

As people around the world are coming to appreciate, Pope Francis has excellent pastoral instincts and skills. We can gain a better understanding of Francis as a pastor by examining two of his fundamental convictions: the Holy Spirit is at work in the whole Church and all its members; and Christ is the model for all pastoral ministry. Jorge Brogoglio gave an initial indication of his pastoral style when he was first introduced to the vast throng assembled in St. Peter's Square, and broke tradition by asking the people to do him the favor of praying for him. Dressed simply, he bowed his head as the huge crowd grew silent and prayed for the new pope. Witnessed by millions of people through live television and frequent replays, this powerful symbolic gesture revealed the pastoral heart of Pope Francis and set the tone for his ministry as Bishop of Rome. Since that initial iconic moment, Pope Francis has acted as a pastor who recognizes the presence of the Holy Spirit in the whole Church and appreciates the spiritual bonds he shares with the people he serves.

In the early years of the Jesus movement, there was a strong sense that all the baptized had special gifts of the Spirit that were to be used to build up the Body of Christ and serve the common good. The whole baptismal community, animated by the Spirit, was responsible for keeping alive the memory of Jesus and furthering his mission in the world. All the members shared in the royal priesthood of Christ. The pastoral leaders charged with overseeing the community were admonished "not to quench the Spirit" and not to lord it over the other members. Rather, they had the task of serving the community by encouraging and coordinating the spiritual gifts of all the members.

Some scholars see the history of ordained ministry in the Church as a gradual process of clericalization, which created a privileged caste in the Church by placing the diverse functions originally shared by all the baptized into the hands of the bishops and the clergy assisting them. After the time of Constantine (d. 337), senior clergy began to adopt imperial trappings and to assume more authority over other members of the Church. Theological developments in the Middle Ages laid the groundwork for viewing priests as "other Christs" and identifying the Church with the hierarchy.

Vatican II challenged this clericalization of the Church, in part, by retrieving the earlier emphasis on the Holy Spirit, "who dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful." After extensive debates and various revisions, the Council produced the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, which treated "The People of God" in chapter two before discussing "The Hierarchical Structure of the Church" in chapter three. This carefully chosen sequence, which starts with the assumption that the Spirit is active in all the members of the Church, set the fundamental framework for the conciliar teaching on pastoral ministry as service to the community. Through baptism all the faithful share in the priesthood of Christ and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They participate in the mission of the Church not by the delegation of the hierarchy, but by virtue of their baptism. All the baptized, animated by the Spirit, are called to holiness and are co-responsible for the wellbeing of the faith community. The task of the ordained leaders is to "discover with faith, recognize with joy, and foster with diligence the many charismatic gifts of the laity." A theology of the Holy Spirit grounds a collaborative style of church leadership that promotes dialogue and respects the instinctive gifts of the faithful. The Church is the whole people of God and cannot be identified with the pope and bishops. In these ways and others, Vatican II set the stage for a process of declericalization and a reform of pastoral ministry. Unfortunately, much of the thrust of this process was blunted by Pope John Paul II, who put his own personal stamp on pastoral ministry by virtue of his remarkable charismatic gifts, and by Pope Benedict, who encouraged "the reform of the reform" movement and seemed to delight in the trappings of the papal office.

And now we are blessed with Pope Francis, who has long embraced the declericalizing thrust of Vatican II and has, in a short period, rekindled hope that the pastoral spirit of the Council will prevail. His consistent efforts to disavow the privileges and trappings of high church office have become familiar to a broad audience within Church circles and beyond: living in a small apartment where he cooked his own meals and using public transportation while serving as cardinal-archbishop of Buenos Aires; now as pope living in the Vatican guest house instead of the papal palace and wearing simple papal garb and liturgical vestments.

It seems that the simple lifestyle of Francis is rooted in his deep spiritual convictions. This becomes clearer when we consider his daily prayer routine: praying the liturgy of the hours from the breviary in the morning; celebrating the Eucharist; saying the Rosary; spending an hour of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament; and finding brief moments for prayer throughout the day. The declericalized pastoral style consistently practiced by Francis seems even more inspiring when considered in the context of his spiritual regimen.

In tune with the pastoral thrust of Vatican II, Pope Francis has appropriated the conciliar image of the Church as the people of God. He speaks admiringly of the “holy, faithful people of God,” who are on a Spirit-inspired “journey through history, with joys and sorrows.” He highlights the conciliar teaching that “all the faithful, considered as a whole, are infallible in matters of belief.” Commenting on Mary of Nazareth, the pope insists: “If you want to know who she is you ask theologians; if you want to know how to love her you have to ask the people.” He is taken with the holiness of ordinary people who are raising children and earning a living, and has expressed admiration for his loving grandmother, Rosa, who “suffered so much” and still “always went forward with courage.” Francis, much like his great predecessor John XXIII, sees himself as a pastor who walks with the people of God on the journey of life, reminding them that the merciful and forgiving God accompanies every individual on the journey. When the newly elected Pope asked for prayers, he was giving expression to his deep pastoral conviction that he is in a Spirit-filled relationship with all the people he serves, a relationship that is enriched by mutual prayer and collaborative ministry.

The pastoral instincts of Pope Francis are not only animated by the Holy Spirit, but are also formed by the example of Jesus. In another richly symbolic and well-publicized event, the Pope celebrated Mass on Holy Thursday at a juvenile detention center on the outskirts of Rome. Recalling the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper, he washed and kissed the feet of 12 young people, including a Muslim girl. He told them this was a sign that “I am at your service,” adding that Jesus teaches us to “help one another.”

The pastoral sensitivities of the first Jesuit Pope are heavily influenced by the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola, who advocated imaginative meditation on the concrete life of the historical Jesus. Traditionally, Jesus is portrayed as priest, prophet, and king or shepherd. It is the shepherd image that has captured the imagination of Francis. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep and guides them, always ready to rescue the strays. The sheep recognize his voice and follow him. The Gospels portray Jesus as a community builder. At his baptism he identifies himself with the mission of John the Baptist to reform the community of Israel. Jesus chose the Twelve, drawn from different regions and factions within Judaism, to symbolize his desire to restore Israel as a genuine light to the nations. His healing miracles, cleansing the ostracized lepers, for example, proclaimed in action that no one is excluded from the reign of God. Jesus reached out to the outcasts. He went to the house of Zacchaeus, the despised chief tax collector, and shared a meal with him. He broke social taboos by engaging the Samaritan woman in deep spiritual conversation and by inviting women to accompany him on his missionary journeys. Jesus had special concern for the poor in his society, no doubt influenced by his own experience as a Galilean peasant burdened by Roman taxation.

In word and action, Jorge Brogoglio has consistently demonstrated throughout his priesthood that he has personally appropriated the pastoral style and message of Jesus. Francis has been critical of pastoral practices that obscure the primacy of the compassionate message of Christ. This happens when “pastoral ministry” is “obsessed with the transmission of a disjointed multitude of doctrines to be imposed insistently.” More specifically: “We cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage and the use of contraceptive methods.” “It is not necessary to talk about these issues all the time.” The moral teaching of the Church should be presented in the context of “the proclamation of the saving love of God,” otherwise, “the moral edifice of the Church is likely to fall like a house of cards, losing the freshness and fragrance of the Gospel.” Warning against preaching that is excessively moralistic, the pope admonishes preachers to proclaim and explain the central Gospel message of divine mercy before drawing moral consequences. He wants more homilies directed to the problem of poverty and less to sexual sins.

Echoing the advice of Pope Gregory the Great (d 604) in his very influential book *Pastoral Care*, Francis encourages pastors to follow the example of Christ the Good Shepherd and reach out to those in need of understanding, forgiveness and mercy. The pope has set a good example of this pastoral approach by his loving, non-judgmental attitude toward gay persons who are always embraced by God’s unconditional love and by his welcoming approach to single mothers who bring their babies for baptism. The people of God, according to Francis, do not want clergy who act like bureaucrats, but courageous pastors who “walk through the dark night with them,” without getting lost. Pastors must “accompany the flock that has a flair for finding new paths,” without leaving anyone behind. Pastoral ministry as envisioned and practiced by Francis has clear Christ-like characteristics, including loving service, inclusive compassion and ultimate hope.

The Church, with Francis as Bishop of Rome, is in an immensely fascinating, hope-filled phase of its post Vatican II history. The precise shape of future developments remains unclear. We do know, however, that we make the journey accompanied by a pope with pastoral instincts inspired by the Holy Spirit and formed by the practice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who washed the feet of his disciples and extended his loving embrace to all.

