



From the desk of the CEO
Mario J. Paredes

SIX YEARS OF POPE FRANCIS

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This March, on the 13th and the 19th, the Catholic world will celebrate the sixth anniversaries of the 2013 election and inauguration, respectively, of Pope Francis' Pontificate.

Six years is a long way to look back and to evaluate what has been accomplished but, above all, to project the near future that awaits and challenges us under the guidance of this man, this Christian, and this pastor, recognized as a spiritual leader by and for all humanity.

Some Information About His Profile ...

His Pontificate has elicited admiration, and no one remains indifferent about it, either by the novelty of his genuine personality as a human being and as Pope or by the themes, accentuations and emphases of his Petrine ministry.

Francis is, above all, a Latin American man, a Christian, and a Jesuit priest who embraced and embraces the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth in integrating them into his own life and his own teachings. And, this desire to want to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ authentically, simply, transparently and without airs, is not foreign to him, nor has it escaped the amazement and admiration of all, both within and outside the Catholic Church.

His own temperament and his life as a Christian also make him an intimate man and pastor – simple and humble – one who is like us. Jorge Mario Bergoglio is, as a man and as Pope, a daily, simple, and authentic being in his words and gestures, in the topics he addresses, in his attitudes and in his way of communicating and getting close to everyone. ...

His way of being in the Church and in the world shows him as a man who is conservative in his doctrine, but progressive in his attitudes and approaches; as a good pastor, welcoming, compassionate, and inclusive, and not exclusive (for example, in his approach to the position of women and homosexuals in the life of the Church) and as a Pope who has, wants and proposes a new way of understanding the forms of government within the Church, to the point of appearing and presenting himself as "anticlerical".

His Challenges and How He Has Answered Them ...

Restoring the trust and credibility of the world and of the Catholic faithful in the Catholic Church, in its hierarchies, in its institutions, and in its message is, without a doubt, the great challenge facing the Church in this era of the Pope Francis' government. The Pontificate of Francis



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is challenged by important issues and problems – within and outside the Church – that must be confronted and resolved for the life, existence, and work of the Church in the world.

To these problems and challenges, Francis has responded by confronting them, without fuss or noise, but with all the determination and seriousness that these challenges demand from the Leader and Shepherd of the Universal Church.

In the remainder of this article, I briefly enumerate the big challenges that I see facing the Pontificate of Francis and the responses that the Pope has delivered in each case, during the six years of his Pontificate.

First, it is urgent that the Catholic Church, its authorities, especially its universal leader and guide, develop and lead positions on the major issues concerning the Church and all humanity. It is urgent that the light "does not stay under the bed, but that it gives light to all those who are at home". It is urgent that the light "shines amidst the darkness". It is urgent that the preaching of the Church leaves the sacristies to illuminate the path of all men and women of good will in the great issues, of all types, relating to human existence and to life in society.

Responding to this challenge, Francis, as a Latin American man, knows first-hand the various sounds, pains and profiles that the very serious social problems facing today's man have, and, from the first hours of his Pontificate, he has asked the Church to "go out to the peripheries". What this means and implies is not to only go to the geographical peripheries, but also and, above all, to the central issues of the world and of all humanity where the Church, perhaps, became peripheral. ... Francis, in all his messages, is interested in everyday problems of all kinds where human beings live with the certainty and conviction that the Gospel of Jesus may enlighten and clarify the existence of every man and all men, with its mystery, its problems, its lights and shadows (cf GS 22). Francis's openness to any topic that interests everyone has been demonstrated in his many trips, messages, and meetings with political and religious leaders from around the world.

Second, Francis has pledged much of the last six years of his Pontificate to a major reform within the Church that starts from the very heart of the Vatican State organization and, in particular, from the Roman Curia, its dicasteries, its organizational chart, accounts, etc. With the conviction that the testimony begins at home, Francis appointed, at the beginning of his Pontificate, a commission of Cardinals in charge of this reform, who serve as his immediate consultants and advisors. This reform has not been easy for the Pope due to the resistances that, in the very bosom of Vatican life, have arisen and have become evident.



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A third challenge, the most mediatic of all, concerns the scandals that, in sexual matters, have undermined the credibility of the Church, especially through the sexual abuse committed against minors (pedophilia) by ordained ministers and of consecrated men and women (bishops, priests, religious men and women). These sex crimes committed, an immense majority of them decades ago and many others in recent times, today come to light thanks to accusations, the payment of lawsuits and, above all, the immediacy of the events in which we live today due to communication through the media and social networks.

In this, as in the most important matters of the life of the Church, Francis has taken the reins, has faced the issues, and has put the cards on the table so that the subject can be discussed and aired openly and without fear. The government of Pope Francis has made drastic decisions, legislated, met personally with the victims, has asked for forgiveness, has punished, has reduced many clerics to lay life, has decreed zero tolerance, but - above all - it has denounced the hypocrisy of our current life in society in which hedonism and pansexuality prevail. It is a pansexualist society and one that is libertine in sexual matters in which priests and clergy are born, in which they are raised and from which they come and, then, lose their minds in sexual crimes - of all kinds - that occur daily by the hundreds throughout the world and that are committed not only by the clergy, but also by men and women of all conditions and stations of life.

Finally: all of this sets a challenge more, and not less, important to the Catholic Church: the current and growing scattering and/or fall in the number of Catholic faithful in all latitudes, due to - in most cases - the problems mentioned above. Francis is aware of this and with his personality, his accentuations, his life, and his Pontificate, gravitates, above all, toward a Christian and ecclesial life in which the authenticity and quality of Catholicism and discipleship in Christ among believers prevails over mere quantity; and this quantity is a result of the testimony and Christians' authentic following of Christ.

May God bless Francis so that, with the human and Christian authority and authenticity he has shown in these six years of his Pontificate, he may continue to guide the life of the Church and illuminate the path for all humanity for many years to come.