



## **POPE FRANCIS AND THE CHURCH OF MERCY**

**By: Dorothea Epple, Ph.D.**

**Presented at:  
NACSW Convention 2015  
November, 2015  
Grand Rapids, Michigan**

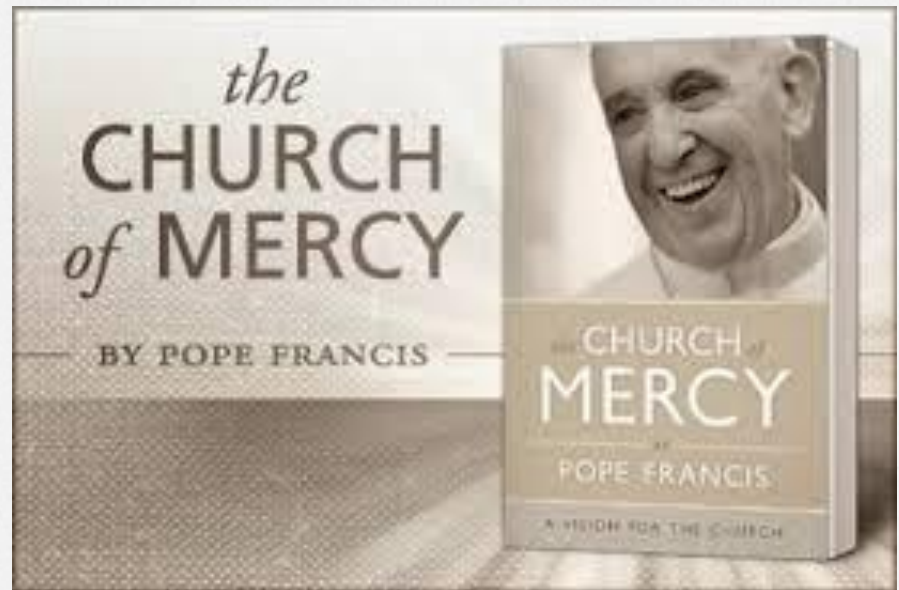
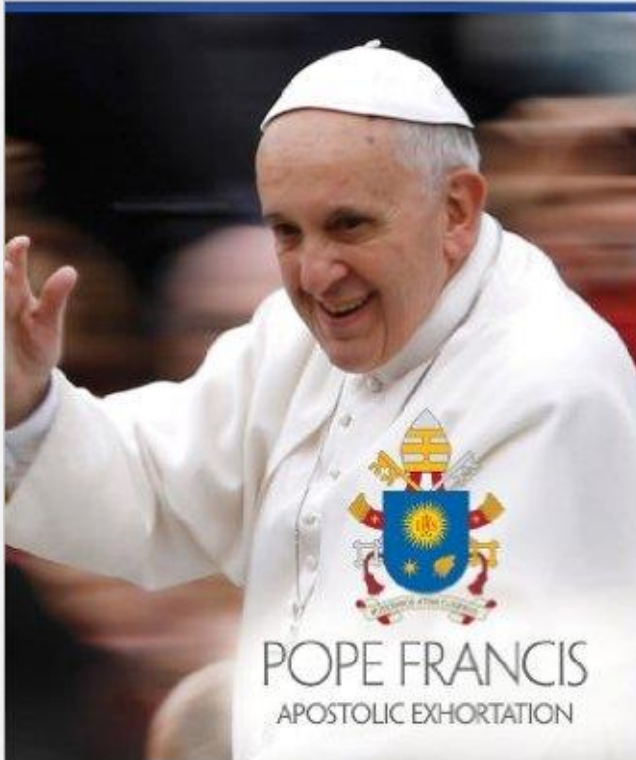


# **Pope Francis and the Church of Mercy**

NACSW 2015 National Convention  
Grand Rapids Michigan

**Dorothea Epple Ph.D. LMSW  
Associate Professor  
Spring Arbor University**

THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL  
*EVANGELII GAUDIUM*





# Learning Objectives

- o Provide a brief history of Pope Francis background, his conversion story, and his overpowering feeling of God's mercy, love, and providence calling him to the priesthood.
- o Provide an understanding of the Pope's theme of Mercy in his papacy as the Lord's most powerful message for each of us to embrace and give to others.
- o Discuss themes in the Pope's homilies as related to Christian Social Work practice including mercy, communion, hospitality, listening to the Holy Spirit, solidarity, community.

# AGENDA

- Who is Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio ?
- What is Pope Francis' vision for the universal church ?
- What are the themes Pope Francis chooses to address and challenge ?
- How can the Christian Social Worker ponder and integrate the Pope's wisdom into daily practice ?



# Who is Pope Francis ?

- o Born Jorge Mario Bergoglio - 12/17/1936 -
  - o Buenos Aires Argentina
- o Entered Society of Jesus - 3/11/1958
- o Ordained as a Jesuit Priest - 12/13/1969
- o Ordained Titular Bishop of Auca and Auxiliary Bishop of Buenos Aires - 6/27/1992
- o Coadjutor Archbishop of Buenos Aires - 6/3/1997
- o Archbishop of Buenos Aires - 2/28/1998
- o Cardinal - 2/21/2001
- o Pope Francis - 3/13/2013
  
- o Source: Bunson, M. (2013). *Pope Francis. Our Sunday Visitor Press*

# A Jesuit takes a Franciscan Name

How does a name influence who we are?

## o Saint Francis of Assisi

- o Poverty, peace, love for creation
- o A commitment to reform
- o Humility

## o Pope Francis

- o Reform
- o Humility
- o Service
- o Mercy
- o Joy
- o Peace





# A Jesuit takes a Franciscan Name

How does a name influence who we are?

- o “The fact that he has taken the name of Francis – reminiscent of Francis of Assisi – confirms his understanding of evangelization primarily as assistance for the poor and the deprived, as protection of their dignity”
  - o Statement of the Russia Orthodox Church
  
- o What is your name?
- o What is the meaning of your name?
- o How has your name influenced who you have become?



# Pope Francis Conversion Story

- o Spiritual experience on the feast of Saint Matthew, September 21, 1953 (17 years old)
- o After going to confession he felt God's mercy touch his heart in an overwhelming way
- o He had a new awareness of God's infinite capacity to forgive
- o He felt in that instant called to the religious life, to follow the example of Saint Ignatius of Loyola ( Society of Jesus / Jesuits)

# We all have a Conversion Story

- o Both S.W. and clients have conversion stories
- o What is your story about how to decide to become a SW?
- o What is your vision of who you are as a SW?
- o What is your vision of the people who come to you for help?

## **The Priorities of this Jesuit who takes a Franciscan name**

- o Humility**
- o Love of poor / service**
- o Challenge power / authenticity**
- o Mercy / Forgiveness**
- o Encounter with Christ**



## **The Priorities of this Jesuit who takes a Franciscan name**

- o **Humility** - was seen in his first words as Pope
- o He ask us to bless him before he blessed us
  
- o Announced Christ is the Church's pastor
  - o Christ remains the center . . .
  - o The heart of the Church
  
- o "The Church is the People of God, the Holy People of God making its way to encounter Jesus Christ"

## **The Priorities of this Jesuit who takes a Franciscan name**

- o **Deep love of the poor**, suffering, marginalized
- o Obligation to **live as Christ-** sacrifice as Christ
  
- o Pope Frances has been called
- o “The Pope for the poor”
- o He wants a new commitment to the poor
  - o He wants the papacy to live this commitment
  - o **providing service**

## **The Priorities of this Jesuit who takes a Franciscan name**

- o **“How I would like a poor church for the poor”**
- o **“Authentic power is service”**
  - o **Especially to the poorest, the weakest**
- o **How have we seen the power of service?**



## The Priorities of this Jesuit who takes a Franciscan name

- o Challenge power / authenticity
- o He will not tolerate the **false divisions**
  - o That pit social teachings against doctrine
- o Courage to **challenge power**
  - o World leaders, bishops, pastors
- o Importance of **Unity**
  - o Tensions must be addressed honestly, not suppressed in hope they will go away
  - o Always seek unity
  - o “The Paraclete, who gives different charisms to each of us, unites us in this community of the Church”

# The Priorities of this Jesuit who takes a Franciscan name

- o Mercy / Forgiveness
- o “Mercy is the Lord’s most powerful message”
- o “God never gets tired of forgiving us”
- o Pope Francis signature idea is that God is a God of mercy and compassion
- o Whose ability to forgive and let everyone start anew is infinite.



# The Theme of Mercy as the Lord's Most Powerful Message to Embrace

- o “The Lord never gets tired of forgiving . . . We are the ones who get tired of asking him for forgiveness.”
- o “Only someone who has encountered mercy, who has been caressed by the tenderness of mercy, is happy and comfortable with the Lord.”
- o How have you experienced mercy?
- o How have you extended mercy?
- o How have you seen clients experience mercy?



# The Theme of Mercy as the Lord's Most Powerful Message to Embrace

- o Francis – motto on his papal coat of arms
  - o (Every pope develops a signature line )
- o Latin – Miserando atque eligendo
- o **“Seeing through the eyes of mercy”**
- o Focus on mercy has deep roots in his own spiritual journey,
  - o experiencing God’s mercy and feeling the call to priesthood

# The Theme of Mercy as the Lord's Most Powerful Message to Embrace

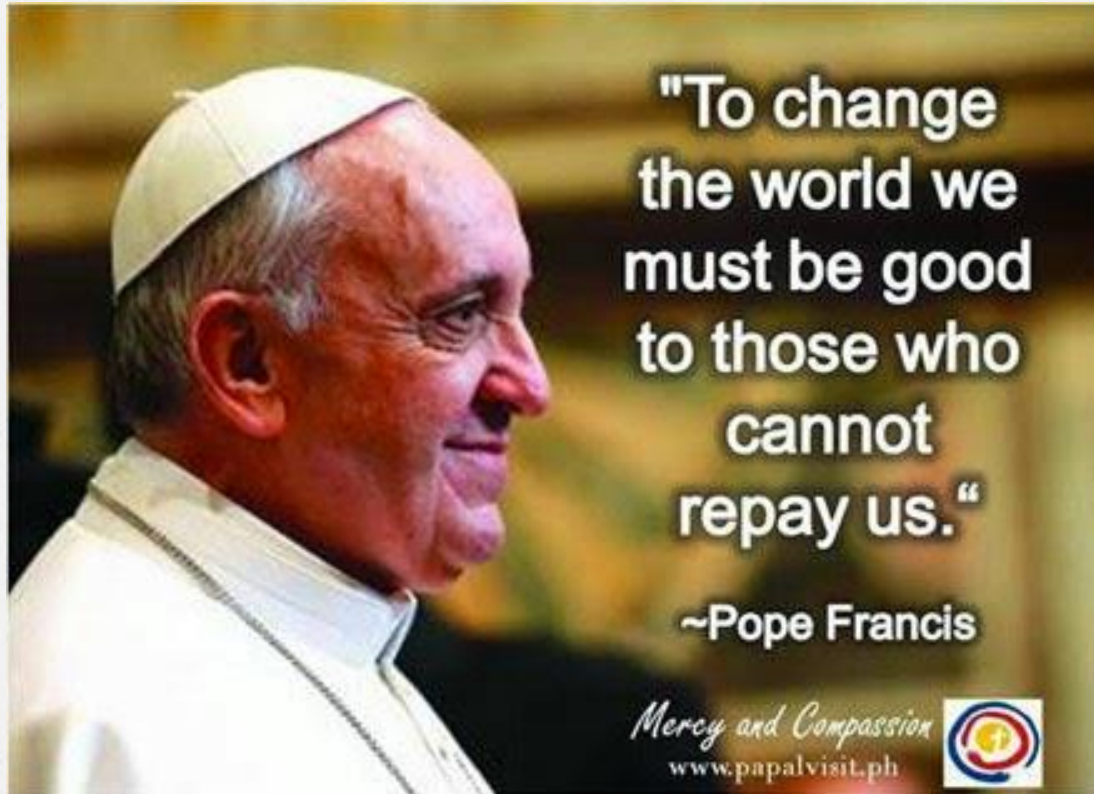
- o Encounter with Christ
- o “It is from contemplation, from a strong friendship with the Lord that the capacity is born in us to live and to bring the love of God, his mercy, his tenderness to others. And also our work with brothers in need, our charitable works of mercy, lead us to the Lord, because it is in the needy brother and sister that we see the Lord himself.” (7/21/13)



# The Christian Social Worker and the Pope's Wisdom in Daily Practice

- o Do I replace malice with innocence
  - o Power with love
  - o Pride with humility
  - o Status with service
    - o Pope Francis
  
  - o Do I sow love where there is hatred
  - o Pardon where there is injury
  - o Union where there is discord
    - o Saint Francis
- o THE CHALLENGE
  - o Do I listen to the Holy Spirit within who creates unity in diversity ?
  
  - o “Only the spirit can awaken diversity, plurality and multiplicity while at the same time build unity”
    - o Pope Francis





**"To change  
the world we  
must be good  
to those who  
cannot  
repay us."**

**~Pope Francis**

*Mercy and Compassion*  
[www.papalvisit.ph](http://www.papalvisit.ph)



# Being a Christian Social Worker

- o “I am the vine you are the branches” John 15: 1-11
  - o Abide in my love,
  - o Remain attached to me,
  - o as the branch is attached to the vine
  
- o Ideas for this section of the power point are adopted from
  - o Pope Francis (2014). *The Church of Mercy*. Loyola Press: Chicago.



# Being a Christian Social Worker

- o # 1. Abiding with Him and being led by Him
  - o How do I experience remaining with Jesus, abiding in Jesus?
  - o Do I find time to remain in His presence, in silence, to be looked upon by Him?
  - o Do I let His face warm my heart?
  
- o If the warmth of God, of His love, of His tenderness is not in our own hearts, then how can we, who have weakness warm the heart of others ?



# Being a Christian Social Worker

## o # 2. Imitating Him

- o When we put Christ at the center of our life, we don't become the center.
- o He leads us out of our self and opens us to others
  - o A gift received and a gift given
  
- o Are we being fed by our relationship with the Lord, so that we can bring Him to others?

# Being a Christian Social Worker

- o # 3. Not being afraid to go with Him to the outskirts
  - o Do not be afraid to pass beyond our comfort zone and follow God
  - o God is always bigger than our little way of seeing things
  - o God is always faithful, creative and can be found in the outskirts
- o How can we be faithful, creative, flexible, courageous, change to adopt to the situation while proclaiming the gospel?

<b>Being a Christian Social Worker</b>	
<b>Jesus does not say “go off and do things on your own”</b>	<b>Road to Emmaus</b>  <b>Jesus is with us, even when we do not recognize His presence</b>
<b>Jesus says “Go, for I am with you”</b>	<b>Remember the story of Lazarus Thomas – “come let us die with him”</b>  <b>Let us die and rise again with our clients</b>
<b>Jesus goes ahead of us, He goes to the outskirts first, He is already there</b>	<b>The light shines in the darkness and the darkness never puts it out</b>
<b>Jesus is waiting for us in the hearts of the wounded bodies, In their life challenges, in their questioning faith</b>	<b>As a Christian Social Worker</b>  <b>We provide the client a new experience in context of the therapeutic relationship</b>  <b>Christ to one another</b>



# The Words of Pope Francis

- o “. . . how else could we be followers of the Lord if we did not personally engage in ministry to the sick, the poor, the dying and the destitute? Our faith in Christ, born of having recognized our own need for him who has come to heal our wounds, to enrich us, to give us life, to nourish us, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society’s most neglected members” (Evangelii Gaudium, 186)
- o “. . . I thank you for being close to those who are ill and all the suffering, offering them the loving presence of their shepherd.” 11/16/14





# References

- o Bermudez, A. (2013). *Pope Francis our brother, our friend: Personal recollections about the man who became Pope*. Ignatius Press: San Francisco.
- o Bunson, M. E. (2013). *Pope Francis. Our Sunday Visitor Publishing: Huntington, Indiana.*
- o Cotter, Kevin (2014). *A year of mercy with Pope Francis: Daily reflections*. Our Sunday Visitor Publishing: Huntington, Indiana.
- o Editor. *The Tyranny of Talk. America Magazine*. December 1, 2014.
- o Kasper, Cardinal Walter (2013). *Mercy: The essence of the gospel and the key to Christian life*. Paulist Press: New York.
- o Kasper, Cardinal Walter (2015). *Pope Francis' revolution of tenderness and love*. Paulist Press: New York.
- o Moynihan, R. (2013). *Pray for me: the life and spiritual vision of Pope Francis: first Pope from the Americas*. Image Press: New York.



# References

- o NASW News (2015, Nov.). Pope's visit shines light on social work ideals. *NASW Press* volume 60, No. 10.
- o Pope Francis (2013) *Encountering Christ: Homilies, Letters, and Addresses of Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio*. Scepter Press: New Rochelle, N.Y.
- o Pope Francis (2014). *The Church of Mercy*. Loyola Press: Chicago.
- o Pope Francis (2014). *The Joy of the Gospel*. Published by The Dynamic Catholic Institute with permission from Vatican Press
- o Pope Francis (2015). *Living lent with passion: encouragement and daily prayers*. Creative Communication; eBook edition.
- o Pope Francis (2015). *Encyclical Letter: Lumen Fidei of the Supreme Pontiff Francis to the Bishops Priests and Deacons Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on Faith*. Retrieved from [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_2013062](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_2013062)