



## Pope Francis: Six New Beatitudes for the Church in the Modern World

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Today I would like to talk about the beatitudes – not the beatitudes Jesus declared in his Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5), calling us to be meek, humble, gentle, merciful, poor in spirit, pure of heart, peacemakers and sufferers for justice sake - all of those things that those in the world around us consider to be utter foolishness but which Jesus reveals to be the way, the Truth and the Life– but about of the additional beatitudes recently set forth by Our Holy Father Pope Francis; beatitudes specifically crafted to enable us to meet the demands of our Modern World.

I would note that these new beatitudes are not the only traditional devotions Pope Francis has shown the willingness to reinterpret and update. For example, Francis proposed adding care of the environment to the 14 corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

Some may balk at his boldness in tinkering with long established prayers and devotions but Pope Francis believes firmly that the unchanging Christian message must resonate with contemporary realities and sensibilities, and when the Gospels were written, many of the challenges and crises we presently face were not in the realm of peoples knowledge, experience or vision.

Today, then, I would like to call your attention to these additional beatitudes Francis has proposed and how reflecting upon and implementing them may enrich your own spiritual life and contribute to the betterment of other people and to the whole of creation.

Each new beatitude Pope Francis offers, addresses a specific example of a person serving as a messenger of God in our day:

“First, Blessed are those who remain faithful while enduring evils inflicted on them by others and forgive them from their heart.

Second, Blessed are those who look into the eyes of the abandoned and marginalized and show them their closeness. Third, Blessed are those who see God in

every person and strive to make others also discover him. Fourth, Blessed are those who protect and care for our common home, the Earth. Fifth, Blessed are those who renounce their own comfort in order to help others. Sixth, Blessed are those who pray and work for full communion between Christians.”

These updated beatitudes remind us that the Gospel is not a static rule book to be read and followed, but a way of proceeding that must be lived in the context of the modern world.

Let me, then, offer a few comments on these additional beatitudes proposed by Pope Francis and then invite your own comments.

Blessed are those who remain faithful while enduring evils inflicted upon them by others and forgive them from their hearts. Today we are living in a much more coarse and uncivilized age. The presidential primaries and election campaign of the past few years reveal there is a lot of hurt, anger and heartbreak plaguing many Americans.

Working class whites are worried about unemployment, growing income inequality and have less hope that tomorrow will be better for their children. Blacks Latinos and other minorities are suffering from the pernicious and persistent effects of racism and xenophobia which remain pervasive, despite laws outlawing discrimination in housing, education and employment. In light of the proposed travel ban many Muslims feel that the First Amendment guaranteeing religious freedom may no longer apply to them. Many college graduates are coping with burdensome, and indeed, crushing student loan debt. Refugees and migrants are afraid that the doors to a better way of life in our land of promise and opportunity may be closed to them, while the undocumented already among us live with the anxiety that any day they might be apprehended, detained and deported – separated perhaps forever from other family members and friends. And we all live with the omnipresent threat of random terrorism

and the fallout from climate change.

In my memory of 78 years, never, I believe, has our nation's morale been so low, its apprehension so great and its uncertainty about the future so prevalent. Although I must admit I was born in 1938, just after the depth of the Great Depression and was too young to fully appreciate the tragedy which befell so many individuals and families during the Second World War.

There are the personal hurts emerging from domestic violence, addiction to drugs and alcohol, family dysfunction, separation and divorce, unjust treatment in the workplace, being ignored or neglected by family and friends, etc.

We have all experienced one or more of these harsh realities and the pain and suffering they create. Quite frankly, it is difficult to forgive those who have inflicted such hurt. Why, after all the love and affection we have lavished on family, friends and co-workers do they sometimes betray us, abandon us or stab us in the back, so to speak?

Yet, as the Scriptures, saints, theologians and spiritual directors have taught us down through the course of the centuries – forgiveness is the most difficult and sublime of all the virtues. On the cross, in the face of extreme betrayal and humiliation, Jesus beseeched God saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." So many of the Christian martyrs confounded their slayers by praying for them and forgiving them. Then there is Peter reconciling with Paul; Monica repeatedly forgiving her wayward son, Augustine, keeping the door open for his eventual conversion, when he became one of the greatest bishops and theologians in the history of the Church.

Let me cite an iconic expression of forgiveness: Stephen McDonald who was shot 30 years ago in his capacity as a New York police officer

While on patrol July 12, 1986, McDonald came upon three teenagers in Central Park and stopped to frisk them because he thought one of them had a weapon in his sock. Indeed, one of the youths, 15 year old Shavod Jones, pulled out a weapon and shot McDonald, leaving him for dead as the trio fled.

Three bullets struck McDonald, including one that pierced his spinal cord leaving him permanently paralyzed.

Doctors initially told McDonald's wife, Patti, who was three months pregnant with the couple's son, that the officer would not survive. However, McDonald pulled through.

At the baptism of the son, Conor, on March 4, 1987, McDonald asked his wife to read a statement about his feeling toward the shooter, saying, "I forgive him and hope he can find purpose in his life."

McDonald remained on the police department payroll after being shot and later was named a detective.

McDonald often discussed his Catholic faith and the reason he forgave the teenage shooter, explaining that he believed what happened to him was God's will and that he was meant to become a messenger for God's message of peace, forgiveness and reconciliation in the world.

Cardinal Timothy Dolan, of New York, called McDonald, "a prophet of the pro life cause."

"He showed us", the cardinal said, "that the value of life doesn't depend on physical ability, but on one's heart and soul both of which he had in abundance."

For years after the shooting McDonald drew widespread attention and media coverage. He met with Pope St. John Paul II in 1995 and with South African anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela. Although he was able to breathe only with the help of a respirator, McDonald crossed the country speaking at schools and other venues about the importance of forgiveness and peace. He also became an advocate for peace in troubled lands, visiting Northern Ireland, Israel and Bosnia to take his message to communities in conflict.

The list could go on and on. Each of you know of personal examples of forgiveness among family, colleagues and co-workers. But how about you? What seething anger do you harbor against someone who has hurt you? What indifference do you show toward another who has caused you pain? What resistance do you display toward someone who wishes to say, "I'm sorry, I apologize, I was wrong?" Or what hesitancy do you have to express the same contrition to someone you have injured by thought, word or deed?

"Master, how often must I forgive someone who has offended me – 7 times?" To which Jesus responds, "I say to you, not 7 times but 70 times 7." In other words, our openness to forgiveness must be infinite.

How we forgive rather than hate those who offend us was brought home to me and others very powerfully by Antoine Leiris whose wife was killed last year when gun wielding ISIS militants invaded a Paris concert she was attending.

The next day in a blog which went viral he left a

message for the terrorists.

He wrote "On Friday night you took the love of my life, the mother of my son... if the God for whom you blindly kill, really made us in His image, then each bullet in my wife's body is a wound to God's heart."

Leiris wrote further, "I will not give you the gift of hate, even though that is what you were hoping for. Responding to hatred with anger would be to fall into the same ignorance that made you the people you are."

"Of course I am devastated by grief, I will concede you that small victory, but that will not last long."

Leiris ended on a note of optimism: "Now it is just the two of us, my 17 month old son and I, but we are stronger than all the armies in the world. In fact I do not have any more time to waste on you. I need to go to get my son who is waking up from his nap. He will have his afternoon tea as always and, then, we will go play as always. And by being happy and free, this little boy's entire life will be an affront to you for he will not hate you either." What a wonderful affirmation of the triumph of love over hatred, of peace over terror, of forgiveness over revenge.

Second, Pope Francis exhorts, "Blessed are those who look into the eyes of the abandoned and marginalized and show them closeness."

I would suggest this beatitude was captured graphically in a shocking picture that appeared in many European newspapers not too long ago. It showed a young couple sunbathing on a sandy beach. At first sight, it appears like any other summer holiday snapshot. Then you notice a dark shape in the sand beyond the couple. It is the body of an African migrant. He has drowned trying to cross to Europe, like many others, desperately seeking to provide a better life for his family.

The couple in the photo seem unconcerned about the body. Whether they were aware of the dead African we can't say for sure. But the image remains a powerful symbol of our ability to carry on enjoying the good life while our brothers and sisters die by the thousands every day as a result of poverty and inequality.

Unfortunately, often it is major natural disasters or humanitarian crises that grab the headlines, but the daily reality of global injustice is not news.

For example, most donations to international development and relief organizations are made in

response to emergency appeals, even though far more people die from the effects of extreme poverty than from natural disasters and quick onset emergencies.

For example, two hundred and thirty thousand people died as a result of the Asian tsunami that struck Japan in December 2004. A record sum of more than \$7 billion was donated by the general public to this appeal, and yet the same number of people die every five days from the effects of extreme poverty.

That is the scale of the problem. According to UN estimates, around 18 million people die every year from hunger and preventable diseases related to poverty.

Such statistics paint a bleak picture of humanity's suffering. But statistics don't show the full picture. They don't reveal the resilience of the human spirit. They don't reveal that in the midst of such suffering, there is hope.

That hope comes from international assistance and development programs which involve the people affected, and which promote transparency and less bureaucratic overhead. However, a major problem in any effort to increase development aid is overcoming that pernicious perception that it just does not work.

Too often we hear the complaint that billions of dollars have been given in overseas aid during the last 50 years and all to no effect.

Poor governance and corruption in developing countries is often blamed for the failure of development aid to eradicate poverty. But this is far too simplistic an argument. We need to question the actions of donor governments who have supported corrupt dictatorships when it has suited them and of companies that have encouraged corrupt practices to further their business interests in developing countries.

Further, we need to examine closely how our aid has been delivered and learn from our mistakes. Have we directed our aid to where it can be most effective and, more important, to where it is most needed? Or are we primarily supporting our own national self-interests?

Has our aid been undermined by too many conditions that have meant developing countries have not been able to manage their own development programs?

As Catholics, our preferential option for the poor demands that we call on our governments to target the poorest, particularly those who are sidelined from the economic growth associated with globalization.

Further, the principle of subsidiarity found in church social teaching such as Pope Benedict's encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, means that we call for aid delivery that is a true partnership between donor and recipient governments, in which the recipients take a role in the leadership of the development process.

It is also important for us to highlight success stories. It is not all bad news, and there are some good examples of real progress that is being made in lifting people out of poverty.

By way of illustration, in 1990, more than 1.2 billion people – 28 percent of the developing world's population – lived in extreme poverty. However, by 2002 that proportion had decreased to 19 percent. During that period, rates of extreme poverty fell rapidly in much of Asia, where the number of people living on less than \$1 a day dropped by nearly a quarter of a billion.

Hence, the new question needing to be asked, of the economy, specifically, and of political arrangements generally, is about the dispositions necessary for a healthy society, one in which everybody flourishes. Some call this the search for a "human ecology". That the human ecology is in crisis, that runaway capitalism has taken off with the loot, and that humanity's lease on the planet is in real difficulty is indisputable.

However, to appreciate this need for a renewed human ecology, the need to find common ground, we must recall what Pope Benedict points out in *Caritas in Veritate*: namely, the graciousness of God; that God has created not a world of scarcity but of abundance. Benedict says that love leavens the very architecture of creation; that creation is a realm of grace, freedom and flourishing and that humanity is made in the image and likeness of our infinitely loving God.

To reap the fruits of God's abundance, however, we must seek common ground with others in our diverse cultures and communities, explore the many ways in which we humans experience and respond to the transcendent mystery which is at the core of our being and discover within this plurality of meanings a vision of the common good to which we can all assent.

To sum up, let me return to the image I mentioned a few minutes ago: the image of the couple sunbathing, while the poor migrant was dying. Global poverty is a fact of life which can and must be eradicated. We simply cannot continue to sunbathe while the poor are dying.

Recently another startling image appeared in the media. It was the picture of a huge fishing net being

towed behind a trawler. But on closer inspection, it revealed a chilling reality: Around the edge of the net, 27 migrants were clinging on for their lives.

They had been abandoned by people traffickers in a small wooden boat that soon began to sink. But the captain of the trawler refused to take them on board, fearing that a change in course would jeopardize his valuable catch of tuna. So they clung to the net, ignored by the captain, until rescued by the Italian navy.

This picture is a powerful metaphor for our world: the poorest people clinging precariously to life as we steam blindly on in pursuit of greater wealth.

We need to stop this ship. We need to get the world's poor on board now. And then, together, as one humanity, we need to set a new course for a better future.

We can do this by becoming more socially aware and socially involved. Perhaps the greatest contribution of Pope Benedict's last encyclical *Charity in Truth* is to combat the polarity which has existed in the Church for a long time.

Some Catholics have drawn a clear line between the Church's promotion of religion and its concern for poverty and social justice. The former is known as "evangelization", the spreading of the Gospel. The latter social justice is considered an adjunct – optional, even marginal, to the Church's main business – and should not be allowed to get in the way of it.

The ironic description, "the Church's best kept secret", often applied to Catholic social teaching, conveys how tangential some have thought this teaching to be. Thus, in general, according to this view, the Church should "stay out of politics", and concern itself with the salvation of souls. Its proper business is not advocating a decent minimum wage but proclaiming the Good News.

If, however, our Catholic Christian vision and philosophy of life, especially as it pertains to the poor, is to be translated into reality, then, it is imperative that all the members of our Church become aware of the issues confronting our society and world, be educated on these issues filtered through the lens of Catholic Social Teaching and be willing to let our elected officials know of our support of or opposition to particular public-policy concerns. And the more credible our witness becomes in this regard, then, I believe, the more attractive our ministry of Word and sacrament will be.

Finally, in this regarding this beatitude, I would note

that in seeking to find common ground and solidarity with others, especially the poor, we need not go to faraway places to be effective. As Mother Teresa said to those who wanted to help her, but complained India was too distant: "Find your own Calcutta."

Her words made me think of Blind Alfred Reed, a Methodist minister from West Virginia and old-time folk fiddler who died 60 years ago. Blind Alfred wrote a remarkable song entitled, "Always Lift Him Up." Its many verses counsel unflinching kindness for the most unloved and unlovable among us.

If he has no friends and everything's against him/If he's failed at everything that he has tried/Try to lift his load and help to bear his burden/Let him know that you are walking by his side.

If he feels that all is lost and he is falling/Try to place that poor man's feet on solid ground/Just remember he's some mother's precious darling/Always lift him up and never knock him down.

That's a message for our times. Lift up those in the Fight for \$15, the unemployed, those fighting racial hatred and discrimination, those who are marginalized poor and weak, especially the undocumented, immigrants and refugees.. This may be the most heartening development in a dismal year — the evidence all around us is that we know how to do this, and can indeed summon the will to stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in need..

A decade ago, the renowned behavioral scientist Robert Putnam authored a book entitled, *Bowling Alone* in which he pointed out that while more Americans bowl today, than ever before fewer participate in bowling leagues. This phenomenon was presented by Dr. Putnam as an evidence of the decline in the sense of community within our nation.

There used to be a time in this country of ours when a sense of community did not need to be fostered. It was part of a lifestyle that was at once warm, loving and mutually stimulating.

If problems arose in local communities people would get together and resolve them themselves. Family members, neighbors, friends, coworkers and members of one's faith community would band together, pull together and respond to human need.

However, within the past half century or so, with the rise of big government and big business, with their emphasis on centralization, specialization and top down decision making, so often human persons and human values have become lost in a maze of computer cards and number systems to the extent

that there are literally millions of our fellow Americans today who live side by side without knowing one another's name or without caring about what is happening on the other side of the street.

Let's face it, the successful person within our nation today, supposedly, is the one who can wall himself or herself off from the rest of human kind. The one who can protect himself or herself to a greater degree from the invasions and problems of others. The one with the greater acreage around his or her home. The one that belongs to the more exclusive club, etc. etc.

The bitter fruits of this self-centered approach to the so called "Good Life" is far too evident for all to behold. For in our society of affluence and resources unparalleled in the history of humankind, we have allowed apathy, indifference and social alienation to breed society of rat infested ghettos and pill sustained suburbs and to create a generation gap that threatens to tear our nation asunder.

Crime, juvenile delinquency, family breakdown and addiction to alcohol and drugs have risen astronomically just within the past decade. The response to the needs of our nation's growing aging population has been woefully inadequate. Nearly one third of our nation's people, that is, 47 million men, women and children are living in poverty. Why? Because, I believe, we have lost or perhaps never found that sense of caring and sharing which should be at the heart of the sense of community.

This mission to people in need in our diocese, nationally and globally is so important because in both the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament there is one category of persons which has a special claim upon our stewardship: the poor. That the Good News is proclaimed to the poor and that the need of the orphan, widow and stranger are met have always been presented in the Scriptures as an infallible sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God among us.

In other words, the way we take into account the poor among us and the way they fit into our plan of life tell us a great deal about ourselves and our own state of spiritual health. For unless we address ourselves seriously to the needs of our hurting brothers and sisters at home and abroad we run the risk of losing that which we already have, namely, the right to be Sons and Daughters of thy Kingdom founded by our father in heaven. If, therefore, we truly believe in God's kingdom and if we are seeking to advance God's kingdom in our day, then the poor must rank very high in our values and priority system. Otherwise we are deluding ourselves and it is not God's kingdom we are

advancing but our own.

That is why as people of faith we need a preferential option for the poor. We must recognize that a wound in one is a hurt in each; that as long as one child falls asleep hungry at night, my stomach hurts; that as long as an elderly person can't afford heat or fears tomorrow, there is a chill in my bones; that as long as one person is treated with a lack of dignity, I am ashamed. Because if one person is oppressed, manipulated or disregarded, it is not someone who is debased, but all of us are. For this is the nature of the interdependence we have upon one another as members of the human family.

Yes, it is a biblical fact that the face of the poor is the face of the Lord and to the extent we cut the poor out of our lives, to that extent do we shut ourselves off from the channel of God's love and grace. On the other hand, to the extent that we reach out to those in need both at home and abroad, to that extent do we prepare ourselves for a union with our eternal God.

"Blessed are those who renounce their own comfort in order to help others" is a third beatitude that Pope Francis offers for the contemporary disciple of Jesus. I can think of no one who better epitomizes this beatitude than Francis himself. Since becoming Pope he has ceaselessly looked for ways to bring about what he calls "the conversion of the papacy." He began on the night of his election in the Sistine Chapel's "room of tears" by refusing to accept the ermine trimmed red velvet mozzetta, gold pectoral cross and red shoes prepared for the new pope, opting instead to keep his simple silver cross and well worn black shoes.

This came as a surprise to many, starting with the cardinals who had just selected him. They did not know that as Bishop of Argentina he dressed as a simple priest wearing a black suit but never the gold chain and cross under the jacket (with the former visible and the latter hidden), as many prelates do to show their rank. When John Paul II named him a cardinal, Francis did not buy new robes; instead he asked to have his predecessor's garments refitted for himself.

Soon after his election as Pope he announced his decision not to live in the Apostolic Palace as his predecessors have done since the 17th Century, but to remain at the small hotel inside the Vatican, the Casa Santa Marta, where he lives in three rooms: a living room, a small study and a tiny bedroom. (Hopefully, there is a bathroom as well.)

His decision shocked many in the Vatican but not those who knew that he had done likewise in Buenos Aires, where there was a large official residence for the Archbishop, near that of the country's president. As Archbishop, however, Jorge Bergoglio, never lived there, not even for one day. Instead, he lived in the diocesan pastoral center curia near the cathedral, in a small study and bedroom.

Likewise, Francis has not spent a single night in the papal summer residence at Castel Gandolfo, several miles outside Rome, where most of his predecessors since Clement VIII, (1592-1605) who bought the property, had taken refuge from the Roman heat in the summer months. "The poor do not live in palaces", Francis told a person close to him during his first summer in Rome. Last October the Vatican announced Francis' decision to open his summer residence to the public, who can now visit it year round.

"The riches of the Church are meant for the service of the poor", Francis has stated several times. He wants those involved in administering the local Church and Vatican finances to bear this in mind and not to misuse or waste them. In Rome, he has given a broad mandate to the papal almoner, the Polish Archbishop Konrad Krajewski, to use Vatican resources for the poor. This has led to showers for the homeless, a food pantry to serve them, and a barber to shave them or to cut their hair to be set up in the Colonnades of St. Peter's Piazza.

For his 80th birthday party last December, he invited the homeless to dine with him. Further, he has asked religious orders to review their use of the properties they own. In all this, Francis is challenging church leaders in a major way.

There are so many other actions Pope Francis has taken which indicates that he is willing to sacrifice his own comfort for helping others and bringing about change in the church. For example, his first visit outside the Vatican following his installation as Pope was on Holy Thursday to visit a Roman jail, where, in accordance with the liturgical ritual of the day, he washed the feet of the inmates, including women and Muslims.

His first trip outside Rome was to the small island of Lampedusa, off the coast of Italy, which houses refugees and migrants fleeing terrorism and hunger in Africa and the Mideast. In a similar way two summers ago he visited the Greek island of Lesbos, housing refugees from Syria. As an example to other nations, he returned to the Vatican with 12 refugees,

including some Muslims.

In his reform of the Curia and in his various encyclicals he has sought to address the needs of those who have been left out. For example, Pope Francis, has appointed a commission to study the history of women deacons and whether it may be appropriate to ordain women for the church in our present day. He has also established a new office for Laity, Family and Human Development, headed by the American Cardinal Kevin Farrell, in which he has called for new leadership roles for women both in the Vatican and at the diocesan and pastoral levels.

. In his apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, in response to the two year Synod on Marriage and the Family, Francis opened the doors for a pastoral response to the separated and divorced who long to receive the eucharist.

Pope Francis has also repeatedly challenged clericalism in the church and has outlined its diseases.

1. The disease of thinking we are “immortal,” “immune” or downright “indispensable,” neglecting the need for regular checkups. It is the disease of the rich fool in the Gospel who thought he would live forever but also of those who turn into lords and masters and think of themselves as above others and not at their service. It is often an effect of the pathology of power, from a superiority complex, from a narcissism that passionately gazes at its own image and does not see the image of God on the face of others.
2. Another disease is the “Martha complex,” that is excessive busy-ness. It is found in those who immerse themselves in work and inevitably neglect “the better part”: sitting at the feet of Jesus.
3. The disease of excessive planning and of functionalism – which believes that with perfect planning things will fall into place.
4. There is also “spiritual Alzheimer’s disease.” It consists in losing the memory of our personal “salvation history,” our past history with God and our “first love”. We see it in those who have lost the memory of their encounter with the Lord; in those who build walls and routines around themselves and, thus, become more and more the slaves of idols carved by their own hands.
5. The disease of rivalry and vainglory.
6. The disease of indifference to others. This is where each individual thinks only of himself or herself and loses the sincerity and warmth of

human relationships.

7. The disease of hoarding – accumulating material goods, not out of need but only in order to feel secure.
8. The disease of closed circles, where belonging to a clique becomes more powerful than belonging to the body of Christ.
9. Lastly, the disease of worldly profit. When an apostle turns his service into power and his power into a commodity in order to gain worldly profit or even greater power.

On the first anniversary of Francis’ pontificate, Sister Katerina Schuth of the University of Saint Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota described the responses she has received from her students and co-workers about what they think about Pope Francis. The responses are quite telling:

- Francis emphasizes God’s mercy and does not scold or reprimand
- He does not just talk but acts like Jesus sharing his love for the poor
- His simple lifestyle is evident – no trappings of office, no special privileges, his down to earth manner
- He seems to exclude no one or show any favoritism
- He employs the vocabulary of ordinary people and communicates as if he is one of us
- He consults widely so as to understand the plight of people in all kinds of situations
- He is credible, consistently speaking and acting on his beliefs.
- He exudes warmth and happiness as he engages so many people
- He does not convey the sense of someone who prefers isolation but of someone who delights in engaging others

Further, Pope Francis’ personal lifestyle defies the consumerism of our day which his predecessor Pope St. John Paul II described as exhausting. Pope John Paul said that we in the West, in particular, are molded and shaped by consumerism. We are bombarded constantly by high powered advertising techniques which seek to define and create more and greater needs. The superfluous becomes the convenient; the convenient becomes the necessary and the necessary becomes the indispensable. Furthermore, these high powered advertising

techniques not only seek to define and create more and greater needs but they seek to shape the attitude and personality of the consumer as well. The self becomes the center of the universe. Other people, things to serve one's needs. The moral norm efficiency; the means whatever works, let the chips fall where they may: be they the chips of unethical business practices, abortion, adultery, euthanasia or whatever else suits one's convenience.

Pope Francis, however, manifests a simple lifestyle which enables us to live with what is sufficient. A lifestyle that is less dependent upon money, status, power, prestige, affluence and influence that is more open and available in service to others. A lifestyle characterized by simplicity in clothing, diet, transportation and entertainment and by prayers for and advocacy on behalf of and service to the poor.

It should be noted that the most pitiful form of human poverty is not the deprivation of material goods and possessions but it is a lack of the knowledge of God and the lack of a meaningful relationship with God. And that is why we must stir up within ourselves and communicate to others an awareness of that fundamental human phenomenon which St. Augustine described some 18 centuries ago when he observed "you have made us for yourself O Lord and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

This leads us to the fourth beatitude of Pope Francis, Blessed are those who see God in every person and strive to make others also discover him."

This beatitude prompts us to address the most urgent need in the Church today: evangelization, the ministry of reaching out to share our faith with others; to proclaim unequivocally and unapologetically that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Redeemer and to demonstrate by our own lives how faith in God gives meaning and purpose to our earthly sojourn.

Regarding evangelization, a survey conducted by Bishop David O'Connell, shortly after his installation as the Chief Shepherd in the Diocese of Trenton sought to ask Catholics why they had left the Church or are not participating in the Eucharist regularly. The answers weren't all that surprising: tepid liturgies, uninspiring homilies, unwelcoming parishes; the refusal of priests to celebrate the sacrament of marriage with couples who have strayed from the practice of their faith or to baptize their children; dissatisfaction with the church's stance on divorce, human sexuality and exclusion of women from ordained ministry were also cited frequently. One disaffected catholic complained: "ask a priest or

deacon a question and you get a rule; you don't get a let's sit down and talk about it response."

Last year there was the release of a comprehensive study about religious practice in the United States conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

Their data revealed that more than a quarter of Americans (28%) have left the faith of their childhoods for another religious denomination, or claim no faith tradition at all.

Between 2007-2014, the number of nones in the US (not nuns, but nones), that is, those who claim to be agnostic, atheists, or spiritual but not belonging to any religious denomination, rose from 16% to 23%.

Meanwhile, in that same period of time the number of Christians in the United States declined by 3 million from 79% - 72% of the population. The headline in USA Today for this story was "Nones Soar, Christians down."

Sadly, Catholics are the religious group with the largest loss of members, with former Catholics making up almost 10% of the United States population. For every adult entering the Catholic Church today, six are leaving.

The Pew Research shows that while 31% of United States citizens indicate they were raised Catholic, only 24% identify themselves as Catholics today.

Some have joined other religions denominations (mainly Evangelical Churches), some say they are spiritual but unaffiliated with any specific religious tradition, and others describe themselves as atheists or agnostics.

On a more positive note the data indicates that the Catholic Church has retained 68% of those who grew up Catholic – more than any other faith group in the United States except members of the Mormon, and Jewish communities.

Certainly this study reinforces our first hand knowledge that many of our Catholic people are either not practicing their faith regularly (only about 25-30% worship weekly) or are joining other churches. Indeed, some studies have indicated that the largest Christian denomination in the United States today is Roman Catholicism and the second largest is the lapsed Roman Catholics.

A major issue in the contemporary milieu contributing to this decline of practicing Catholics is the bifurcation between spirituality and religion. More and more, people, especially, young adults, make the distinction

between spirituality, which is conceived as private, subjective and individualistic, freeing one to be in touch with the authentic self, with one's true inner core, and religion, which is viewed as an ascent to a self-limiting creed which can lead people to become dogmatic, rigid and intolerant.

As Father Drew Christiansen of Georgetown University notes: "Their standard for belonging is not adherence to the religious authority of any church as the repository of revelation, but rather, it is the satisfaction of their own inarticulate searching."

This subjective, unaffiliated character of their searching does not necessarily mean they are shallow. Many live disciplined spiritual lives characterized by daily meditation, fasting, spiritual reading and serving at soup kitchens, food pantries and so on.

What they reject is conformity in a rules-bound institution. They don't understand why they need to be married in a church building rather than under the vault of heaven or why they can't have a "destination wedding."

They resist the reinforcement of ritual distinctions between the ordinary faithful and the ordained. Further, they seek a synthesis of insights from all the world religions.

These spirituals don't label themselves agnostics, nor are they necessarily looking for a faith community but, they want some of the virtues, emotional grounding and psyche space associated with religion.

But this tendency to embrace a "spirituality only" or a "Catholic lite" approach to faith fails to appreciate the importance and value of tradition and community. Tradition, and the rituals which sustain it, is not traditionalism (or what the late theologian Jeroslav Pelekan called "the dead faith of the living"). Rather, tradition is the living faith of the dead.

Unlike a spirituality only approach, with a religious tradition we don't have to start out from scratch. We not only have a time-tested and track-proven perspective on life and its ultimate purpose, but we have a community that can challenge us to examine our biases and self-centered habits, and that can sustain us emotionally, esthetically, intellectually and morally through all the dry days and dark nights that inevitably occur on our life's journey.

In other words, the spiritual but not religious folks fail to appreciate the central theme interwoven throughout the sacred scripture, namely, that God calls us to salvation not as individuals but as members of a faith community, as members of the people of

God.

In his 2015 New Year's Day homily, Pope Francis put it this way: "Without the Church, our relationship with Christ would be at the mercy of our own imagination, our own interpretation, and our own moods."

"To separate Jesus from the Church would introduce an 'absurd dichotomy', Francis said, "It is not possible to love Christ but without the Church, to listen to Christ but not the Church, to belong to Christ but outside the Church.

Without the Church, Jesus Christ ends up as an idea, a moral teaching, a feeling." Francis concluded by saying, "Christ and the Church are inseparable."

To be contemporary evangelists, however, is a difficult challenge for us to undertake. Let me cite three reasons for such.

First, we as Catholics tend to be very privatized in our approach to faith. The old adage that you never talk about religion and politics in polite company has been deeply ingrained in our Catholic genes. For example, when I was growing up in Troy our family generally attended Mass on Sunday as a family, went to confession regularly, said grace before meals and prayed the rosary as a family during the Marian months of May and October, but rarely, if ever, did we talk with one another about religion, God, who Jesus is for us and how faith influences our life. Faith was just expected to be transmitted by osmosis, if you will, as well as from the catholic culture which in those days was omnipresent. And I don't think my family was unique in this regard.

Second, when I was serving in the inner city of Albany at Providence House and Hope House, I had no problem at all celebrating Mass and the sacraments; no problem at all speaking to any group that would invite me about the theological imperative of the social Gospel; and no problem at all responding to people's social and material needs. But when it may have been appropriate to speak to another person about our Catholic faith and the Christian life, especially if the person did not initiate the topic, I literally froze, feeling that this would be coercive or unprofessional, or rationalizing that I didn't want to fall into the trap of "rice Christianity", that is, of offering assistance to another on the condition the other accept our faith. But in my heart of hearts I realized that I was allowing my own self image and my own concern about human respect to get in the way of my baptismal commitment and ordination responsibility to proclaim the Good News of Jesus

Christ both in season and out of season.

Thirdly, we are living in a society which has adopted an attitude of "live and let live." We are afraid that if we share our faith with others, it will be offensive to them or we tend to associate evangelization with the pushy tactics of the Jehovah Witnesses, the God on my sleeve approach of some born-again or the blatant huckertism of the tele-evangelists. Or we are afraid that we may come across as overly pious and fanatical and, thus, become ourselves the butt of ridicule, scorn, rejection and ostracism.

Now we all know someone: a family member, friend or co-worker who fits into the category of unchurched, a fallen away Catholic or in the "none" category.

I would urge you, then, to reach out to such persons and share with them how faith gives meaning, purpose and direction to your life, that buoys you up and sustains you in good times and in bad, in the midst of your joys, hopes, sorrows, and disappointments and amidst the trials and tribulations of everyday life.

You can also invite such persons to "come and see" – asking them to attend Mass with you, or an adult education program being sponsored by your parish or the diocese, to become involved in the food pantry or some project on behalf of youth or the poor in which your parish is engaged. You don't have to be a saint or scholar to evangelize, you must simply be willing to share how meaningful and life giving faith is for you.

Thus, in addressing the challenge of evangelization, I believe it's not so much a lack of programs or resources that is at the heart of the problem, but a lack of relationships, both in terms of people being willing to engage others in their search for meaning and of being confident that such an engagement is not so much a matter of providing programs for people's information and edification, but evangelization is a matter of being willing to listen, to understand and to walk with people in their spiritual quest.

And I am convinced that through such a person-to-person, peer-to-peer approach to sharing our faith with others in our own sphere of influence, however broad or narrow that may be, we in the church today can break the quiet, reserved privatized posture that has tended to characterize American Catholicism and we can offer a dynamic new approach to evangelization: one that is not coercive, one that is not flamboyant or hysterical, one that does not engage in spiritual mugging, if you will, but an

approach that respects the dignity of others, that emanates from the love of God and the movement of the Spirit within us and that responds to the call to discipleship that has been given to each of us.

The fifth beatitude proposed by Pope Francis is "blessed are those who pray and work for full communion between Christians."

Before ascending to heaven, Jesus prayed, "Holy Father keep them in the name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are one." (John 17:11)

This quest for unity of which Jesus speaks is not something optional for us. It is an imperative in order that the Christian message may be credible and that the world may truly believe that Jesus is the only begotten Son of the Father.

However, while these ecumenical strides have been significant and sustained, it must be noted that the pace of ecumenism has slowed considerably in recent years and new obstacles to unity have arisen.

In other words, the initial wave of advances which were made especially following the Second Vatican Council has now been followed by a period of sobering realism. The reason for such are complex, including declining membership, fiscal constraints being experienced by denominations, internal issues to be addressed between and within faith communities like recognition of same sex marriage, the nature of authority or who can be ordained, and the natural ebb and flow of movements and relationships, just to mention a few. As one noted ecumenist observed, "we have had the honeymoon and now we are faced with the arduous task of building a solid marriage."

Others have suggested that ecumenism and interfaith relationships are in crisis. But crises can be viewed not only in the negative sense of the breakdown of what has been built up over the past century or so, but also in the original Greek sense of the term crisis, which signals a turning point where things are hanging in the balance. In time of crisis old ways come to an end, but this opens up the doors for new possibilities.

Commenting on this reality Cardinal Walter Kasper, the former President of the Vatican Council for Promoting Christian Unity and relationships with the Jewish community suggests there are some immediate dangers to be avoided.

The first danger is that many young people of all our denominations in the United States are unaware of the divisions and hostilities which existed formerly and are still prevalent elsewhere. Hence, there has

developed a kind of indifference or lack of interest.

Second, despite the warning of the Council that we must not bypass issues of doctrine, and simply come together as friends to do service together, unfortunately at the grassroots level this latter approach frequently has become the norm.

The third problem is that the ecumenical and interfaith dialogue runs the risk of becoming a purely academic affair among scholars. Although not denying the importance of a serious theological underpinning for ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, as noted in his first admonition, there is the concern that often the faithful in the congregation are excluded, and thus, become either disinterested or uninformed.

The final danger is that we embark upon an endless series of conferences, symposia, commissions, meetings, sessions, projects and high-level events with the perpetual repetition of the same arguments, concerns, problems and lamentations. The ecumenical and interfaith documents of the past few decades at the national and international levels, to say nothing of regional and local documents, now comprise over 5,000 volumes. Cardinal Kaspar asks, "Who can read all of this stuff, and, indeed, who wants to?" Most of these findings do not reach the local faith communities either at the leadership or grassroots level. Thus, many clergy and lay people rightly ask disappointedly, "What and where are the concrete results, what is the specific outcome of all of these rarified discussions and dialogues?"

The answer, Cardinal Kasper proposes, is to be found in the spiritual dimension of ecumenism. This means first and foremost that we must recall the foundation of the pursuit to which we are called, namely, the bond we have with God. For while denominational creeds, moral codes, liturgical practices, governing structures and ecclesial histories and traditions are important, and must be an integral part of the ecumenical dialogue, we must never forget that first and foremost ecumenism is about a relationship: a relationship with God. If our ecumenical and interfaith interactions are not rooted in a deep intimate relationship with God, who is the source of all unity, peace, healing and reconciliation, then our efforts, well-motivated and well-intentioned as they may be, will account for naught.

Therefore, while it is important that we seek to resolve differences, heal wounds and foster mutual understanding, respect and tolerance, it is even more important that we spend time praying together and

listening to one another. For unless we know who God is for us and how we experience God in our respective Christian traditions, then, we will not have that solid foundation necessary to achieve the unity which Christ so urgently wants for the members of his flock.

Spiritual ecumenism also means that prayer must be a priority in all of our ecumenical endeavors. We cannot make or organize church unity; unity is a gift of the Holy Spirit who alone can open hearts to conversion and reconciliation. Thus, we must come together to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. There can be no ecumenism without conversion and renewal. Spiritual conversion means reading the Scriptures and sacred texts together, sharing faith experiences and collaborating in the service of the needy, sick and the outcast. This type of ecumenism is not restricted to the theological "experts" but is both assessable and obligatory for all.

Therefore, there is need for greater emphasis on spiritual ecumenism; on clergy and church members spending more time together in reading the sacred texts together, in talking about who God is for us, in sharing stories of lived faith and in prayer.

Also, I would note that with respect to ecumenism, our dialogue over the years has tended to be with the Orthodox Christians and mainline Protestant denominations. However, Pentecostalism in its various incarnations has been the fastest growing form of Christianity.

In many areas Pentecostals or Evangelicals can be very anti-catholic and unecumenical. But as Kevin McDonald, the Archbishop Emeritus of Southwark in Great Britain, suggests, such interaction with evangelicals can also provide a fertile terrain for ecumenical dialogue.

In the early Christian community there was a great emphasis on the gifts of tongues, prophecy and healing. Thus, the Archbishop opines that since these gifts are so central to Pentecostalism and Evangelism, the future of ecumenism must focus as well on dialogue with these movements which transcend denominational boundaries, rather than simply between the mainline communities which traditionally have been involved in ecumenical dialogue.

In this regard Cardinal Kurt Koch, the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity stated that the rapid expansion of the new Pentecostal movements has "radically changed the geography of Christianity worldwide."

The success of these new movements, the Cardinal opines, “obliges the Catholic Church to act itself”. What are we doing wrong and why are the faithful deserting us? While noting there are no simple answers to these questions, Cardinal Koch warned against seeing these new forms of Christianity solely as a threat to the Church. It is obvious that there is a great hunger for those spiritual movements which should make the historic Christian churches question the churchifying of the faith and of the Christian life.

Again, this will require reading Scriptures together, sharing stories of lived faith and prayer. It is here, I believe, that we will come to appreciate more fully the bonds that unite us and experience more acutely the pain and futility of our separation. It is here that we will find together better ways to combat the secularism, humanism and anti-religious attitudes which are eroding the foundation of all our Christian communities. It is in such spiritual activity that we will become more sensitive to the repercussions of unilateral decisions upon our brothers and sisters of other churches and it is here that we will become more open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit who reveals to us our God of surprises, and who leads us into the future, not with a blueprint but a compass, a compass focused on our one God and our one Savior Jesus Christ.

May this be the compass we follow in our quest to fulfill the mandate of Jesus “that they may be one. As you Father are in me and I am in you. May they be one in us that the world may believe it is you who have sent me.”

The sixth and final additional beatitude which Francis offers is “blessed are those who protect and care for our common home, the earth.”

The beatitude is explained in detail by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si* which draws its title from “the Canticle of Creation” authored by the Pope’s namesake and role model, that renowned 13th century saint, Francis of Assisi.

Let me attempt to summarize the content of the Pope’s encyclical as it pertains to this sixth beatitude.

It has been at the heart of Judeo-Christian teaching that God created the universe and gave to Adam and Eve and to the members of the human family dominion over the earth.

Through the course of the centuries, the church’s eyes have been fixed primarily on the next world and the ethic of dominion which focuses little on non human creatures and the environment as a whole seemed to

give scriptural authority for human beings to take the earth for granted and to do with it what we pleased.

In more recent years, however, catholic theologians have sought to replace this ethic of dominion with a new ethic of the caring stewardship of God’s creation. Pope Francis has placed himself clearly in accord with this new line of thinking. For example, the encyclical states emphatically, “Nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute dominion over creatures.” In other words, in his encyclical Pope Francis places himself firmly in the tradition of Francis of Assisi, telling the world’s 1.2 billion Catholics and all people of good will that the caring stewardship of creation, suddenly and dramatically is at the heart of our church’s mission and that we have a passionate reason to love the earth and to respect it, now more than ever when it is being threatened so mortally. Our planet is truly the work of our Creator and it is to be treasured as such. In honoring creation we are honoring God. In short, Pope Francis strongly rejects any interpretation of the Scriptures that would find men and women as “dominators” over nature.

But *Laudato Si’* will be read and remembered primarily from a scientific perspective as Pope Francis’s environmental encyclical. The sentences everyone was looking for arrive near the beginning, carefully qualified but unambiguous: I quote, “A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system.... It is true that there are other factors (such as volcanic activity, variations in the earth’s orbit and axis, the solar cycle, etc.), which contribute to this phenomenon yet a number of scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides, and other pollutants) released mainly as a result of human activity.”

So with his exhortation, Francis officially puts himself on the side of the 97% of scientific consensus on climate change.

The research shows that virtually every piece of land ice on earth is melting, the sea ice in the Arctic is collapsing, droughts and other weather extremes are intensifying, the global food system is showing signs of instability, and, if left unchecked the effects on agriculture, sea levels and the natural world will be devastating and impact disproportionately on the poor.

Further, for Pope Francis, climate change is just one part of a larger ecological crisis that also involves the extinction of plant and animal species and the accumulation of waste. And this ecological crisis, he believes, is part of a larger ethical or moral failure that also involves the way we treat the poor, the disabled, the unborn, and the future generations who will inherit the world we're destroying. Building upon a basic element of the church's social teaching, Francis calls for "intergenerational solidarity," as well as for solidarity with other creatures. He calls on people in the developed world to put down our digital devices long enough to consider the effect of our choices—as consumers and citizens—on fellow creatures thousands of miles or hundreds of years away."

Thus, the most important thing to recognize is the urgency of the problem, and to accept that the only way to solve it is "by our decisive action, here and now." We cannot wait for the magic of markets or new machines to save us from our predicament. We will have to face it head on, by means of political engagement at every level—personal, local, national, and international.

The Pope's encyclical demands of each of us personal sacrifices like cutting back on our own consumerism, recycling, using buses or car shares, turning off unnecessary lights, cutting back on heating and air conditioning, etc.

Doing what the Pope asks will require an extraordinary change in human vision and behavior to accomplish the peaceful resolution he calls for. It will require sacrifice from everyone, especially those of us who are enjoying the fruits of the status quo. Yes, doing what the Pope asks will not be easy but Francis encourages us to trust in a loving God and a powerful Spirit who can renew the face of the earth.

A recent poll indicates that the majority of Catholics accept Pope Francis analysis about the crisis of climate change, but the downside of the poll is that few indicate any practical initiative they intend to undertake either personally or communally to address the issue. This, I believe, offers an opportunity for each of us to be an agent for change, especially by supporting candidates, elected officials and other civil servants who are seeking to confront this issue of climate change aggressively and constructively.

What can we do personally about global warming? A recent article in the New York Times offered some practical personal suggestions. We could drive a few miles less a year and reduce our speed. Turn down our thermostat by 3 degrees, 8 hours a day in winter.

Replace one of every 5 incandescent light bulbs with LEDs. Reduce our meat consumption by 7 percent – about a pound a month. Any one of those actions would help.

But none would come close to doing as much as driving a fuel-efficient vehicle. If vehicles averaged 31 miles per gallon, according to research, the United States could reduce its carbon dioxide emissions by 5 percent.

The simple fact is that American drivers are a significant contributor to greenhouse gas pollution, so having a vehicle that burns less fuel can have an outsize impact on total emissions.

Though the United States has just 4 percent of our world's population, it is responsible for 14 percent of man-made greenhouse gases that end up in the atmosphere. Our transportation accounts for 27 percent of those emissions. And 60 percent of these emissions result from driving our personal vehicles.

The New York Times columnist, Tom Friedman, has pointed out that some critics say that the climate has been changing since long before any human drove a car, so how could humans be causing climate change? Of course, we aren't solely responsible. The climate has always changed by itself through its own natural variability. But that doesn't mean that we humans can't exacerbate or disrupt this natural variability by warming the planet even more and by doing so, making the hots hotter, the wets wetter, the storms harsher, the colds colder and the droughts drier.

Look at the past year: Not only were several big U.S. cities slammed by monster hurricanes and a blizzard, but San Francisco set a heat record — 106 degrees on Sept. 1, a day when the average high there is 70 degrees; the West was choked by record-breaking forest fires exacerbated by drought; and South Asia was slammed by extraordinarily harsh monsoons, killing some 1,400 people.

But what if we prepare for disruptive climate change and it doesn't get as bad as feared? Where will we be? Well, we will have cleaner air to breathe, less childhood asthma, more innovative building materials and designs, and cleaner, more efficient power generation and transportation systems — all of which will foster huge export industries and create tens of thousands of good jobs. Because with the world's population steadily rising, we all will need greener cars and power if we just want to breathe clean air, no matter what happens with the climate. We will also be less dependent on petro-dictators.

Indeed, it is safe to say, that if we over prepare for climate change and nothing much happens, it will be exactly like training for the Olympic marathon and the

Olympics get canceled. We'll be left with a body that is stronger, fitter and healthier. Now that's a plus for all of us.