

# **Priorities and Goals**

## **and the Seasonal Farm Workers Ministry**

John Paul II Pastoral Centre

4 November 2017

Dear brother priests; dear sisters and friends gathered here today:

### ***Introduction***

Before saying a few words about the Archdiocese's priorities and goals, I want to thank all of you for your ministry to the seasonal farm workers who are guests in the Lower Mainland. It is a great blessing not only to them but also to all the faithful of our local Church. Here, of course, my special gratitude to Father Richard Zanotti, the Scalabrinian family that collaborates in the ministry, the Teresian Carmelite Missionary Sisters and everyone who works so tirelessly to accompany the men who find themselves away from their homelands and families and are working here on a temporary basis.

### **I. In Communion with the Universal Church**

Yours is a beautiful ministry that finds itself right at the heart of what Pope Francis is calling the Church to do. The Gospel is a proclamation of joy for everyone and, in a special way, for the weakest and the marginalized. We are all called to assure them – whoever they are and wherever they find themselves – of our closeness and our solidarity. We do this because we want to follow the example of Jesus Christ who gave witness to the Father's special love for them. And this is exactly what you are doing.

Moreover, your ministry is right in line with the direction set by Pope Francis for the life of the universal Church. Let me emphasize three things: the Pope's personal simplicity and his love for the poor; his desire that the Church move outside her comfortable zone and realize her mission as a field hospital for the world's wounded; and, third, the particular attention he gives to refugees, migrants, temporary workers, and other displaced persons.

I believe that in each of these you can situate our ministry and see how it conforms to what the Pope is calling us to in our ministry.

### ***1. Call to Simplicity and Love for the Poor***

It is evident in how he has chosen to live – in the residence of Santa Marta and not the Apostolic Palace; in his choice of a Ford Focus instead of a Mercedes – that the Pope sees simplicity of life as key to all ministry, beginning so to speak at the top. To serve others is not to do so from the position of someone who “gives” to another as a superior to an inferior in a kind of patriarchalism but to accompany others on a level playing field, where giving and receiving exist on the same plane.

Not surprisingly, this simplicity leads the Holy Father to put Jesus Christ and the Gospel before anything else in his life and teaching. Like his namesake from Assisi<sup>1</sup> the Pope shares the vision of “a simple

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<sup>1</sup> Leonardo Boff thinks that the choice of the name “Francis” was not just a *nomen* but an omen: “Francis is more than a name – it’s a plan” (Paul Vallely, *Pope Francis:*

radical return to the real Gospel lived and preached by Jesus,” and of a desire “to restore in the world the way and style of life of Jesus and of the Apostles described in the Gospels.”<sup>2</sup>

Francis of Assisi came to the poor out of love for Christ. The profound motive for his conversion from worldliness was not of a social nature – to change society, but evangelical – to follow Christ.<sup>3</sup> The key text of his conversion was “Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 16:25). For St. Francis, following Jesus’ word, the choice was between living for oneself, for one’s own comfort, glory and advancement or living for Christ and his Kingdom.

Likewise, for this Pope, poverty is not merely a matter of economics; it is theological: “Poverty for us Christians is not a sociological, philosophical or cultural category, no. It is theological. I might say this is the first category, because our God, the Son of God,

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*Untying the Knots* [New York: Bloomsbury, 2013], 198).

<sup>2</sup> Raniero Cantalamessa, *Saint Francis of Assisi and the Reform of the Church by Way of Holiness*, Meditations for Advent for the Papal Household (December 2013), Manuscript, 7; cf. George Weigel, “Franciscan Churchmanship,” *First Things* (January 2017), 47.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Raniero Cantalamessa, *Saint Francis of Assisi and the Reform of the Church by Way of Holiness*, Meditations for Advent for the Papal Household (December 2013), Manuscript, 2-3.

abased himself, he made himself poor to walk along the road with us.”<sup>4</sup>  
If the Son of God could strip himself of the prerogatives of the Divinity to undertake our salvation by becoming man and dying on the Cross, who are we not to do likewise?

The Church must be poor in imitation of her Founder. By making himself poor, Jesus did not seek poverty for its own sake but, as Saint Paul says, “that by his poverty you might become rich” (cf. 2 Cor 8:9). It is by the path of poverty that the Church enters into God’s logic, which is the logic of the Incarnation and the Cross.

The wealth of God’s grace does not pass through our wealth, the Pope affirms, “but invariably and exclusively through our personal and communal poverty, enlivened by the Spirit of Christ.”<sup>5</sup> A poor Church, therefore, does not depend on worldly power or prestige, let alone material wealth, but on the utter gratuity of the One who took the form of a slave (cf. Phil 2:7): she is a poor Church, for she has “no riches other than her Spouse.”<sup>6</sup>

For Francis, moreover, the Church is not only to be poor herself but also to be “for the poor.” She is being called to make an option for

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<sup>4</sup> Francis, Address to the Ecclesial Movements, Vigil of Pentecost (18 May 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Francis, Lenten Message 2014 (26 December 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Francis, Morning Meditation (24 November 2014).

the poor of this world:

I have said that the poor are at the heart of the Gospel; they are present there from beginning to end. In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus made this clear at the outset of his ministry. And when in Matthew 25 he speaks of the latter days, and reveals the criterion by which we will all be judged, there too we find the poor.<sup>7</sup>

They have much to teach us, because they know in their flesh the suffering Christ. “We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them.”<sup>8</sup>

The Church “is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society.”<sup>9</sup> Thus she must work to eliminate the structural causes of poverty, to promote the integral development of the poor, to meet their immediate needs by daily acts of solidarity, as well as to foster their

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<sup>7</sup> Francis, Address to the Bishops of Korea (14 August 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 198.

<sup>9</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 187.

spiritual development and evangelization.<sup>10</sup>

## ***2. Church as Missionary***

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he speaks eloquently of a Church “which goes forth.” He describes it in this way:

The Church which “goes forth” is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice. An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast.<sup>11</sup>

Bringing the Church “nearer to people”<sup>12</sup> is on Francis’s mind. Speaking of the parish, for example, he warns that it must “not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed cluster made up of a chosen few.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 188, 192.

<sup>11</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24.

<sup>12</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 28.

<sup>13</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 28.

Perhaps the most original of Pope Francis' images of how he views the Church is that of the "field hospital":

I see clearly that the thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds. . . . And you have to start from the ground up.<sup>14</sup>

The physician, the Church, on the field of battle is to treat major wounds and to try desperately to stop the bleeding. That's what you are doing in your ministry. You bring to others the consolation of knowing they are loved by God, and have "the chance to live life on a higher plane."<sup>15</sup>

### ***3. Pope's Concern for Temporary Migrants***

Through his visits, such as to Lampedusa, his endless talks, and his Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Pope Francis keeps before our eyes that we can never forget those who come to us from other countries, no matter the reason why they come or for how

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<sup>14</sup> Francis, Interview with Spadaro.

<sup>15</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 10.

long they stay.

Throughout the first years of my pontificate, I have repeatedly expressed my particular concern for the lamentable situation of many migrants and refugees fleeing from war, persecution, natural disasters and poverty. This situation is undoubtedly a “sign of the times” which I have tried to interpret, with the help of the Holy Spirit, ever since my visit to Lampedusa on 8 July 2013. When I instituted the new Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, I wanted a particular section – under my personal direction for the time being – to express the Church’s concern for migrants, displaced people, refugees and victims of human trafficking. Every stranger who knocks at our door is an opportunity for an encounter with Jesus Christ, who identifies with the welcomed and rejected strangers of every age (Matthew 25:35-43). The Lord entrusts to the Church’s motherly love every person forced to leave their homeland in search of a better future. This solidarity must be concretely expressed at every stage of the migratory experience – from departure through journey to arrival and return. This is a great responsibility, which the Church intends to share with all believers and men and women of good will, who are called to

respond to the many challenges of contemporary migration with generosity, promptness, wisdom and foresight, each according to their own abilities.<sup>16</sup>

## **II. Archdiocesan Goals and Priorities**

I wish to share with you now some of the ways – by no means all! – in which in the coming years we will be working together more intentionally to help people experience God’s merciful love.

We can call these our “priorities,” for they focus our efforts and our mission. They were developed last year after widespread consultation.

I am grateful for the way in which you are carrying out this priorities which, I hope, are in line with the Pope’s.

In talking about priorities we want to avoid the temptation to think “that with perfect planning things will fall into place, he becomes an accountant or an office manager. Things need to be prepared well, but without ever falling into the temptation of trying to contain and direct the freedom of the Holy Spirit, which is always greater and more flexible than any human planning (cf. Jn 3:8).”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Francis, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees (14 January 2018).

<sup>17</sup> Francis, Address to the Roman Curia (22 December 2014).

## ***1. Make Every Sunday Matter***

First of all, for most Catholics Mass – and for those who are ablew, Sunday Mass, is their principal point of contact with the Church. After much discussion, we have decided – and many, many people had a hand in reaching this conclusion – that we must strive “to make every Sunday matter.”

What does this mean? First of all, it means that the Eucharistic celebration must be reverent and beautiful, but also that those of us who preach must strive to:

- be relevant to our parishioners’ daily lives
- focus on proclaiming the core of the Gospel message

It also means that we need to pay more attention to the quality of music. Thank you for engaging both yourselves and the farm workers in providing music for the liturgies you celebrate in the churches or other places of gathering.

Here I wish to express my gratitude for the many, many ways in which you help the men come to worship. You pick them up on the farms, bring them to Mass, provide opportunities for Confession and provide a festive atmosphere, often accompanied by your delicious meals!

Secondly, as a goal, we need to find practical and concrete ways of being more welcoming communities.

From the booklets you prepare – and they are beautiful! – you do this extraordinarily well. Bravo y gracias! You are setting the bar for the rest of us.

## ***2. Get Closer to Jesus***

Our second priority focuses on ways of helping the faithful to come to a direct and personal knowledge of Jesus or to foster deeper discipleship with him. We all need to be evangelized – and constantly. It's a never-ending journey until death.

The Pope speaks constantly of the need for this personal relationship with the Lord, and constantly invites us to encounter Jesus in a warm, personal and intimate encounter.

I note in your ministry great steps in this regard for which you are to be especially commended. Not only do you encourage devotional practices such as the Rosary but you are also providing a wonderful means of helping the workers know and experience the love of Jesus Christ.

Translating the Faith Studies developed by CCO into Spanish, and sponsoring the small group discussions which are aimed at primary evangelization are a great blessing to the workers. And to us! I encourage you to continue to expand this dimension of your ministry as much as possible. It will bear lasting fruit!

### ***3. Strengthen Marriages and Families***

The Synod of Bishops which met two years and the apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis on the family published last year are timely reminders of our need to find more effective ways to strengthen marriages and families.

Although you cannot offer marriage preparation or parenting programs, your counsel, your accompaniment, your encouraging with those separated from their spouses, children and families are making a real contribution to strengthening marriage and family.

Yours is a special ministry in this regard, and I urge you to continue your pastoral accompaniment of the workers. Thank you for lending your heart and your ear to those who inevitably encounter all the difficulties and temptations entailed by separation.

### ***4. Develop Parish Leadership and Support***

The last Archdiocesan priority we are working on is this: developing leadership and support in our parishes.

Parishes are most likely to thrive and experience renewal when pastors are enabled to delegate significant leadership, as well as apostolic and administrative functions to an evangelized, well-formed and talented team of parishioners.

I believe that the season farm workers ministry is exemplary in this regard. It draws people together from many parishes. And those who

minister, in collaboration with the pastors and priests, show what it means for the lay faithful to be co-responsible for the life and ministry of their parish and its outreach.

### ***Conclusion***

I have enumerated for you the principal Archdiocesan priorities that have been identified as areas we are working on together for the next few years to advance the Church's great mission of evangelizing, of bringing the love of Jesus Christ to the world.

What you are doing in your ministry certainly inspires me. It is situated within the Holy Father's emphasis on serving the marginalized and those "on the peripheries," specifically those who are seasonal farm workers, and you are also working to fulfill the priorities and goals which the whole Archdiocese is focusing on.

Thank you once again for living the command to welcome the stranger as you welcome Jesus Christ. Keep up and strengthen your ministry. And may God bless you!

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver