

Pope Francis acknowledges mistakes and defends most controversial decisions in new autobiography

Cindy Wooden - Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- While calling himself an “old man” and saying he never expected to be pope this long, Pope Francis said he still has dreams for the future.

“We must not stumble upon tomorrow, we must build it, and we all have the responsibility to do so in a way that responds to the project of God, which is none other than the happiness of mankind, the centrality of mankind, without excluding anyone,” the 88-year-old pope wrote in his autobiography.

“Hope: The Autobiography” was written with the Italian editor Carlo Musso beginning in 2019. The book was released Jan. 14 in its original Italian and in 17 other languages in about 100 countries. Random House published the book in the United States, and Penguin Random House Canada released it in Canada.

The original plan, Musso said, was for the book to be released after Pope Francis’ death. But Mondadori, the Italian publisher coordinating the release, said the pope decided in August that it should be published at the beginning of the Holy Year 2025, which has hope as its central theme.

In several chapters of the book, Pope Francis directly addresses readers, including when he quotes St. John Paul II’s words during the Jubilee 2000: *“Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ!”*

“If one day you are overcome by fears and worries,” he told readers, *“think of that episode in the Gospel of John, at the marriage at Cana (John 2:1–12), and say to yourselves: The best wine has yet to be served.”* *“Be sure of it: The deepest, happiest, most beautiful reality for us, for those we love, has yet to come,”* he continued. *“Even if some statistic tells you the opposite, even if tiredness weakens your powers, never lose this hope that cannot be beaten.”*

Much of the book contains familiar stories of Pope Francis’ past, his childhood and relationship with his grandmother Rosa, his vocation and ministry as a Jesuit, his service as archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and his election as pope in 2013.

Pope Francis acknowledged that he has made mistakes during his pontificate, usually because of his impatience, but he defends some of his most controversial decisions, including expanding the possibilities for divorced and civilly remarried Catholics to return to the sacraments and, more recently, to authorize the blessing of same-sex or cohabiting couples.

He wrote about both of those decisions in the larger context of how the church should reach out to and welcome everyone.

“All are invited. Everyone,” he wrote. *“And so: Everyone inside. Good and bad, young and old, healthy and sick. For this is the Lord’s plan.”*

“It is our task as pastors to take others by the hand, to accompany them, to help them to discern, and not to exclude them,” the pope wrote. *“And to pardon: to treat others with the same mercy that the Lord reserves for us.”*

In late 2023, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith published, with the pope’s approval, *“Fiducia Supplicans”* (“Supplicating Trust”), on *“the pastoral meaning of blessings.”*

The declaration said that priests can give brief, spontaneous, non-sacramental, non-liturgical blessings to individuals who are in irregular situations or part of a same-sex couple *“without officially validating their status”* or blessing their union.

In **“Hope,”** Pope Francis again said: *“It is the people who are blessed, not the relationships.”*

The blessing, he wrote, is a sign that the church wants to accompany everyone and that it does not exclude anyone because of *“one situation or one condition.”*

“Everyone in the Church is invited, including people who are divorced, including people who are homosexual, including people who are transgender,” the pope wrote.

As for his decision in the 2016 exhortation, *“Amoris Laetitia”* (“The Joy of Love”) to open a possibility for some divorced and civilly remarried people to have access to the sacraments, Pope Francis said that decision *“made some people throw their arms up in horror.”*

“Sexual sins tend to cause more of an outcry from some people,” he wrote. *“But they are really not the most serious (sins). They are human sins, of the flesh. The most serious, on the contrary, are the sins that have more ‘angelicity,’ that dress themselves in another guise: pride, hatred, falsehood, fraud, abuse of power.”*

“Homosexuality is not a crime, it is a human fact,” the pope wrote. LGBTQ+ people *“are not ‘children of a lesser god.’ God the Father loves them with the same unconditional love, He loves them as they are, and He accompanies them in the same way that He does with all of us: being close by, merciful, and tender.”*

Pope Francis also discusses his health and asserts again that he has never thought of resigning, although like his predecessors he had prepared a letter early in his pontificate offering his resignation *“in the event of impediment for medical reasons.”*

“At the beginning of my papacy I had the feeling that it would be brief: no more than three or four years,” he wrote. *“I never imagined that I would write four encyclicals, and all those letters, documents, apostolic exhortations, nor that I would have made all those journeys to more than sixty countries.”*

But, he said, *“the reality is, quite simply, that I am old.”*

Pope Francis wrote that he will be pope as *“long as God wishes,”* and repeated his plan to be buried in Rome’s Basilica of St. Mary Major and not in St. Peter’s Basilica as most modern popes are.

“The Vatican is the home of my last service, not my eternal home,” he wrote. His burial site is *“in the room where they now keep the candelabra, close to the Regina della Pace (Mary, Queen of Peace) from whom I have always sought help, and whose embrace I have felt more than a hundred times during the course of my papacy. They have confirmed that all is ready.”*

“Though I know that He has already given me many blessings,” Pope Francis wrote, *“I ask the Lord for just one more: Look after me, let it happen whenever You wish, but, as You know, I’m not very brave when it comes to physical pain -- so, please, don’t make me suffer too much.”*