Ecclesiology in the Age of Pope Francis

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What can the Pope change in the Catholic Church?

(compared to leaders in other organizations?)
What kind of organization is the Catholic Church?

*The life and mission of Jesus Christ extended in time and space*

**Characteristics of the Church:**

A community united by a visible structure, multiple gifts and graces, a common set of beliefs, and a common worship, all stemming from the Gospel.
What can change in the Church and how does it happen?

- External customs and practices
- Doctrinal teachings

The Development of Doctrine:

- Occurs unevenly over time
- Responds to a hierarchy of truths
- Admits of different roles:
  1. the faithful—the Sensus fidei
  2. Theologians
  3. The magisterium
The Synod on the Family

- Widespread consultation
- Second session a year from now
- Apostolic Exhortation follows
1. Become a More Welcoming Church

A. “The Eucharist . . . Is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.”

A. The joy of Christians will impel them to go forth and tell the story, i.e., to become an evangelizing community.
C. Realistic view of Church failures and outmoded structures.

D. Need to keep preaching and teaching in balance, radiating love and mercy.

E. Implications for our hospitals, clinics, and workplaces

2. Go First to the Poor
A. “How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points?”

B. Personal experience

C. “Say no to an economy of exclusion and inequality.”

D. Implications for our planning and practice
3. Eliminate Outmoded Customs and Structures

A. Examples may vary across cultures

B. Pastoral workers: “The People of God want pastors, not clergy acting like bureaucrats or government officials.”
C. Ecclesial structures, from the parish to the papacy:  
“Excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church’s life and her missionary outreach.”

D. Need for increased collegiality and solidarity, less censorship from Roman offices.

E. Be bold and creative!

F. Implications for the American Church and our ministries.

A. Eliminate clericalism

B. The People of God “does not err in faith, even though it may not find words to explain that faith.”

C. Solicit the voices of the poor
D. Create a greater role for women: "The specific place of women in those places where the authority of the Church is exercised."

F. Implications for health care policies and practices

The Potential for Change --
The Challenges of Our Time

“The Holy Spirit knows well what is needed in every time and place.”