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## Person of the year for 2014

A year ago, Pope Francis' photo adorned the covers of *Rolling Stone*, *The New Yorker*, *TIME* magazine and *The Advocate*. The latter two named the pope their person of the year. Francis' personal humility and simplicity, his common-sense rhetoric seasoned with homespun charm had captured the imagination of Catholics, non-Catholics and even nonbelievers. Acutely aware of the power of simple language and of images, Francis set about molding a pontificate for the age of Facebook and Twitter. Though he has little computer knowledge himself, Francis harnessed these tools for a new kind of evangelization.

Many among our readers, editors, staff and contributors embraced the message he advocated. They heralded not just a change in tone and style, but a change in substance and direction. Just as many among us, however, were not convinced. The refrain was, "Yes, but what has he done? To what real change can we point?" And so *NCR* resisted naming Francis our person of the year for 2013.

A year later, the resistance is weakening. We can name many points of disagreement with Francis: He is consistently tone-deaf in the way he speaks about women. We do not believe he clearly understands the powerful contribution women are already making to church life, and we believe he is mistaken not to appoint more women to leadership positions in church administration. His remarks to the November symposium at the Vatican, "An International Interreligious Colloquium on the Complementarity of Man and Woman" (Page 19), suggest he and the church hierarchy need an updated theology and science on human sexuality. Despite these objections, we also find a growing list of accomplishments.

One clear message from the conclave that elected Francis was that the new pope must reform the Roman Curia — not only to bring it up to date, but to restore its mission of service to the church at large. We have said that the reform of that institution needs



—Paul Lachine

changes in at least three key areas: a change in culture; personnel to support the reform; and new structures, policies and procedures to make it work.

Francis has made clear movement in all three of these areas. He has worked quickly and resolutely to build on reforms of the Vatican's financial system begun under Pope Benedict XVI. The Vatican bank will soon be held to the same international standards of transparency and accountability that other international institutions must follow. That is a great step forward and should go a long way in erasing the scandals that have periodically wracked that institution. Moreover, one of his appointees, Australian Cardinal George Pell, has in place a plan to modernize the administration of Vatican offices outside the bank as well.

The "examination of conscience" Francis administered during his annual Christmas greetings to the Curia (Page 13) shows that he is determined to change the culture of the Vatican. Some news accounts report that the cardinals and curial officials "sat stone-faced" during Francis' recitation of the diseases afflicting the Curia. The cultural change will eventually affect even the local chancery. Francis has told his nuncios, his ambassadors in countries around the world who are instrumental in selecting bishops for the local churches, to find "pastors who are close to their people ... who are meek, patient and merciful" and to avoid "those who are ambitious, who seek the episcopacy." As he makes more appointments, the culture will change even among the leaders appointed by his predecessors.

We have taken Francis to task for not understanding the seriousness of the sex abuse crisis in the church. In the last year, Francis has made tremendous strides in this area by — most important — meeting with victims of clergy sexual assault and by appointing a high-level commission of professionals, half of whom are lay and women, to advise him directly. The commission has yet to act, but its forma-

tion indicates the pope is grappling with the issue.

Francis has also acted on his own words to take the church out of the sanctuary and into the streets. The first two teaching documents of his pontificate, last year's apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* ("The Joy of the Gospel"), and the encyclical on the environment anticipated this year have established the priorities of his papacy, speaking for the poor of this world where they are most vulnerable: squeezed by the global economy and threatened by environmental degradation. His teachings aren't entirely new, but follow the progression of these issues through all recent papacies, reaffirming that in Catholic social teaching people come before profit and property.

"Out in the streets," Francis has also demonstrated a certain deftness as a global diplomat. In the spring, he brought together in the Vatican Gardens Israeli President Shimon Peres and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas for an "invocation for peace" in the Holy Land. We are just learning that he played an instrumental role in thawing relations between Cuba and the United States. Peres has said that neither the United Nations nor its peacekeepers "have the force or the effectiveness of any one of the pope's homilies."

Perhaps Francis' greatest contribution as pope will be his embrace and advocacy for the Synod of Bishops as central to the governance and mission of the church. The two synods that Francis has called to discuss family life may result in changes in pastoral practices that will welcome Catholics back into full participation in the church, but the process the synods begin may well be their most important outcome. Francis is making of the synod what Pope Paul VI envisioned it to be in 1965: a body that would provide "for a continuance after the [Second Vatican] Council of the great abundance of benefits that ... result of our close collaboration with the bishops."

By giving the synod such importance and by appointing his Council of Cardinals and convening them regularly, Francis is reshaping how a pope governs. He is one among many bishops, and they guide the church together. His preference for the title of bishop of Rome above all other titles clearly shows his intent. His reaching out to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew underscores his desire for a church in full communion while also celebrating its diversity.

For all these reasons, we name Pope Francis *NCR*'s person of the year for 2014.

## 2015 could be the year we save the earth

When it comes to our planet's health, "2015 could be a decisive year in history," Bishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, told a gathering in London in November. We agree with the bishop: 2015 could go down in history as the year we saved the earth. We hope Catholics around the world can muster the spiritual and political clout to help make it happen.

The developments in early December out of Peru signal that a concrete, global solution for addressing climate change might well be within reach. The Lima Accord (Page 17) was an important breakthrough, representing the first time that each of the 195 member-nations in the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change agreed to make commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Deadlines for submitting carbon-cutting plans come in March and June, and U.N. meetings in Geneva (February) and in Bonn, Germany (June), will further shape the Lima document before possible finalization in Paris in December. The year holds great possibilities, but it will be a long, hard fight against vested interests in the fossil fuel industry and global economic status quo.

Those looking for a strong voice for sustainability and environmental stewardship could find an able ally in Pope Francis. Faith-based communities can expect an accurate road map to the issues early in 2015 when Francis is expected to release his long-

awaited encyclical on the environment. Francis will use the document to teach Catholics — as well as other religious and secular communities — about creation, humans' relations to it, and the state of the climate. If usual patterns with this pope hold true, it should spark intense global interest and prompt much conversation, within parishes, among bishops and in society at large, thanks to media coverage.

That Francis has selected the environment for his first solo encyclical (*Lumen Fidei* was largely written by Pope Benedict XVI) is in itself significant. Judging from his comments so far, Francis won't likely wax poetically about the fate of frozen tundra or endangered species, as much as he will place special focus on the human elements involved — both in the mistreatment of the planet and the resulting mistreatment of its people, particularly the world's poor. "Respect for nature also calls for recognizing that man himself is a fundamental part of it. Along with an environmental ecology, there is also need of that human ecology which consists in respect for the person," he told the European Parliament in November.

Additionally, the Vatican has floated the idea of hosting religious leaders at some point this year to further raise climate awareness ahead of the Paris summit. We hope Francis can duplicate in climate change negotiations the diplomatic acumen he demonstrated in cracking a 60-year stalemate in U.S.-Cuba relations.

As for the U.S., President Barack Obama clearly

sees climate change as a legacy issue, and he will spend his remaining time in office addressing it. The mid-November deal he made with China, the world's leading greenhouse gas emitter (the U.S. is second), gave needed momentum to the Lima talks.

The groundwork for U.S. commitments, though, will become a battleground once the 114th Congress is sworn into office. Incoming majority leader Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., has stated his first priority will be a bill approving construction of the highly contentious Keystone XL pipeline.

Politicians from coal country, McConnell included, are also dead set against the Environmental Protection Agency's proposed Clean Power Plan, which would greatly reduce emissions from coal- and gas-fired power plants.

On behalf of the U.S. bishops, Archbishop Thomas Wenski of Miami and Bishop Richard Pates of Des Moines, Iowa, wrote to the EPA in July supporting national carbon reduction standards and encouraging Catholics to weigh in during a public commenting period that ended Dec. 1.

We applaud these efforts and encourage the U.S. bishops to do more. They have pulpits, blogs and diocesan newspapers as platforms and will have Francis' encyclical to form their message. By further leveraging alliances with groups like Franciscan Action Network and Catholic Climate Covenant, Catholics could become opinion leaders for carbon reduction in 2015.