

MICHAEL COLLINS

# FRANCIS

*Bishop  
of Rome*

DISCUSSION GUIDE

SECOND EDITION

## About the Book

In *Francis: Bishop of Rome*, Fr. Michael Collins introduced readers to the pope who has grabbed the attention and the spiritual imaginations of Catholics and others around the world. Now, in this second edition, Collins takes account of the most important events and development of his remarkable pontificate. With a focus on compassion, Francis has challenged world leaders to be more attentive to the poor, begun important reforms of the Curia and the Vatican Bank, and called for two synods of bishops to discuss pastoral challenges that face modern families. This new edition, which is 25% longer than the first, includes more details about Jorge Bergoglio's early life and a far more expansive understanding of the pontificate of this remarkable spiritual leader.

## About the Author

Michael Collins is a priest for the Archdiocese of Dublin, where he has served in a number of parishes. He has written or co-authored a number of books, including *Benedict XVI: Successor to Peter*, *John Paul II: The Path to Sainthood*, and *The Story of Christianity*. He recently edited *The Illustrated Bible*.



# Discussion Guide

## Chapter One

1. Given his family history, how accurate is the claim that Francis is a non-Italian pope? Or that he is the first pope from the New World? What is the significance of these claims?
2. What role did the Fascist Party play in the emigration of Bergoglio's family to Argentina?
3. What do you know of the Salesian order? What formative impact did it make on Bergoglio's early years?
4. How did Bergoglio's work at the Hicktheir-Bachmann hosiery factory affect his life and worldview?
5. What do you think of Bergoglio's response to his mother when she confronted his dishonesty surrounding his studies (p. 11)?

## Chapter Two

1. What did you know of the Jesuits prior to reading this chapter? How has your perspective changed?
2. Why does the author write that the “option for the poor” is “most notable in the work of the South American Jesuits” (pp. 16–17)? What evidence does Collins offer?
3. What impact did having to teach literature have on the young Bergoglio?
4. What accounts for Bergoglio’s rapid promotion to Jesuit provincial?
5. Prior to reading this chapter, what did you know about Argentina’s political and civil unrest during the 1970s and 1980s? How has your perspective changed?
6. Who were Orlando Yorio and Francisco Jalics? Describe their relationship to Bergoglio.
7. How did Marxist thought emerge as an influence on Latin American theology? What was Bergoglio’s reaction to this development?

## Chapter Three

1. What strikes you as notable from the brief overview of the church's involvement in the settlement of Buenos Aires (pp. 31–33)?
2. Why were some priests not happy with Bergoglio's "new style" of the episcopate (p. 36)?
3. What was Bergoglio's role in the 2001 Synod of Bishops? How may that have affected future developments in his career?
4. Who were the Pallotine priests for whom Bergoglio opened a cause for beatification (pp. 49–50)? What strikes you about their story?
5. Describe Bergoglio's relations with non-Catholic religious groups in Argentina. How does your local church community relate to those of different beliefs and practice?
6. What do you find most poignant about Bergoglio's thoughts regarding priestly celibacy (pp. 59–60)?
7. What is your reaction to Bergoglio's statement on the sexual abuse scandal (p. 62)?

## Chapters Four, Five, Six

1. Describe the balloting process for a papal conclave. How does the process differ from other elections around the world?
2. What is the “dictatorship of relativism” as described by Joseph Ratzinger (p. 67)? What is the relevance of that term for a papal conclave?
3. What developments from “the Benedict years” strike you as notable? What has their continuing impact had on the Church?
4. Who is Carlo Maria Vigano, and what is the significance of his letter that was made public? Do you think these stolen letters and documents played a role in Benedict XVI’s abdication?
5. Look up Benedict XVI’s farewell address to the cardinals (p. 76) on the Vatican website. What did he quote from Romano Guardini—and why?
6. While visiting the Vatican website, find Benedict XVI’s final *motu proprio*, in which he replaced some norms regarding papal conclaves. What do you find most interesting about his changes?
7. Reflect upon the excerpt from Bergoglio’s intervention at the General Congregation (p. 80). What does he mean by the “self-referential Church”?

## Chapter Seven

1. What is significant about Francis's choice of shoes in the minutes prior to his presentation to the public?
2. Do you remember Francis's election and presentation at St. Peter's Square? If so, where were you? What do you remember about that moment?
3. Why did it take so long for Francis to be presented to the public? What was going on behind the scenes at Castelgandolfo (p. 88)?
4. What is the significance of the light bulb in Francis's room at the hostel (p. 92)? What does that incident say about his character?

## Chapter Eight

1. Why did Bergoglio choose the papal name “Francis”? What is significant about a Jesuit choosing that name?
2. What is the Domus Sanctae Marthae, and why is it important to Francis’s pontificate?
3. Reflect upon the excerpt from Francis’s sermon at his first Chrism Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica (p. 104). What does he mean by the phrases “sad priests” and “smell of the sheep”?
4. What is the significance of the group of eight cardinals selected by Pope Francis to reform the Curia (p. 110)? Look up the work of this council online. How has it changed in the years since its establishment?
5. Look up Francis’s first encyclical, *Lumen Fidei*, online. Reflect upon the following excerpt from that document: “Faith, received from God as a supernatural gift, becomes a light for our way, guiding our journey through time” (§4). What does this mean to you?
6. What did the liberation theologian Leonardo Boff mean when he said, “What matters isn’t Bergoglio and his past, but Francis and his future” (p. 112)? What does this quote mean to you?
7. Look up the series of interviews that appeared in *America* magazine (“A Big Heart Open to God”) and described on p. 115. What strikes you as notable in these interviews?
8. How has Francis advocated for refugees? How has his presence in Lampedusa affected the impact of this ministry?



9. Who is Raymond Burke, and what do you make of his criticism of Pope Francis (p. 119)?
10. What has been Francis's response to the mafia (pp. 123, 128)?
11. What is the significance of Francis's ecumenical meeting with the patriarch of Constantinople (p. 126)?
12. Compare Pope Francis's response to the sexual abuse scandal (pp. 128–30) with that of a younger Bishop Bergoglio (p. 62). What has changed? Why do you think that is?
13. Which of Pope Francis's international travels most caught your attention in this chapter?
14. What further events in Francis's pontificate have transpired since the publication of this book? If you were to write a third edition of *Francis: Bishop of Rome*, what would you focus upon?