

# Encountering Pope Francis

Co-sponsored by  
*Trinity Episcopal Church, Allendale,*  
and  
*Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, Ramsey*

Date: Friday, April 17, 2015

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Place: Lutheran Church of the Redeemer  
55 Wyckoff Avenue, Ramsey

Admission: Free

Many people are curious about Pope Francis, who quickly gained popularity internationally in 2013. What has made Pope Francis so popular? Is he offering a fresh approach to all Christians universally? How does his call to Christians to embark on a new chapter of evangelization relate to present-day American culture and turbulent political conditions globally?

In this talk, Msgr. Richard Liddy, University Professor of Catholic Thought and Culture at Seton Hall University (see more below), will address several themes in Pope Francis's "The Joy of the Gospel" (*Evangelii Gaudium*), his first major encyclical, released in November 2013. According to this letter, the joy of Christians comes from being loved and forgiven and sends us forth to share that good news with others.

*But what repercussions are there from such an emphasis on who we are as Christians and who Christians are called to be in the contemporary world?*

## **What, exactly, does Pope Francis envision?**

The Pope advises Christians to find new meanings for today's world in the unchanging truths of the Gospel by recovering the Gospel's original freshness, while also discovering its eternal newness.

To live dignified and fulfilled lives, he asks Christians to "go forth from our own comfort zones," liberated by the love of Christ, which enables believers to "reach out to others and seek their good."

*How should all this be approached by average Christians and manifested in their lives?*

## ***Against what does Pope Francis warn?***

He cautions that consumerism and the pursuit of "frivolous pleasures" can lead to self-absorption and "blunted consciences," and suggests that too many Christians' "lives seem like Lent without Easter." He admonishes, "Sometimes we are tempted to find excuses and complain, acting as if we could only be happy if a thousand conditions were met."

*Who expresses true happiness, according to the Pope, and how is that happiness achieved?*

### ***Are churches, in truth, attractive—or even willing to transform?***

Warning also of stagnation, Pope Francis asserts, “It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but ‘by attraction.’”

*Has lack of “attraction” been the chief cause of declined mainline church attendance? Of what does “attraction” consist in this day of vast, rapid cultural changes?*

The Church, says Pope Francis, must look within itself to contrast the Church that Christ envisioned with the image the Church actually presents. He asserts there is need for continual reformation. This means being more open and inclusive, rather than a “self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few.”

*Have churches been acting like “tollhouses”? How open are parishioners and their clergy to making adjustments and being constantly adaptive? Are churches willing to become “bruised, hurting, and dirty...” as the Pope says they should? Are there rules, precepts, and customs that have become irrelevant and now should be abandoned?*

***Can the new missionary zeal for which Pope Francis is asking overcome cultural, governmental, and political hostility in some contexts to the missionary activity of the Church?***

Pope Francis counsels that Christians cannot passively and calmly wait in their church buildings, but instead must move from a pastoral ministry of “mere conservation” to a permanent state of missionary transformation. Missionary activity, he claims, “is the greatest challenge to the Church.”

*But what does it mean to encourage Christians to fulfill Christ’s mandate to “Go forth and make disciples of all nations...” and to reach into the “peripheries” that “need the light of the Gospel,” in an age when aversion to encroaching on the preferences and rights of others prevails?*

***And what of bishops... and of the pastor’s message?***

Bishops must learn to listen to everyone, says Pope Francis, not just to those who tell them what they want to hear.

*But are bishops willing to engage in “realistic pastoral discernment”?*

The pastor’s homily, observes Pope Francis, should not be centered on a multitude of doctrines, but instead simplified, focused on essentials, and balanced.

*Yet, do parishioners suffer because they have to listen to homilies, and the ordained minister suffer as well because he or she must preach them? Will simplified homilies help a church become more “attractive”? How can moral teaching risk becoming a “house of cards”? Does the homily inspire the listener to continue the conversation afterward in his or her own way?*

### ***Radical changes***

The Pope complains that progress of the Catholic Church has been hindered by excessive centralization and by its central structures, and that the papacy itself needs conversion.

*In what ways has he been successful in making needed changes? Are the leaders of other denominations also making similar reassessments?*

Reflecting on believers, Pope Francis points out they no longer can insist, “We have always done it this way.”

*Yet, in what ways should Catholic and Protestant Christians become bold and creative?*

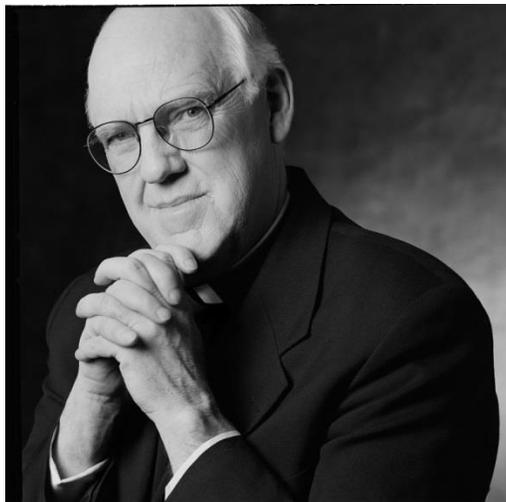
### ***Need for accessibility***

Pope Francis reminds clergy that “Religion shouldn’t be a form of servitude,” and observes that a church that goes forth is one whose doors are always wide open.

*Are they?*

Please save the date and join us for Msgr. Liddy’s talk, followed by stirring discussion.

Tempting refreshments will be provided for our guests.



### **About Msgr. Richard M. Liddy**

*Msgr. Richard M. Liddy is University Professor of Catholic Thought and Culture and Director of the Center of Catholic Studies at Seton Hall University. The Center oversees three institutes, the Bernard J. Lonergan Institute, the G. K. Chesterton Institute for Faith and Culture, and the Micah Institute for Business and Economics. Msgr. Liddy earned his S. T. L and Ph. D. degrees from the Gregorian University in Rome. He has written extensively on the Jesuit philosopher theologian Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984), with whom he studied in Rome in the 1960s. His many publications include two books on Lonergan, Transforming Light: Intellectual Conversion in the Early Lonergan, and Startling Strangeness: Reading Lonergan’s Insight. He has been a Lonergan Fellow at Boston College and a Fellow at the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University.*