

New Evangelization through Collaboration

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The parish meeting room at 7 p.m. on a weeknight is a familiar scene: An adult faith formation session of some type begins, and the same ten people are present. They are the stalwarts who always attend everything. We might want to change this familiar story, but “we have always done it this way.” Somehow we expect different results, even though we keep doing the same thing over and over. Change can be difficult. Yet, Pope Francis reminds us in his actions, large and small, that change is necessary for growth and for vibrant life in the church. What does

he mean by the phrase “changing business as usual”? It does not mean throwing out church teachings or discarding our tradition. The change called for by the 2012 synod on new evangelization refers to a “move from a pastoral strategy of *maintenance* to a pastoral position that is truly *missionary*.”¹ Pope Francis, in words and actions, lives this movement and draws others into the shift. He calls for change in a co-responsible and collaborative way. In his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, he clearly outlines how to make the shift from maintenance to mission:

Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way.’ I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style, and methods of evangelization in their respective communities. A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory⁽ⁿ³³⁾.

“Bold and creative” does not mean being hasty, careless, or thoughtless. Consider the actions of Pope Francis in making changes at the Vatican. He uses a “communal search,” consulting broadly and then creating new structures in order to change “business as usual.” (This call for a change of “business as usual” comes from number 10 of the *Lineamenta* for the synod.)

Often, our greatest resistance to change stems from our uncertainty about how to proceed and a certain comfort with the

familiar. Some people try to change things alone by making decisions and then getting others to implement the plan. “Collaboration for” describes this method. Others try to make changes by committee, inviting a select few into the discussion with the hopes of affecting some change. “Collaboration with” depicts this method. A more holistic method engages all those involved. “Collaboration from the beginning” as a method “proceeds in a communal fashion right from start and together they:

- * analyze the situation,
- * recognize the need to act,
- * make decisions, and
- * realize those decisions.”²

As a methodology, *collaboration from the beginning* has three elements associated with it:

- * Cenacle Spirituality
- * *Communio* Ecclesiology
- * Cooperation Technology

The three elements, when combined, integrate the spiritual, ecclesial, and human dimensions, resulting in a functional methodology. The framework fosters co-responsible and collaborative action that advances the work of new evangelization.

Cenacle Spirituality refers to the experience of the community of Acts, the Upper Room in Jerusalem. Everyone in this room, women and men, received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit moved them out into mission, but the community continued to gather in worship and in communal sharing, discernment, and decision-making. Each person had a role, a contribution to make. There were certainly designated leaders, but all were equal and all brought unique gifts in service to the local community and to the mission of the church.

Communio Ecclesiology offers a way of living as church. The perspective of *Communio* reminds us that we are not only called to collaborate with one another in the mission of the church as baptized, but that we also collaborate with the Trin-

1 XIII Ordinary Synod of Bishops, Proposition 22.

2 Union of Catholic Apostolate, “Together and For One Another,” n. 11.

ity. Our triune God models a collaborative relationship where each distinct being relates one to another and with us.

Cooperation Technology illustrates how we function with one another as human beings and also with our God. We baptized have been gifted by the Holy Spirit and the gifts we received are meant to be put at the service of Christ and his church. These gifts need to be recognized within the faith community and united for the good of that community.³ We are called to reciprocal dialogue with one another, to truly listen, and effectively respond to the other. This dialogue becomes a “trialogue” when the listening and response includes the Holy Spirit, who draws us into the life of the Trinity.

Collaboration from the beginning, as a methodology, sets us on a trajectory that can move beyond “we have always done it this way.” We have identified ten ways in which Pope Francis demonstrates how we can apply this way of functioning to our own lives. He is

- * Simple and Direct
- * Pro-active and Outward-focused
- * Pastoral and Collaborative
- * Merciful and Joyful
- * Faith-filled and Witnessing

In short, his words and actions witness Jesus Christ. Many people see, hear, and recognize his witness as faith in action. As Pope Francis said in his first encyclical, *Lumen Fidei*, “Faith in Christ brings salvation because in him our lives become radically open to a love that precedes us, a love that transforms us from within, acting in us and through us” (20).

Pope Benedict echoes the central role love plays in *Porta Fidei*. He writes, “It is the love of Christ that fills our hearts and impels us to evangelize” (7).

SIMPLE AND DIRECT

Many have commented that the homilies, addresses, and talks of Pope Francis are not complex theological treatises, but are in simple language that makes the point. His willingness to embrace those most in need reveals a direct approach. Pope Francis challenges us to live with integrity so that our words match our deeds.

PRO-ACTIVE AND OUTWARD-FOCUSED

Pope Francis sees needs and acts. Rather than waiting for those on the margins to come to him, he goes out to them. To be a follower of Jesus Christ, a disciple, is not enough for one who is baptized. While we are always followers of Christ, we are also apostles, who are sent by Jesus Christ into the world. St. Vincent Pallotti taught that we are sent on mission, as apostles. As “missionary disciples”⁴ we bring Good News and healing to those in need. To bring the wounded back to the “battlefield hospital” as Pope Francis has called the church, a place of healing.⁵

3 Loughlin Sofield and Carroll Juliano, *Collaboration: Uniting Our Gifts in Ministry* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2000), 17.

4 *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 120.

5 Interview in *Civiltà Cattolica*, September 30, 2013.

PASTORAL AND COLLABORATIVE

Often described as pastoral, Pope Francis enters into the lives of people sometimes by calling them on the telephone or by making a visit. His approach in reforming the Roman Curia or the Vatican administration requires a collaborative engagement of others in the development of methods and means. He shows us that we cannot continue with the “status quo” and “business as usual.” In today’s complex world, no one person has all that is necessary to respond well. Change must be done in a way that is co-responsible and responds to the needs of people. It also requires going outside of our comfortable churches and their buildings, out into where people are, rather than waiting for them to come to us.

MERCIFUL AND JOYFUL

His genuine smile, warmth, and embrace of those who are suffering serve as a hallmark of the papacy of Pope Francis. Too often Christians, particularly Catholics, are presented as dour and judgmental. Mercy remains the constant theme of Pope Francis. The merciful approach meets people where they are and demonstrates an outward movement toward those who are lost, struggling, suffering. Mercy offers an experience of the love of God that transforms hearts and minds and heals all wounds. Not naïve or simplistic, the joyful Christian trusts in Jesus Christ and the experience of Christ in the community of faith called the Church.

FAITH-FILLED AND WITNESSING

All the baptized, including pastoral leaders, must give witness to Christ in their personal lives and in their way of being church. The church can preach, teach, and even serve, but as Paul VI taught in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, to “witness goes deeper and permeates all of the life choices of one who believes in Jesus Christ” (41). A life of witness lived well by the baptized and the Church evangelizes. Every day, in Catholic and secular social media, the witness of Pope Francis illumines the world and evokes deeper conversations with others about the church. His witness offers an opportunity to evangelize.

Pope Francis teaches and models for us ways to share our experience of Jesus through being simple and direct, pro-active and outward-focused, pastoral and collaborative, merciful and joyful, faith-filled and witnessing. We can use these methods in our daily lives and in our functioning as church. He challenges all the baptized to live more deeply and witness well faith in Christ. Authentic witness coupled with collaborative functioning allows the baptized to become co-responsible for the life and growth of the church. Changing “business as usual” will not be easy, but Pope Francis calls each one of us to take up new evangelization and live as fully and faithfully as we can. |

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