



## Voluntas Dei USA Team Formation Lesson



Formation Theme (2013-2014): Guided by the Vision and Mission of Vatican II  
**Pope Francis and the Church in the Modern World**  
(Prepared by Paul Lang)

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### GATHERING PRAYER

(Taken from: The Present Moment, Louis-Marie Parent)

All: Lord, each morning you wait for me with special graces for the day.

Today, I want to love you, to adore you, to serve you. You activate within me your Spirit, who gives me the tenderness to love, the courage to distribute peace and to carry it with me, the good humor to sow joy.

Today, you shower me with an abundance of kindness, goodness, and gentleness. Kindness is the face of your Divine Spirit who, through me, wants to reach everyone who has been placed on my road today.

Goodness is the climate that you ask of me so that my neighbors will not feel menaced by my behavior; so that they will be drawn towards you to find serenity and to be at ease.

Gentleness is a permanent quality of the heart that is ready to accept its neighbor unconditionally. Thank you for awakening me to these realities of your Spirit in me.

All: Amen

### Reading and Comments on a Gospel Passage

*Gospel*

*JN 3:14-21*

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*And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn\* the world, but that the world might be saved through him.*

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This is a beautiful passage that shows God's indescribable love for us. For sporting fans, this passage is very familiar, you always see in a sports stadium a fan holding up a sign John 3:16. Over the years it has probably sent many a curious fan to their Bibles. It is a beautiful verse about the belief in Jesus. It tells us that those who believe in Jesus will have eternal life. But over the years, you realize that is only part of the story. One has to not only *believe* in Jesus, but one also has to *follow* him. I use this Gospel passage as a Segway into Pope Francis' view, shown by his day to day life example, of "*The Church In The Modern World*".

### Our Modern World - *Gaudium et Spes* -The Joy and Hope

Take a moment, close your eyes and picture the modern world – your modern world.

- What does it look like?



The modern world is complex, having changing technology, attraction to materialism, worshipping of the self, affliction, poverty, grief, war and in the mist of all that there is love, joy, peace. How can we say this?

**Because it is all part of God's creation, living, breathing, and constantly evolving - moving forward.**

### **What is the Church?**

Again take a moment close your eyes – What is your image of our Church

In response to Pope John XXIII's call for Vatican II to *"Throw open the windows of the church and let the fresh air of the spirit blow through"*, a document was given birth, not from a pre-arranged agenda, but right from the council floor itself. "The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World so unique is that never before has a church council addressed itself to all humankind without insisting that all the readers be baptized or give their allegiance to Rome!" (Huebsch). This document, as Huebsch puts it, is truly an international, trans global, ecumenical document summarizing what we humans believe about ourselves and have reflected together profoundly on the very nature of our humanness. From this document, we are compelled to listen to the world, its people, signs and events, and find ways as a Church to be of service to the world. To show the world its goodness and reveal to it God's indescribable love for it. The document's preface says it all:

*"The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts."* (Spes)

Pope Francis in conversations with the media said "It is time to throw open the windows again". He wants the windows and doors open(wide open) to let the spirit move through the Church – to let people in – to let God's love, mercy and grace freely flow out to the world; a world that desperately needs it. The Pope is speaking of people, the children of God – us - The Church.

In one of his daily homilies Pope Francis said the work of the Second Vatican Council was "a beautiful work of the Holy Spirit." He criticized those who resist change and "wish to turn the clock back" – our fragile human nature trying to tame the Holy Spirit. Stating, "Have we done everything the Holy Spirit asks us to do during the Council?" – The pope's answer was definitely NO.

### **Who is Pope Francis?**

From an interview with Pope Francis by Antonio Spadaro, S.J. entitled *"A Big Open Heart to God"*, Pope Francis describes himself this way, "I often visited the Church of St. Louis of France, and I went there to contemplate the painting of 'The Calling of St. Matthew,' by Caravaggio. That finger of Jesus, pointing at Matthew. That's me. I feel like him. Like Matthew." Here the pope becomes determined, as if he had finally found the image he was looking for: "It is the gesture of Matthew that strikes me: he holds on to his money as if to say, 'No, not me! No, this money is mine.' Here, this is me, a sinner on whom the Lord has turned his gaze. And this is what I said when they asked me if I would accept my election as pontiff."

**In the present moment, what image would we use to tell the world who we are as Voluntas?**

### **The Church in the Modern World – *Gaudium et Spes***

"We Christians believe that these times and this life will ultimately end in an eternal dwelling place. Nonetheless, we also believe that life in this world and in these times must be lived nobly, fully, and with attention to our day to day obligations. And we also believe that religion and everyday life are intimately and



indissolubly linked, part and parcel of each other. We cannot divorce what happens in religion from how we live our everyday life. Simply put, there is not split between faith and everyday life.” (Huebsch 158)

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World enables us to see our humanness and through our humanness and life events proclaim God to the world:

“Although the Council sought to reflect on the Church, its clarion call became Jesus Christ and the life of Triune God. That life opens up for human beings through encounter with Christ in the world, where the Holy Spirit “in a manner known only to God offers to everyone the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.” (Leahy 113)

### **Pope Francis in the Modern World**

In an exclusive interview with Pope Francis, the following questions were asked: “What does the church need most at this historic moment? Do we need reforms? What are your wishes for the church in the coming years? What kind of church do you dream of?” I see clearly,” the pope continues, “that the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds.... And you have to start from the ground up. The church sometimes has locked itself up in small things, in small-minded rules. The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you”. (Antonio Spadaro).

Pope Francis’ daily life examples of living modestly, being among the people, in dialog with other faith groups and governments, meeting people where they are in life, giving special attention to the poor and promoting the dignity of human life gives the Church as a whole an example of a person of service, a follower of Christ, and a way to live an authentic Christian life. In some ways he challenges us to do the same, in his first apostolic exhortation “The Joy of the Gospel” (Evangelii Gaudium) he calls upon the Church and the world with encouragement to begin a new chapter in evangelization. Boldly saying go and proclaim the Gospel to all.

“The Exhortation articulates Francis’ dream for the Church but also for the world. First and foremost he calls all to conversion: individually, communally and institutionally. From this conversion will flow the Church he envisions: more missionary, more merciful, more inclusive and more open to change. Pope Francis begins the document by reminding Christians that the joy of the Gospel comes from a personal encounter with Jesus Christ.” (Russell Pollitt)

The Pope ends his exhortation by speaking of Mary as the mother of evangelization.

“There is a Marian “style” to the Church’s work of evangelization. Whenever we look to Mary, we come to believe once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness. In her we see that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong who need not treat others poorly in order to feel important themselves. He goes on to say, “Mary is able to recognize the traces of God’s Spirit in events great and small. Mary being of service, justice, tenderness, contemplation and concern for others is what makes the ecclesial community look to Mary as a model for evangelization. (Francis 216)

### **How do we as Voluntas take on the challenge of Pope Francis in boldly proclaiming the Gospel?**

How close do our attitudes in Voluntas reflect Pope Francis’ dream of the Modern Church and World. I give you these two reflections from Fr. Parent for discussion:

We can manage to live without complaining if we strive to discover the lessons that we can learn from *events*, be



they happy or unhappy. We must detect in them the positive meaning that can help us. Just as God speaks through the Bible, so also he speaks through events. We must listen if we want to grasp his message and receive it. (In the Footsteps of Jesus, pg. 83)

If we are capable of thinking of God, of nourishing ourselves with his presence, of avoiding criticism and complaint, it is because we are filled with the Holy Spirit and have recognized that we are beings of service. Then we can say with Jesus; “*I did not come to be served but to serve...*” (Mt 20:28) The height of friendship is to give our lives for those we love: *No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.*” (Jn. 15:13-14) (In The Footsteps of Jesus, Pg. 89)

**An Accomplished (*Authentic*) Christian  
Fr. Parent**

People will be accomplished (*authentic*) Christians if they live according to the Beatitudes. The spirit of God will accompany them in all their social and political relationships. We will discover in them the breathe of the Spirit, the horror of evil, the love of good. Their direct or indirect actions will always be marked by their personality as adult Christians.

- To be Christian is to live the same life of God which continues in us and which must be spread by us.
- God wants our being more than our acts; He wants our entire person for His good and our own.
- Charity – is God who begins in our hearts and goes out to love another.

**The world must be better because we have lived**



The Calling of St. Matthew,' by Caravaggio

