

Pope Francis - the first year



March 13 the first anniversary of Francis as Pope. CNI presents media reports outlining major aspects of the past year

In March last year an unfamiliar figure stepped on to the balcony above St Peter's Square in Rome to be greeted as [Pope Francis I](#). Jorge Mario Bergoglio, an Argentine bishop virtually unknown outside Latin America, spoke to the crowds in an affable, unceremonious manner. His style, which seems to embrace and engage people at their own level, has continued to inspire Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Pastors across the world have reported, albeit cautiously, a swelling of their congregations. Pilgrim travel to Rome is breaking all records – and Francis has made the covers of Time

magazine (as its 2013 Person of the Year) and, perhaps more remarkably, last month's Rolling Stone.

As he prepares to celebrate the first anniversary of his election on March 13, [Francis's vision for the Roman Catholic Church](#) is now increasingly clear. He is

focusing on the poor of the world, and the "lost sheep": the untold millions of the world's 1.2bn faithful who have left the Church in recent years, many because they disagree with official Catholic strictures on sexual morality.



Already 77, and not in the best of health (he has only one lung), Francis is a man in a hurry. Yet his proposals, while widely popular, have also prompted criticism and resistance from influential conservative Roman Catholic groups in the US and elsewhere. Francis, in their view, appears to be promoting [anti-capitalist solutions to poverty](#) and liberal attitudes towards sexual sin.

Francis is uniquely qualified, both pastorally and temperamentally, to understand the predicament of marginalised peoples. Some of his more popular predecessors did share something of this quality, including the two who are to be canonised as saints next month: John XXIII (1958-63), who preached lessons of love for all; and John Paul II (1978-2005), who helped bring about the collapse of Soviet communism ("the tree was rotten, I just gave it a shake").

Francis is, however, the only pope of the modern era who has previously lived and worked among slum dwellers and ministered to a populace that had suffered decades of poverty and violence. As Archbishop of Buenos Aires (1998-2013), he moved out of the episcopal palace to live in a small flat where he cooked for himself, and travelled by bus rather than chauffeur-driven limo.

On Saturday nights in his latter years as Archbishop, he routinely went to the seamiest, most poverty-stricken depths of the city's red-light district, dressed simply as a priest. Sitting on a street bench he talked with prostitutes, listening to their problems and offering spiritual comfort.

When asked, after his election to the papacy, how he would characterise his personality, Bergoglio said: “I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech . . . I am a sinner.” This admission seems key to understanding the reforming approach of his papacy. But what kind of sinner did he have in mind?

In his early career, Bergoglio was the leader of Argentina’s Jesuits, members of the Society of Jesus, an order founded in Spain in 1540 and famous for its militancy and discipline. This period coincided with the “dirty war” of the 1970s between the ruling junta and neo-Marxist groups. Bergoglio had been accused by members of his own religious order of failing to help two arrested worker priests, one of whom was tortured. Whatever happened during that dark time, by the late 1980s he appears to have undergone an extraordinary transformation. He became the “Bishop of the Slums” – and a thorn in the side of Argentina’s political elite.

WCC chief and Pope share hopes for justice, peace and unity



In an audience with Pope Francis in the Vatican, the World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit stressed the significance of Christian unity. He also expressed appreciation for Pope Francis’s call to pray for peace in Syria and his call for churches to remember the poor, encouraging Christians to work for economic justice.

The WCC general secretary, who represents a fellowship of 345 member churches in more than 110 countries, expressed these views on 7 March during his visit to Rome hosted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity of the Roman Catholic Church. In his remarks Tveit said, “I believe that in our time God is opening new ways for us to unity, and for how the world can see our communion in Christ, particularly in the ways we can

serve the world together.” He was referring to Pope Francis’ recent Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* which speaks of the joy of sharing the gospel. The “WCC rejoices that the call to work for justice and peace, in deep Christian solidarity and for the benefit of all human beings, is seen as a gospel imperative by so many parts of the Christian family,” Tveit emphasized.

Tveit mentioned WCC documents such as *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* and *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in a Changing Landscape*. These documents, he said, stress the concept of “servant church” and how a “church must be inclusive, sharing in a mission from the margins”.

Tveit also spoke about Pope Francis’s planned visit to Jerusalem where he will meet with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I. Tveit said, “We heartily appreciate that you are going there as a pilgrim at a time urgently calling for a sustainable conclusion to the peace process.”

For many years the WCC has worked and prayed for peace in Jerusalem, he said.

“We know that religion and faith play a significant role in the conflict in what should be a city of peace. We believe that only a peace with justice, with a shared city of three religions and Israel and Palestine as two independent states, can there be an end to the occupation and the violence in this region,” Tveit added.

Tveit pointed to the call from the WCC Busan assembly in 2013 asking churches and people of good will to join a “pilgrimage of justice and peace”.

Along with emphasizing the important role of faith leaders in seeking solutions to conflicts in the world, Tveit also spoke about issues of climate change and economic justice as major concerns in the pilgrimage of justice and peace.

“The future of humanity is threatened; the poorest among us are already feeling the worst consequences of them. We encourage you and the Roman Catholic Church to be with us in mobilizing a real change of mind, heart and priorities,” he said.

Tveit called his personal conversation with Pope Francis “very positive”.

Pope Francis - the first year: Is the rebel too good to be true?

www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/pope-francis--the-first-year-is-the-rebel-too-good-to-be-true-9172000.html

Pope Francis: revitalising the Catholic church

www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/09/pope-francis-revitalising-catholic-church?CMP=tw_t_fd

All things Catholic: Catholicism growing in heart of Muslim world, reflections on Africa's antigay laws, and more - World - The Boston Globe

www.bostonglobe.com/news/world/2014/03/08/catholicism-growing-heart-muslim-world/LxliUYwSlro7Zl6ugvVQJM/story.html

Message of the WCC general secretary delivered in audience with Pope Francis

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/speeches/speech-for-audience-with-pope-francis>

Cooperation between the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/jwg-with-roman-catholic-church>