

# A Conversation with Father Michael Collins

Author of *Pope Francis: A Photographic Portrait of the People's Pope*

**Q:** This fall readers will be treated to several new publications about Pope Francis from annotated biographies to critical analyses on his religious views and papal reforms. What can readers expect from DK's forthcoming book, *Pope Francis: A Photographic Portrait of the People's Pope*?

**Father Michael Collins:** The DK book on Pope Francis brings the readers close up to the Pope through the photographer's lens. There is a great narrative. We begin with a short biography before bringing the reader into the room in the Apostolic Palace on February 11, 2013 when Pope Benedict announced to the Cardinals his intention to abdicate. We follow Cardinal Jose Mario Bergoglio from his arrival in Rome to participate in the conclave through to his election and then on into events of the first three years of his pontificate. These photographs are taken in the imposing surroundings of the Vatican or during his many trips abroad.

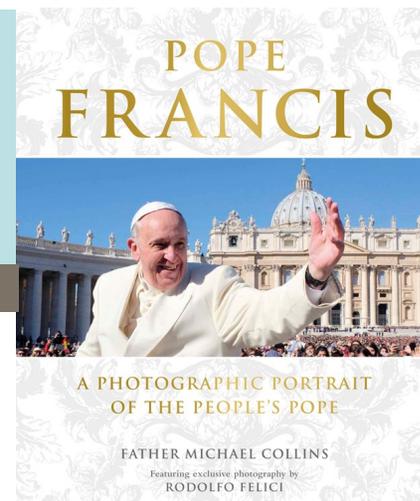
**Q:** *Pope Francis: A Photographic Portrait of the People's Pope* is a series of pictorial essays that offers a rare look at life behind the scenes with His Holiness Pope Francis, capturing both significant and informal events of papal life. Of all the moments spotlighted in the book, which one would you select as your personal favorite?

**FMC:** I like the photographs taken on the island of Lampedusa when Pope Francis flew from Rome to visit migrants from Africa. He originally wanted to fly with three priests on a scheduled flight. The Italian authorities would not allow that and insisted on flying on a small plane to bring the Pope to the island.

**Q:** As a church historian, you have written extensively about the Holy City in DK's *The Vatican*, which offered a uniquely informative insider's view to the great treasures and daily life at the world's smallest nation and the spiritual center of the Catholic Church. Can you briefly speak to what a typical day is like for Pope Francis when he is at the Vatican? How will Pope Francis and his advisors prepare for a trip to the United States this fall?

**FMC:** Pope Francis rises before 5:00 am each morning for prayer and celebrates Mass in the chapel in the residence which he shares with other priests and bishops. Visitors are invited to attend the Mass on four mornings each week. After shared breakfast in the refectory, the Pope spends a couple of hours dealing with administrative desk work after which he holds audiences which last until lunch at 1:30 pm. This meal is taken with his companions in the refectory. In the afternoon the Pope receives a number of visitors and continues paperwork. The evening meal is taken in the refectory and the Pope sits where he finds a placing. There are a number of meetings in preparation for events such as papal visits abroad which require careful planning. Then there are regular papal liturgies, either in St. Peter's at the Vatican or in Roman parishes.

**Q:** *Pope Francis: A Photographic Portrait of the People's Pope* includes inspiring photographs from one of Pope Francis' official photographers, Rodolfo Felici, who works with the Felici Studios, a family-run photographic studio founded by Giuseppe Felici in Rome in 1863. In what ways do these images succeed in providing readers with an exceptionally intimate portrait of the pope?



## BOOK DETAILS

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**FMC:** Almost all of these images are candid. The Pope is by now oblivious to the constant presence of photographers. Rodolfo told me that the Pope really comes alive when he is with people. He loves meeting people. Sometimes he banters with them, others he encourages them. Pope Francis has a wonderfully expressive face and these images capture different aspects of his lively personality.

**Q: Pope Francis is first Jesuit and Latin American pope and commonly referred to as “the Pope of the people.” Can you explain some of the reasons behind Pope’s Francis’s popularity and why it is that he draws such strong crowd response?**

**FMC:** It is difficult to say. The numbers attending events in the Vatican tripled from 2 million to almost 6 million in the first year in office. I think people like his openness and sincerity. He also speaks from the heart in easy to understand language. This makes him very attractive to many.

**Q: Pope Francis’s visit to the United States has been extended twice to include not only a speaking engagement at the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia, but also additional stops planned in Washington, DC, to address US Congress, and New York City to speak at the United Nations. What item on Pope Francis’s agenda would you recommend Americans tune in for? What do you imagine the papacy is hoping to take away from this visit abroad?**

**FMC:** The first visit by a Pope to North America was made by Pope Paul VI in 1965. That is 50 years ago. Who could have dreamt that within half a century a Pope from the Americas would return? I know that special consideration is being given to a visit to Ground Zero. The Pope will address the topic of climate change and care of the planet. Migration issues and human trafficking are on the top of his agenda. He even thought of entering North America from Mexico but realized that it would make the trip too long.

**Q: When Pope Benedict abdicated his position and Pope Francis was elected the new pope, what were the initial reactions from within the Catholic community and the Vatican? In his short time as pope, how has Pope Francis made an impact in his new role?**

**FMC:** Most people were entirely taken by surprise even though Pope Benedict had intimated at least two years earlier that he contemplated retiring if his health were not suited to the requirements of the office. The Vatican as an institution does not really welcome change and found it difficult to deal with two popes.

**Q: There are an estimated 78 million baptized Catholics, comprising 25 percent of the population of North America. For Catholic Americans specifically, what do you believe Pope Francis’s visit to the United States symbolizes? Why is Pope Francis such a heralded figure?**

**FMC:** Americans have a great reputation for hospitality. I expect he will receive a rapturous welcome. However, he will have to address a number of issues in morality and ethics in a pluralistic society and that will be a challenge for him. But generally people seem well disposed to him. And for the Hispanic community I expect a fellow Latino will be a source of great pride.



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