

Pope Francis Biography

Pope (1936–)

Quick Facts

Name: Pope Francis

Occupation: [Pope](#)

Birth Date: [December 17, 1936](#) (age 78)

Education: [Colegio Of San José](#), [Diocesan Seminary Of Villa Devoto](#)

Place of Birth: [Buenos Aires](#), [Argentina](#)

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected the 266th pope of the Roman Catholic Church in March 2013, becoming Pope Francis. He is the first pope from the Americas.

Synopsis

Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on December 17, 1936, Jorge Mario Bergoglio became Pope Francis on March 13, 2013, when he was named the 266th pope of the Roman Catholic Church. Bergoglio, the first pope from the Americas, took his papal title after St. Francis of Assisi of Italy. Prior to his election as pope, Bergoglio served as archbishop of Buenos Aires from 1998 to 2013 (succeeding Antonio Quarracino), as cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church of Argentina from 2001 to 2013, and as president of the Bishops' Conference of Argentina from 2005 to 2011. Pope Francis made his first international visit in July 2013, traveling to Brazil. In December 2013, Pope Francis was also named Person of the Year by *Time* magazine. To date, his tenure has been characterized by humility and outspoken support of the world's poor and marginalized people, and he has been involved actively in areas of political diplomacy and environmental advocacy.

Early Life and Education

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on December 17, 1936, to Italian immigrants. As a young man, Bergoglio underwent surgery to remove part of one of his lungs due to serious infection. He graduated from a technical school as a chemical technician before beginning training at the Diocesan Seminary of Villa Devoto. In March 1958, he entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus.

Bergoglio taught literature and psychology at Immaculate Conception College in Santa Fé in 1964 and 1965, and also taught the same subjects at the Colegio del Salvatore in Buenos Aires in 1966. He studied theology and received a degree from the Colegio of San José from 1967 to 1970, and finished his doctoral thesis in theology in Freiburg, Germany in 1986.

Entering Priesthood

Ordained as a priest in December 1969, Bergoglio began serving as Jesuit provincial of Argentina in 1973. He has said that initially, his mother did not support his decision to enter the priesthood, despite the fact that she was a devout Catholic. By the time he was ordained, however, she accepted his calling and asked for his blessing at the end of his ordination ceremony. He later returned to his alma mater, the Colegio of San José, where he served as rector (1980-86) as well as a professor of theology.

On May 20, 1992, Bergoglio was named titular bishop of Auca and auxiliary of Buenos Aires; he was ordained into that post a week later. In February 1998, he became archbishop of Buenos Aires, succeeding Antonio Quarracino. Three years later, in February 2001, he was elevated to cardinal by [Pope John Paul II](#), named the cardinal-priest of Saint Robert Bellarmino. In 2005, he was named president of the Bishops' Conference of Argentina, serving in that position until 2011.

After Pope John Paul II's death in April 2005, Bergoglio reportedly received the second-most votes in the 2005 papal conclave; [Pope Benedict XVI](#) (Joseph Ratzinger) was chosen as Pope John Paul's successor.

Becoming Pope

On March 13, 2013, at the age of 76, Jorge Bergoglio was named the 266th pope of the Roman Catholic Church—becoming the first citizen from the Americas, the first non-European and first Jesuit priest to be named pope, and adopting the name Pope Francis (he took the title after St. Francis of Assisi of Italy). Prior to the 2013 papal conclave, Pope Francis had served as both archbishop and cardinal for more than 12 years. The tone of his papacy, which has become admired globally, was established long before his elevation to the church's highest position; however, when he was named to that post, the media quickly picked up on stories of his humility. News circulated about the fact that he returned to the boarding house where he had been staying to pay his bill personally, rather than send an assistant, and that he would choose to live in a simple two-room apartment rather than the luxurious papal accommodations in the Vatican's Apostolic Palace. In choosing to live more simply, Pope Francis broke a tradition that had been upheld by popes for more than a century.

Addressing a crowd of tens of thousands in St. Peter's Square, in the Vatican City in Rome, Italy, after his selection by the conclave, Pope Francis stated, "As you know, the duty of the conclave was to appoint a bishop of Rome. It seems to me that my brother cardinals have chosen one who is from faraway. . . . Here I am. I would like to thank you for your embrace."

After the results of the 2013 papal conclave were announced, U.S. President [Barack Obama](#) issued a statement about the new pope: "As the first pope from the Americas, his selection also speaks to the strength and vitality of a region that is increasingly shaping our world, and alongside millions of Hispanic Americans, those of us in the United States share the joy of this historic day."

It was not long after assuming the papacy that Pope Francis began offering more nuanced views and interpretations on key social issues about which the church holds pronounced doctrinal views. He has not shied away from elaborating on those views, and sound bytes such as "Who am I to judge?", a comment he made referring to homosexuality, have served to portray him as a compassionate conservative whose views are often considered progressive compared to those of his predecessors.

First International Visit as Pope

Pope Francis made his first international visit on July 22, 2013, when he arrived at the Galeão-Antonio Carlos Jobim International Airport in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. There, he was greeted by Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff in a welcome ceremony and later circulated in downtown Rio in order to be "close to the people." While in Rio, Pope Francis was on hand to celebrate World Youth Day. More than three million people attended the pontiff's closing mass at the event. On his way back to Rome, Pope Francis surprised reporters traveling with him regarding his seemingly open stance on gay Catholics. According to *The New York Times*, he told the press: "If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?" His remarks were heralded by several gay and lesbian groups as a welcoming gesture by the Roman Catholic Church.

Pope as Spiritual and World Leader

In September 2013, Pope Francis called for others to join him in praying for peace in Syria. The pontiff held a special vigil in St. Peter's Square on September 7, which was attended by an estimated 100,000 people. According to the Catholic News Service, Francis told the crowd that "When man thinks only of himself. . . [and] permits himself to be captivated by the idols of dominion and power. . . , [t]hen the door opens to violence, indifference, and conflict."

The pope implored those involved in the conflict to find a peaceful solution. "Leave behind the self-interest that hardens your heart, overcome the indifference that makes your heart insensitive towards others, conquer your deadly reasoning, and open yourself to dialogue and reconciliation."

Later that month, Pope Francis gave a revealing interview to an Italian Jesuit publication called *La Civiltà Cattolica*. He explained that religious dialogue must be broader in scope, not simply focused on such issues as homosexuality and abortion. "We have to find a new balance; otherwise, even the moral edifice of the church is likely to fall like a house of cards, losing the freshness and fragrance of the Gospel," the pope said. "The proposal of the Gospel must be more simple, profound, radiant. It is from this proposition that the moral consequences then flow."

While he does not believe women should be ordained as priests, Francis considers women an essential part of the church. "The feminine genius is needed wherever we make important decisions," he said. He also continued to present a more accepting attitude toward homosexuality than previous pontiffs, saying that "God in creation has set us free: it is not possible to interfere spiritually in the life of a person," according to *The Guardian*.

In early December 2013, Pope Francis gave an "apostolic exhortation," an address calling for big changes in the Catholic Church, including rethinking long-held but antiquated customs. "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," he stated. "I do not want a Church concerned with being at the center and then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures."

Also in December 2013, Pope Francis was named Person of the Year by *Time* magazine. Pope Francis—having joined the ranks of [Pope John Paul II](#) and Pope John XXIII, the only other popes to be awarded the title in 1994 and 1963, respectively—was a contender against other prominent figures of the year, including [Edward Snowden](#), Senator [Ted Cruz](#), Syrian President [Bashar al-Assad](#) and Edith Windsor. In the article, it was revealed that the deciding factor that led to Pope Francis landing at the top of the list, was his ability to alter the minds of so many people who had given up on the Catholic church in such a short period of time. The following March, it was announced that Pope Francis had been nominated for the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize. He did not receive this honor, but he continued to devote his time to reaching out to Catholics around the world. During that summer, Pope Francis went on his first visit to Asia. He spent five days in South Korea in August.

On his return trip from South Korea, Pope Francis discussed his own mortality with the press. "Two or three years and then I'll be off to my Father's house," he said, according to a report in *The Guardian*. He also suffered a personal loss around that same time after several members of his family were killed in a car accident in Argentina.

That fall, Pope Francis showed himself to be progressive on several scientific issues. He told the members of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences that he supported the Big Bang theory and evolution. According to *The Independent* newspaper, Pope Francis said that "The Big Bang, which today we hold to be the origin of the world, does not contradict the intervention of the divine creator but, rather, requires it." He also said that evolution "is not inconsistent with the notion of creation."

Throughout late 2014 and into 2015, Pope Francis continued his pattern of deep engagement with both political and environmental conflicts around the world. He spoke out against global abuses and the misuse of

political and economic power, lamenting the disappearances and suspected murders of 43 students in Mexico; the dangers and losses of life caused by immigration; financial mismanagement within the church itself; and sexual abuse. His decision to crack down on church corruption and excommunicate members of the Mafia were hailed by Catholics and non-Catholics alike, though they also caused him to receive death threats. He tackled other political blockades too, bringing together Presidents [Raul Castro](#), of Cuba, and President [Barack Obama](#), of the United States, in a historic meeting that precipitated significant foreign policy changes. Finally, his ambitious schedule of travel continued, with visits to Paraguay, Bolivia, and Ecuador, as have beatifications. To date, he has beatified more than three dozen people, including Óscar Romero, a priest from El Salvador who was assassinated in 1980 because of his espousal of liberation theology and his activism to protect marginalized people.

In September 2015, Pope Francis continued to stir up the status quo in the Catholic Church when he announced that priests around the world will be allowed to forgive the "sin of abortion" during a "year of mercy," which starts December 8, 2015 and ends November 20, 2016. The Pope wrote about this act of compassion in [a letter](#), stating: "I think in particular of all the women who have resorted to abortion. I am well aware of the pressure that has led them to this decision. I know that it is an existential and moral ordeal. I have met so many women who bear in their heart the scar of this agonizing and painful decision. What has happened is profoundly unjust; yet only understanding the truth of it can enable one not to lose hope."

He added: "The forgiveness of God cannot be denied to one who has repented, especially when that person approaches the Sacrament of Confession with a sincere heart in order to obtain reconciliation with the Father. For this reason too, I have decided, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, to concede to all priests for the Jubilee Year the discretion to absolve of the sin of abortion those who have procured it and who, with contrite heart, seek forgiveness for it."

Pope as Environmental Activist

In June 2015, Pope Francis spoke out about the environment. He released [a 184-page encyclical](#), a type of Papal message, warning of the dangers of climate change. In this letter, entitled "Laudato Si," Pope Francis wrote: "If present trends continue, this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us."

Pope Francis chided world leaders for failing to "reach truly meaningful and effective global agreements on the environment." He also called for "highly polluting fossil fuels" to be "progressively replaced without delay." And while improving and protecting the environment will be difficult, the situation is not hopeless, according to Pope Francis. "Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start." The encyclical was considered significant by environmentalists and church observers alike because it was not directed exclusively to Catholics, but to everyone in the world.