, a few were benefiting from the suffering of the many. What could I do, but organize?

F*: “ …the future of humanity does not lie solely in the hands of great leaders, the great powers and the elites. It is fundamentally in the hands of peoples and in their ability to organize. It is in their hands, which can guide with humility and conviction this process of change. I am with you. Each of us, let repeat from the heart: no family without lodging, no rural worker without land, no laborer without rights, no people without sovereignty, no individual without dignity, no child without childhood, no young person without a future, no elderly person without a venerable old age.”*

N: But it’s hard, slow work. The people were leery of new schemes. I had to listen and do research and listen some more. Eventually, “They said, ‘Let us start building!’ So they committed themselves to the common good.” (Nehemiah 2:18b)

F: “*Today, the scientific community realizes what the poor have long told us: harm, perhaps irreversible harm, is being done to the ecosystem. The earth, entire peoples and individual persons are being brutally punished. And behind all this pain, death and destruction there is the stench of what Basil of Caesarea – one of the first theologians of the Church –called “the dung of the devil”. An unfettered pursuit of money rules. This is the “dung of the devil”. The service of the common good is left behind.”*

N: I wonder what people in Portland are doing to rebuild the city for all. I heard some people are having house meetings to discover how to respond to big problems that are affecting members of their congregations and neighborhoods. I hope they are effective.

F: *They can do a lot. They really can. You, the lowly, the exploited, the poor and underprivileged, can do, and are doing, a lot. I would even say that the future of humanity is in great measure in your own hands, through your ability to organize and carry out creative alternatives, through your daily efforts to ensure the three “L’s”… (labor, lodging, land) and through your proactive participation in the great processes of change on the national, regional and global levels. Don’t lose heart!*