

A Joyful Journey with
POPE FRANCIS



EXPLORING TWELVE PIVOTAL DOCUMENTS



James H. Kroeger, MM

Praise for James Kroeger and *A Joyful Journey with* POPE FRANCIS

“These succinct popularizations introduce us to the engaging vision of Pope Francis in summary form.... Hopefully, as you peruse these materials, you will discover that they are ‘appetizers’ for the full writings of Pope Francis. May you also discover the vibrant ‘missionary spirit’ of Pope Francis: ‘Let us be realists, without losing our joy, our boldness, and our hope-filled commitment.’”

—CARDINAL LUIS ANTONIO TAGLE, PRO-PREFECT:
VATICAN DICASTERY OF EVANGELIZATION



“James Kroeger provides a wonderful avenue for ‘Catholics in the pews’ (and others) to access the inspiring thought and vision of Pope Francis. In his synthesis of twelve major documents, Kroeger has faithfully captured the main points and phrases in this shortened and accessible format. We thank him for opening up the treasures of Pope Francis for a broader audience.”

—ROGER SCHROEDER, SVD, CATHOLIC
THEOLOGICAL UNION, CHICAGO



“James Kroeger has compiled a treasure trove of deeply meaningful and timely reflections on twelve writings from Pope Francis. These prophetic documents speak to important issues of our day and challenge us to respond with love and action.”

—DIANE LAMPITT, M.ED., SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR,
CREATINGSOULSPACE.ORG

“A dozen pearls of wisdom for a dozen years of papal ministry! As Pope Francis compassionately continues guiding the People of God, this book recaps a dozen of his significant documents—an ideal way to again touch into his gifted wisdom and devoted fidelity. We have been privileged to be the recipients of a wealth of guidance—comfort and challenge—in Pope Francis’ many and diverse writings. What a treasure this short compilation is—giving us reminders, recaps, summaries, and digests—when we might not have the time to delve deeply into each document. With its Reflection Questions and Prayer Prompts, this book is ideal for personal prayer and reflection, small faith-sharing groups, retreats, and parish adult faith formation.”

—JANET SCHAEFFLER, OP, RETREAT/WORKSHOP
PRESENTER; AUTHOR



“Before starting a road trip, especially one of any substance or length, we usually consult a map to get a bird’s eye view of the starting point, destination, and points of interest along the way. Thus prepared, we travel with more confidence, anticipation, and orientation to our journey’s end.

In *A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis*, Fr. Kroeger has given us road maps for twelve of Francis’ most essential writings. These chapters are worthy and helpful companions for anyone who wants to engage with these groundbreaking exhortations and letters. If you have already read *Laudato Si* or *Amoris Laetitia*, these will help you organize and retain their teaching. If not, they will whet your appetite and encourage you to begin.”

—TOM GOOD, PASTORAL MUSICIAN AND RESIDENT OFFICER,
NATIONAL LABOR RELATION BOARD (RETIRED)

“*A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis* packs an abundance of wisdom, insight, and powerful quotes from Pope Francis. It brilliantly synthesizes the Pope’s deep and expansive thinking, as it clearly articulates the radical nature of the message of Christ and Francis’ pontificate. A big treasure in a small package.”

—GERARD THOMAS STRAUB, AUTHOR OF *READING THOMAS MERTON AND LONGING FOR GOD IN HAITI* (GERARDSTRAUB.COM)



“Twelve years ago, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, a largely unknown Jesuit and Argentinian archbishop became Pope Francis, the 266th pope in the Catholic Church. Francis immediately became known for his humility, compassion, simplicity of lifestyle, and concern for the environment, just like his namesake, Francis of Assisi, the mystical saint known for joy, love, and passion for creation. Pope Francis has already left a legacy of inspiring documents that articulate his unique vision of the critically needed gifts the Catholic tradition offers to this challenging moment of the 21st century.

Fr. James Kroeger, MM, has summarized in a clear and concise manner the twelve key documents of Francis pontificate, making these foundational insights that will shape Catholicism for decades easily accessible to anyone. Here is a great chance to wade more deeply into the heart and mind of the mystical pope who has energized the Church and challenged it to think of itself not as a museum of religious ideas, perspectives, and images, but a “field hospital” that is prepared to serve the world by alleviating suffering and bringing a Gospel Joy to a troubled human condition.

—MARK S. MARKULY, PH.D., DEAN EMERITUS OF THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY, SEATTLE UNIVERSITY

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Introduction

Popes have many titles, some classical, others popular. Of the classical appellations, Pope Francis would probably prefer “Servant of the servants of God.” From the wide range of popular titles, he might choose “pope of mercy.” He has incorporated this virtue into his papal motto: *miserando atque eligendo*, chosen through mercy. One constantly witnesses mercy through Francis’ many actions and documents. In fact, he has asserted that Jesus is “mercy made flesh,” born of the “Mother of Mercy” (MV 24).

Our merciful pope is now entering his twelfth year of guiding the People of God, having been elected on March 13, 2013. Recalling this milestone, this short booklet presents brief glimpses into twelve pivotal documents of the Francis pontificate. This writer is profoundly aware that no summaries can substitute for the rich depths of the full documents; these presentations are no more than enticements, appetizers, or inducements to savor Francis’ profound wisdom and insights.

A quick glance at the table of contents will reveal the twelve documents found in this booklet; they are listed along with the descriptive title of each of the twelve chapters. Readers will note that the numbers found in parentheses after a quoted section in the text refer to the paragraphs of the original documents written by Pope Francis; these references will enable an interested person to easily locate the original text.

A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis

It is the sincere desire of this author that readers will see these materials as a kind of “road-map” to find and explore the rich treasures found in the corpus of Pope Francis’ writings. Hopefully, it will prove to be a “joyful journey,” an “enriching discovery,” and a “rewarding pilgrimage”! Kindly note that at the end of each chapter there are “reflection questions” for personal or group use as well as a “prayer prompt” to initiate individual or shared prayer and commitment.

Finally, everyone will find Pope Francis to be a master teacher and a trustworthy guide, leading to a deeper “Christ-encounter.” Let us often recall Francis’ heartfelt exhortation: “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day” (EG 3).

CHAPTER 1

Walking in the Light of Faith

Lumen Fidei (LF), *The Light of Faith*, is Pope Francis' first encyclical. Francis admits that Pope Benedict XVI "had almost completed a first draft of an encyclical on faith" and for this initial work "I am deeply grateful to him." Here we have a unique treasure: profound reflections on faith from two popes!

As one reads, it becomes clear that Pope Benedict had the major input into this document. It harmonizes well with the vision Pope Benedict outlined in his proclamation of 2012 as a "year of faith," recalling the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

Brief Overview

The structure of *Lumen Fidei* is simple and direct, containing an introduction and four chapters; it concludes with Marian reflections. The Introduction shows how ancients viewed faith; it narrates how the Second Vatican Council, a "Council on faith" sought to bring faith into the contemporary world. Francis writes: "The Second Vatican Council enabled the light of faith to illumine our human experience from within, accompanying the men and women of our time on their journey" (6).

Faith Foundations

Chapter One shows that we believe in a God of mercy and how Christians can “see with the eyes of Jesus and share in his mind” (21). “Faith opens the way before us and accompanies our steps through time. Hence, if we want to understand what faith is, we need to follow the route it has taken, the path trodden by believers” (8). “Believing means entrusting oneself to a merciful love which always accepts and pardons” (13).

In Chapter Two Francis portrays the close link between faith and truth. He asserts: “Faith transforms the whole person precisely to the extent that he or she becomes open to love” (26). “Christian faith, inasmuch as it proclaims the truth of God’s total love and opens us to the power of that love, penetrates to the core of our human experience” (32).

Contemporary Faith

The importance of evangelization and the transmission of faith are central themes of Chapter Three. The communication of the gift of faith must be fostered in every age. “It is through an unbroken chain of witnesses that we come to see the face of Jesus” (38). Indeed, “the Church, like every family, passes on to her children the whole store of her memories” (40). For Francis, “the sacramental character of faith finds its highest expression in the Eucharist” (44).

Finally, in Chapter Four, Francis explains the link between faith and the common good. The Pope writes: “Precisely because it is linked to love (cf. Gal 5:6), the light of faith is concretely placed at the service of justice, law, and peace” (51). Faith enables us to share the gaze of Jesus and thus accompany the poor and suffering in our world.

Living the Faith

Pope Francis concludes his encyclical with some inspiring reflections on Mary's pilgrimage of faith (cf. 60). He prays: "Mother, help our faith! . . . Help us to entrust ourselves fully to him [Jesus] and to believe in his love, especially at times of trial, beneath the shadow of the cross, when our faith is called to mature."

The entire encyclical strikes a positive note as it unfolds how people through the centuries have lived their faith (e.g. Abraham, Moses, Saint Paul, Francis of Assisi, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and the Virgin Mary). Faith, indeed, is a special gift that we pray may be granted to us, making us living icons of faith to others in the contemporary world.

► REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Who has been a powerful "faith witness" in your life? How did this person concretely manifest his/her faith; give some specific examples.

► PRAYER PROMPT

Lord, help me to be a true "faith witness" by . . .

A Joyful Journey with **POPE FRANCIS**

Marking the twelfth anniversary of the beginning of Pope Francis's pontificate, this book presents a brief overview-synthesis of a dozen of his significant documents.

These materials are designed to attract readers to explore the profound insights of Pope Francis. As brief summaries, they seek to faithfully capture Francis's thought and lead to an understanding and appreciation of his wisdom.

In addition, "reflection questions" and "prayer prompts" are provided to foster personal integration. These materials may prove beneficial for pastoral reflection groups, catechetical sessions, personal prayer, or retreat meditations.

Come and profit from a joyful journey with our friend and mentor, Pope Francis!



James H. Kroeger, MM, a Maryknoll priest with a doctorate in missiology from Rome, has served mission in Asia (Philippines and Bangladesh) for more than five decades. He has published widely on the topics of Church, Mission, Inculturation, Interfaith Dialogue, and "Asian Theology."

