



*Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales*

For Immediate Release

### **Pope Francis - Requiescat in Pace**

Pope Francis has died aged 88, the Vatican Press Office has confirmed. He served as the 265th successor of St Peter from his election on 13 March 2013 to 21 April 2025.

At 9:45am, Rome time, Cardinal Kevin Farrell, Camerlengo of the Apostolic Chamber, announced the death of Pope Francis from the Casa Santa Marta with these words:

“Dearest brothers and sisters, with deep sorrow I must announce the death of our Holy Father Francis. At 7:35 this morning, the Bishop of Rome, Francis, returned to the house of the Father. His entire life was dedicated to the service of the Lord and of His Church. He taught us to live the values of the Gospel with fidelity, courage, and universal love, especially in favour of the poorest and most marginalized. With immense gratitude for his example as a true disciple of the Lord Jesus, we commend the soul of Pope Francis to the infinite merciful love of the One and Triune God.”

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales and Archbishop of Westminster, said:

“The death of Pope Francis brings great sadness to so many around the world, both within the Catholic Church and in societies in general. A voice proclaiming the innate dignity of every human being, especially those who are poor or marginalised, is now silent. The legacy he leaves is one we must seek to carry forward and strengthen.

"Pope Francis was called to priesthood through his experience of the mercy and compassion of God. This remained the core of his ministry, as Priest, Bishop and Pontiff. Only in understanding the love and mercy of God towards each one of us can we fashion societies and communities that bear the mark of the 'kingdom of God'.

"This same focus and emphasis lay at this desire to see membership of the Church as being rooted in ‘missionary discipleship’, a dynamic and powerful vision for every Christian and every community.

"Now we pray for the repose of his soul, that he may know, in full measure, the merciful and loving embrace of the Father, of the one God to whom he gave his life in unstinting service.

"May he now rest in peace and rise in glory.”

The Catholic Bishops of England and Wales will celebrate Requiem Masses for the repose of the soul of the late Pope in their cathedrals. Prayer cards have been distributed to Catholic parishes throughout the two countries.

Pope Francis was the first non-European Pope for nearly 1,300 years since Gregory III, an 8<sup>th</sup> century Syrian. An Argentinean, he was the first Pope from the southern hemisphere and was also the first Pope to be a member of the Society of Jesus.

A champion of ecclesial reform, an advocate for the poor and refugees, Pope Francis urged the world to develop a relationship with the Earth which he called “Our Common Home”. He said we face an “environmental-social crisis,” marked by “globalised indifference to the poor”. Care for people, he said, should always trump financial gain. “My people are poor and I am one of them,” was a favoured saying.

These were not mere words: Francis chose to live in two plain rooms in the Vatican guesthouse rather than the residence in the Apostolic Palace traditionally used by Popes. He would invite the homeless to celebrate his birthday. At Francis’s behest, free showers and launderettes for the destitute were opened in Rome.

He created a Vatican Office for the care of refugees and migrants.

Francis urged every Catholic parish and monastery in Europe to welcome a migrant family after bringing 12 refugees from Syria from Greece to re-settle in Italy. He visualised the Church as a “field-hospital” where sinners (he included himself) encounter God’s healing love and mercy. His message was that God’s love was for everyone, including those who felt alienated from the Church for whatever reason. He stressed the need for every person to see their lives as a step by step journey into closer union with God, following the way and teaching of Jesus, the Christ.

Ultimately, Francis desired a simple Church focused on evangelisation and sensitive to the needs of the poor.

In 2013, *Time* magazine named Francis their “person of the year” for bringing the Papacy “out of the palace and onto the streets.”

## **Biography**

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was born on 17 December 1936 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. His father, Mario worked as an accountant for the national railways after emigrating to Argentina from Piedmont, north-west Italy. His mother Regina (née Sivori) was born in Buenos Aires to a family of Italian origin. She and Mario had five children. Jorge was the eldest.

Like his father, he was a fan of the Buenos Aires football team, San Lorenzo de Almagro. His grandmother Rosa was a major influence on his faith, teaching the young Jorge to pray the rosary. His call to priesthood came when celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation. His vocation was founded on the mercy of God.

He left secondary school with a diploma in applied chemistry and then worked briefly in a food processing laboratory before entering the diocesan seminary. On 11 March 1958, he entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus in Buenos Aires.

Bergoglio was attracted to the Jesuits’ missionary spirit, community, and disciplined approach to prayer.

Aged 21, he developed severe pneumonia. Part of his right lung was removed in an operation. This impaired his breathing permanently.

In 1963, after studying humanities in Chile, he obtained a theology degree from the Jesuit Colegio de San José in Buenos Aires. From 1964-1966 he taught literature and psychology in schools in Santa Fe and Buenos Aires. He once invited the Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges to address his pupils.

He was ordained a priest on 13 December 1969, subsequently completing the final stage of Jesuit formation in Alcalá de Henares, Spain. On 22 April 1973, Fr Bergoglio made his final vows to become a Jesuit. He served again as Rector at the Jesuit seminary in Buenos Aires where he also taught theology.

On 31 July 1973, he was appointed the provincial superior of the Society of Jesus in Argentina for a six-year term.

From 1980 – 1986, he served once again as Rector of the Jesuit seminary in Buenos Aires. He included labour on the seminary farm in the curriculum – where he would muck out the pigsty – and asked trainee Jesuits to open a soup kitchen for 400 local children. In March 1986 he went to Germany to pursue doctoral research concerning the theologian, Romano Guardini (1885 – 1968).

He was subsequently a teacher in Buenos Aires, then served as spiritual director at the Church of San Ignacio in Córdoba. On 20 May 1992, Bergoglio was appointed auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires and Titular Bishop of Auca by Pope John Paul II.

On 3 June 1997, he was appointed Coadjutor Archbishop of Buenos Aires. For his motto, Francis chose the phrase *Miserando atque eligendo*. Translated roughly, this means ‘by having mercy and by choosing [him].’ The words are from a homily by the Venerable Bede for the Feast of St Matthew.

Every day, Bergoglio would rise at 4.30am. He was famed for being hard-working and always punctual. On Saturdays, he could often be found ambling in battered shoes through Buenos Aires’ shanty towns, chatting to local families. Bergoglio championed the idea of the theologian Yves Congar, that people on the edge or peripheries of the Church could evangelise its centre.

Two things struck Bergoglio in the slums: the solidarity and care residents displayed for one another and the strength of their Catholic faith. This culture produced *la teología del pueblo* or people’s theology, manifest in joyful fiestas held by the poor to honour Jesus, Mary, or the Saints.

On 28 February 1998, he became the city’s Archbishop, Primate of Argentina, and Ordinary for the Eastern-rite faithful in Argentina. His habits were frugal. Instead of ordering new clothes for his role, he insisted the previous Archbishop’s cassocks should be tailored to fit him. He refused to use the chauffeur-driven limousine available for the Archbishop and would travel only by public transport.

Decisive by nature and highly organised, he was inspired by Pope Paul VI’s 1975 encyclical, *Evangelii Nuntiandii* (In Proclaiming the Gospel) to launch a programme to evangelise the three million people living in his archdiocese.

During his first Holy Week as Archbishop, he washed the feet of drug addicts and prostitutes at a Maundy Thursday liturgy held in a Buenos Aires hospital.

On 21 February 2001, Pope John Paul II elevated Bergoglio to the rank of Cardinal. Bergoglio asked Catholics not to fly to Rome to celebrate, but instead to donate the money they would have spent on the trip to the poor. At the time, Argentina was sliding into economic meltdown.

Behind the scenes, Bergoglio helped find jobs and accommodation for trafficked women escaping prostitution. He supported priests working in the slums and baptised the children of men who scavenged rubbish dumps for a living.

Deeply loved in his Archdiocese, he refused to become President of the Argentinian Bishops’ Conference when first invited to do so in 2002. He later served twice in this role in 2005 and 2008. In April 2005, he participated in the conclave which elected Pope Benedict XVI.

### **Successor to Benedict XVI**

On 28 February 2013, the serving Pope, Benedict XVI became the first pontiff to resign in almost 600 years. Two weeks later, on 13 March 2013, after a two-day conclave, Jorge Mario Bergoglio was proclaimed the new Pope.

He chose the name Francis after the 13<sup>th</sup> century Saint, Francis of Assisi (1182 – 1226) whose love for poverty, fraternity and nature would shape his priorities as Pope.

His first pastoral visit as Pope was to refugees on the island of Lampedusa, near Sicily. He observed that “no one in the world” felt responsible for the refugee crisis.

Francis wanted the Church to have a less euro-centric image, reflecting the fact that nearly 70 per cent of Catholic Christians live in the developing world.

As Pope, Francis enjoyed meeting people in the street. He regretted the fact he could not “slip out” of the Vatican for a pizza.

## **Missionary Disciples**

Francis wanted a Church fundamentally focused on evangelisation. He urged every baptised Catholic to live as a “missionary disciple”, bringing the Gospel to every part of life.

He said: “I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.”

In 2013, he urged millions of young Catholics to “wreak havoc” or shake up the status quo in their parishes by evangelising and helping the sick, poor and needy.

## **The Mercy of God**

Mercy was a key word for Francis’s papacy.

“Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s Mercy,” he observed, saying God’s mercy was no “abstract idea,” but something tangible and tender, like a parent’s love for their child. This is revealed through acts of love.

Francis declared a Year of Mercy (8 December 2015 – 20 November 2016). He began the year by opening the Holy Door of St Peter’s Basilica in Rome. A symbol of God’s mercy working in our lives, the door is opened every Holy Year, a period that recurs roughly every quarter-century. For the first time, similar holy doors were opened in cathedrals in dioceses around the world.

Reconciliation with God was central to the year. Catholics were encouraged to frequent Confession, a sacrament the Pope called “an encounter with the Lord’s mercy.”

## **Encyclicals**

Pope Francis urged believers and non-believers alike to develop new ways of relating to each other, the poor and our planet.

His first encyclical *Lumen Fidei* (The Light of Faith) published on 29 June 2013, was a re-working of a draft text given written by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI about the light of Christ illuminating every aspect of our lives.

*Evangelii Gaudium* (The Hope of the Gospel), published on 24 November 2013 was dubbed Francis’s “magna carta”. It outlined the major themes of his pontificate including:

- The inseparable bond between Christianity and the poor.
- The need for everything in the Church from her language to her goals to be directed towards mission.
- The need for urgent reform of the global economy. Francis attacked contemporary “idolatry of money” asking “How can it be that is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies... but it is news when the stock market loses two points?”

- The emergence of a “throwaway culture”, the result of excessive consumption, where “human beings [are] being themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded.”

*Laudato Si'* (Praise be to You), published on 24 May 2015, focused on the environment. Inviting “all people of good will” to enter a new dialogue about the Earth, “our common home,” he observed the following:

- St Francis of Assisi invites us to see nature as a “magnificent book” through which God speaks to man.
- True ecology always includes questions of social justice. “When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities...it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected.”
- The poor are on the frontline of environmental degradation because they often subsist via agriculture, forestry and fishing. All are affected by climate change.

In 2023, the Pope penned a second part to *Laudato Si'* to reflect fresh environmental concerns.

*Fratelli Tutti* (All Brothers and Sisters) was published on 3 October 2020. A challenge to the post-Covid world, the encyclical used the Gospel parable of the Good Samaritan to highlight our need to help our neighbour, including refugees and migrants. The encyclical observed that:

- Everyone is our brother and sister as we belong to one human family.
- We should aspire to develop social bonds of fraternity and friendship.
- We need a “better kind of politics” centred on fraternal love. This should be the basis for solving global problems including terrorism, slave labour and organised crime.
- The death penalty should be abolished worldwide.

In October 2024, Pope Francis published *Dilexit nos* (He Loved Us), an encyclical on the human and divine love of the heart of Jesus Christ. He emphasised that during our frenetic lives we need to find time to pay attention to what is going on in our hearts.

## Synods

Francis sought to govern the Church in a collegial fashion, via Synods. This term for an ancient process to help Popes govern the Church combines two Greek words: *Syn* meaning “together” and *Hodos* meaning “road” or “way.” A synod is therefore a meeting where believers walk along the path of Christ together.

During his pontificate, Francis held several major synods including:

The Synod on the Family (2014 and 2015) which considered Catholic teaching on marriage, divorce, family, and sexuality. The final Synod document, titled *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love) reflected on God’s love in the midst of the messy realities of family life.

The Synod on Young People (2018) explored the needs and vocation of the world’s youth.

The Synod for the Pan-Amazonian region (October 2019) explored challenges and hopes for the region.

## The Synod on Synodality

October 2023 and October 2024

Pope Francis sought to give the whole Church – including non-practising Catholics, the disabled and refugees – a voice in the gathering. He wanted to discern how Catholic teaching might be applied by the Church in today's world by hearing the "living voice of the People of God".

Millions of Catholics around the world took part in surveys for the synod in their local diocese to record their views of the Church and experience of faith in their local parishes. The synthesis of the findings formed the Synod's agenda.

The Synod was a call for the whole Church to discern the voice of the Holy Spirit through prayerful encounter, dialogue and listening to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

This marked the first time women and lay people were allowed to vote in a Catholic Church synod. Fifty per cent of the lay people participating in the Synod were female.

## **Safeguarding**

Like his predecessor, Benedict XVI, Pope Francis was grieved by the scourge of sexual abuse by ordained and lay members of the Church. In 2014, he set up the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors.

In 2016, the Pope announced the Church worldwide would hold a day of prayer for survivors of clerical abuse. He wrote to lay Catholics urging them to be close to abuse victims, and pray and fast in reparation for the "atrocities" survivors had endured.

The Pope wrote<sup>1</sup>: "'If one member suffers, all suffer together with it' (1 Cor 12:26). These words of Saint Paul forcefully echo in my heart as I acknowledge once more the suffering endured by many minors due to sexual abuse... perpetrated by a significant number of clerics and consecrated persons.

"Looking back to the past, no effort to beg pardon and to seek to repair the harm done will ever be sufficient. Looking ahead to the future, no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening... The pain of the victims and their families is also our pain."

Francis changed Church law to make it easier to detect and convict paedophile clergy. In 2019, he made it mandatory for all Catholic priests and bishops to report cases of sexual abuse, or cover up, to the state authorities as well as the Church, while protecting the seal of the Confessional.

He also abolished the pontifical secret, a part of canon law relating to classified information connected to clerical sex abuse cases.

## **Legacy**

Pope Francis sought to reform the Catholic Church at every level, from its decision-making processes to rooting out financial corruption in the Vatican Curia. "*Todos, Todos, Todos*," "Everyone, Everyone, Everyone," he encouraged young people to chant at World Youth Day in Lisbon in 2023. "That is the Church," he said. "There is room for all."