

Remembering Pope Francis: A Reflection by Jeffrey S. Burwell, SJ

April 21, 2025



With faith in the resurrection, the Jesuits of Canada join the universal Church in mourning the passing of Pope Francis.

As a man formed in the Jesuit tradition, Pope Francis bore witness to the truth; he spoke with clarity even when the words were difficult to hear. Rather than resolving tensions hastily, he allowed the slow work of discernment to unfold. His leadership was shaped by patience, prayer, and a deep trust in the Holy Spirit. He challenged the Church to listen before it spoke; to comfort those who suffer; and to seek justice not as an abstract ideal but as a lived reality.

Pope Francis confirmed the four Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAPs) of the Society of Jesus in 2019 and ratified our universal mandate within the Church. These priorities — showing the way to God; standing with the marginalized; accompanying young people in their search for meaning; and caring for creation — were the fruit of a global process of prayer and reflection.

They reinforced the call to deepen our spiritual identity while actively engaging in works of the Church. Across the world, Jesuit institutions and apostolates renewed their focus in light of these preferences. Pope Francis encouraged us to ensure that our ministries did not simply maintain past structures but that they respond dynamically to contemporary needs. Pope Francis in Quebec. Photo: Jesuit Curia

Beyond shaping our mission in this way, his visit to Canada in 2022 stood as a significant moment of impact. More than an event, it was a reflection of our shared desire to deepen relationships and to grow together.

His presence among Indigenous communities, Church leaders, and the faithful across the country demonstrated a willingness to listen and to learn. He showed us that reconciliation in Jesus was not a single step but a journey; Pope Francis showed us that walking it required humility and courage. His visit challenged us to move beyond words into concrete acts of justice. This work continues, and the Jesuits of Canada remain committed to collaborating with Indigenous peoples in a spirit of solidarity.

I was shaped by Pope Francis and his call for a poor Church for the poor. I came to see justice and reconciliation not as an idea but as an encounter; not as a task to be completed but as a way of being. His leadership challenged me to ask whether my own life reflected the compassion and humility of Christ — especially in places where dignity was most at

risk and hope was hardest to find. Influenced by his legacy, I remain committed to remembering those who are often forgotten and sharing in their struggles.

Pope Francis showed us that leadership required both courage and patience; he remained a Jesuit of vision and hope until his very last day.

Father Jeffrey S. Burwell, SJ

Provincial of the Jesuits of Canada