

Pope Francis Wants Parishes to be ‘Schools of Service’

Francis asks that parishes function as "schools of service and generosity" where people can "find the gift of the sacraments"

By Ivan Fernandes

Pope Francis in his special prayer intention for February asks that parishes be generous and open, becoming communities of faith, fraternity and welcome towards those most in need.

"Sometimes I think that we should put a sign on the door of parishes that says, 'Free admission.' Parishes should be close-knit communities, without bureaucracy, people-centred — a place where the gift of the sacraments can be found. They have to become once again schools of service and generosity, with their doors always open to those who are excluded", Pope Francis says in his video message for February 2023 (<https://youtu.be/f5uRUQDiJ-g>)



Francis emphasizes the importance of parishes with the video, which begins with an image of the outside of a beautiful but empty parish church, followed by that of the same church full of people. *"Please, let us be daring. Let us all rethink the style of our parochial communities (and) may increasingly become communities of faith, of fraternity and of welcoming the most in need,"* he says.

The pope has spoken about the importance of the parish in the life of the Church repeatedly during his pontificate. In the Apostolic *Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium*, published at the beginning of his pontificate, Francis highlighted the centrality of the parish: *"While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes,"* he wrote, quoting an expression of John Paul II in *Christifideles liaci*, parishes have the peculiarity of being *"the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters."* This is why it should be *"in contact with the home and the lives of its people"* and not become *"a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few."* In his Pope Video, the second for the year, Francis insists on the idea of parishes continuing along this path of transformation.

The Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network of the Apostleship of Prayer (<https://bit.ly/3RjQcAg>) developed "The Pope Video" initiative to assist in the worldwide dissemination of monthly intentions of the pope in relation to the challenges facing humanity. Today, the network connects millions of Catholics around the world from diverse countries, cultures, and social and ecclesial contexts, through prayer.

"A few years ago, Francis told the Italian diocese of Isernia-Venafro: *'Every parish community is called to be a privileged place of listening and of proclaiming the Gospel; a house of prayer around the Eucharist; a true school of communion.'* Listening, prayer, and communion: these are essential synodal characteristics for parish life. But to do this, they need to really be communities, with the people at the centre, because we are truly a community when we know each other, know each other's names, needs, and voices. How often is it the case that parishes have become a group of more or less unfamiliar people who meet for Mass on Sunday, but without community life? It's a great challenge. Being a Christian community is a grace, born from shared faith, from the lived experience of fraternity, and from welcoming those most in need; born from a shared spiritual experience, from an encounter with the Risen Jesus Christ," recounted Father Frédéric Fornos, SJ, International Director of the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network, in a statement accompanying the pope's prayer intention for January.

The full text of the pope's prayer intention is below:

We pray that parishes, placing communion at the centre, may increasingly become communities of faith, fraternity and welcome towards those most in need.

Pope Francis – February 2023

Sometimes I think that we should put a sign on the door of parishes that says, "Free admission."

Parishes should be close-knit communities, without bureaucracy, people-centred —a place where the gift of the sacraments can be found.

They have to become once again schools of service and generosity, with their doors always open to those who are excluded. And to those included. To all.

Parishes are not a club for the few, which give a certain kind of social belonging.

Please, let us be daring.

Let us all rethink the style of our parochial communities.

Let us pray that parishes, placing communion – communion of people, ecclesial communion – at the centre, may increasingly become communities of faith, of fraternity and of welcoming the most in need.



FOR PARISHES

“We pray that parishes, placing communion at the centre, may increasingly become communities of faith, fraternity and welcome towards those most in need.”

- Pope Francis -

Challenge for humanity and for the mission of the Church – February de 2023

The **Catholic Church** has nearly

200,000

parishes throughout the world.



A parish is a community of faithful (united by the same faith in Jesus) who, under the authority of the diocesan bishop, are entrusted to the care of their own proper pastor.



The Parish is **not identified** as a building or a series of structures, but rather as a specific community of the faithful.



It should **not become** a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few but rather the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters.



How have the most recent Popes described the role of parishes?



FOR THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

“The parish [...] remains an indispensable organism of primary importance in the visible structure of the Church”

St. John Paul II



AS A GUIDE AND HOPE

“The parish is a beacon that [gives] meaning and hope to the lives of individuals and families.”

Benedict XVI

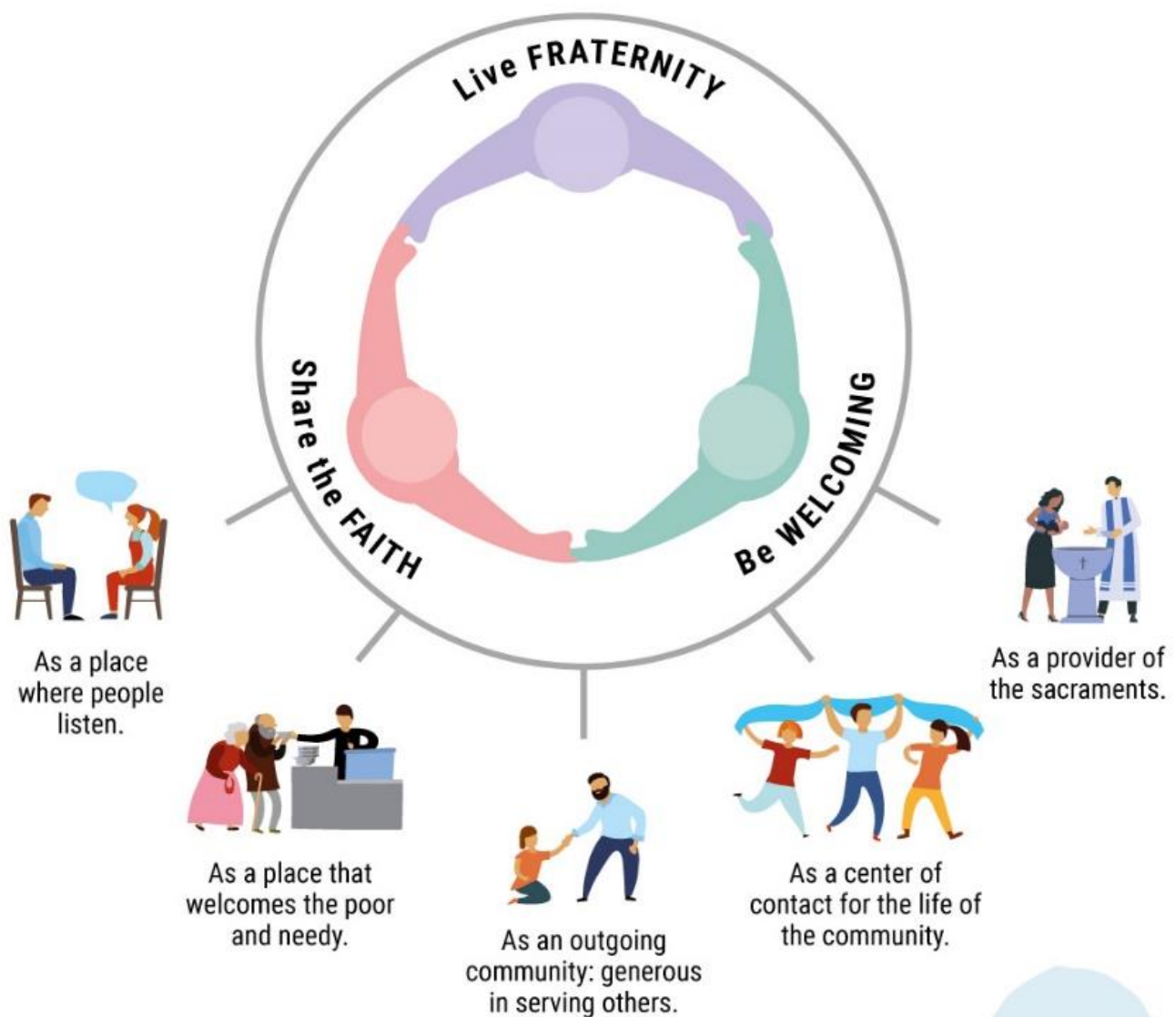


AS A CLOSE COMMUNITY

“Parishes should be close communities [...] centered on the people, a place where they can find the gift of the sacraments.”

Francis

HOW CAN PARISHES BECOME TRUE COMMUNITIES?



"The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory [...]. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities."

Evangelii Gaudium (28)

- POPE FRANCIS -

Main sources:

Code of Canon Law, 515 § 1 | Pope Francis (2021): "Address to the faithful of the diocese of Rome" | Congregation for the Clergy (2020): "Instruction: The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelizing mission of the Church" | Frequently Requested Church Statistics (2018) | Pope Francis (2015). "Address to pilgrims from the diocese of Isernia-Venafro" | Pope Francis (2013). Evangelii Gaudium.