

## Papal PR by Megan Burpo (<http://vtprssa.weebly.com/blog/pope-pr-by-megan-burpo>)

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The common words that appear next to Catholic Church in the media are “corrupt,” “scandal,” and “controversy.” However, with just twelve short months behind him, Pope Francis has been able to create an exceptional image for him and the church he leads. While he has not altered any of the practices of the catholic faith, he has changed the way of publicizing the Pope’s actions to better reflect his faith. Being the first religious figure head to appear on the January cover of *Rolling Stone*, this PR rock star knows what to focus on and spotlight.

From the start, Francis made a more personal impression than his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, and seemed to choose every opposite tactic. His face was circulating around social media as part of top 10 lists of greatest acts or pictures that “restore faith in humanity.” Even without the extra push from outside media sources, Pope Francis puts us all to shame with his 3.86 million Twitter followers (<https://twitter.com/Pontifex>). He’s the second-most followed world leader after President Obama, who has had five extra years to rack up his 42.3 million followers.

So how does he do it? What makes Pope Francis so beloved? There is no doubt that any person who gets elected to be Pope is a good person, but what pushes him to be so beloved by people of various faiths, backgrounds, and beliefs?



Let’s start with the initial image the world was presented with. Pope Francis ditched the gold and rubies (<http://nypost.com/2013/06/09/papas-brand-new-bag/>) that normally adorn the Pope, and instead chose a metal cross, simple silver ring, and plain white robes. He keeps on the simple black shoes and pants of an average priest to remind him who he really is underneath his title. Unlike previous Popes, Francis refused to live in the Vatican mansion and opted to live in the guesthouse closer to his people and colleagues.

Backing up his tweets with his actions, Francis has been photographed serving the poor at night and kissing the sick. Less time is spent in the trusty pope mobile and more time is spent hands on with the people. Walking among the mobs during World Youth Day in Brazil the Pope took the opportunity to shake hands and be seen at the same level of the people. He takes situations others would find concerning, like a child running on stage during mass, and makes them opportunities to laugh off mistakes, meet a new individual, and be part of one of the most historic selfies to date. The Pope’s overall good spirit and laid-back attitude makes it hard for people not to be drawn to him. From serious events to publicity meetings, Pope Francis conducts himself with a professional attitude and a smile.

The next step to Pope Francis’s PR perfectionism comes from the topic he chooses in his addresses. From the start, Pope Francis focused on the important, but basic, topics of love and charity. As you can see, these are non-controversial topics that everyone can stand behind. Even though Pope Francis is not seen regularly bringing up hot button issues, when he does answer them, he uses tact while remaining true to his views. By choosing language that is non-offensive or confrontational he makes all people, even those with different views, comfortable. This creates unification with all members of faith instead of digging the divides against one another deeper.

Agree with his beliefs or not, we can all learn more than just religious lessons from Pope Francis. Francis can feel confident about adding “communication teacher” under “church figurehead” on his resume, as he exemplifies how to work a crowd and relate to multiple audiences. As of now, Pope Francis has secured the accuracy of the trending hashtag #BestPopeEver (<https://twitter.com/hashtag/bestpopeever>).

*Edited by Melanie Ford, Webmaster and Editor-in-Chief 2013-2014*



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