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Come, follow me: Tweets from @pontifex

Kate Childs Graham | Jul. 3, 2014 Young Voices

Every morning, like clockwork, I check Twitter at about 7 a.m. And almost every morning, there is a tweet from Pope Francis ? @pontifex [1] ? waiting for me. This morning, for instance, he tweeted:

> Dear young people, do not give up your dreams of a more just world!
>
> ? Pope Francis (@Pontifex) July 3, 2014 [2]

A study out last month named Pope Francis as the most influential world leader on Twitter for the second year in a row. In an interview with the Associated Press [3], Matthias Luefkens, who leads the annual Twiplomacy survey [4], said, ?It's not the number of followers which is really important, but the reach, the engagement.?

Since the day Pope Francis stepped out onto the balcony in March 2013, he has been a force on Twitter. His election alone led to 132,000 tweets per minute. His first tweet read:

> Dear friends, I thank you from my heart and I ask you to continue to pray for me. Pope Francis.
>
> ? Pope Francis (@Pontifex) March 17, 2013 [5]

He has more than tripled the number of followers since he took over the handle, surpassing 10 million followers within six months of his papacy.

> Dear Followers I understand there are now over 10 million of you! I thank you with all my heart and ask you to continue praying for me
>
> ? Pope Francis (@Pontifex) October 27, 2013 [6]

Today, Pope Francis has Twitter accounts in nine languages with 14.2 million followers. At 6.08 million, his Spanish language account is his most popular, while his account in Arabic is his least followed at 137,000. His English language account has 4.2 million followers, expanding his Twitter reach well beyond that of Cardinal Timothy Dolan?s 164,000, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops? 59,000, Fr. James Martin?s 42,000 and Sr. Simone Campbell?s 10,000 followers.

Every one of Pope Francis? 363 English-language tweets has been favorited at least once, and, according to the

Twiplomacy survey, he is retweeted an average of 6,462 times per tweet (down from last year?s 8,200). In comparison, tweets from President Barack Obama?s twitter account, which is run by Organizing for America, get retweeted 1,442 times on average. Pope Francis? most popular tweet, retweeted 39,486 times, was on this Easter.

> Christ is risen! Alleluia!
>
> ? Pope Francis (@Pontifex) April 20, 2014 [7]

The pope isn?t big on the use of hashtags. He used #JMJ and #Rio2013 17 times each during the World Youth Day events in Brazil. He also used #prayforpeace when imploring ?each party to follow decisively and courageously the path of encounter and negotiation? during the height of the Syrian conflict and was one of many world leaders to use #bringbackourgirls when more than 200 Nigerian schoolgirls were kidnapped.

> Let us all join in prayer for the immediate release of the schoolgirls kidnapped in Nigeria. #BringBackOurGirls [8]
>
> ? Pope Francis (@Pontifex) May 10, 2014 [9]

Though at the beginning of the year, Pope Francis lauded the Internet, saying that it ?offers immense possibilities for encounter and solidarity,? he uses his feed almost exclusively to broadcast out messages, not to engage in conversation. He has never replied to a tweet, just follows his other Twitter accounts and has only mentioned another Twitter user ? @infoscholas, a project launched by Pope Francis that seeks to encourage peace through education and sports ? once.

> I greet the World School Network for Encounter. Today we plant the first virtual olive tree for peace. @infoscholas [10]
>
> ? Pope Francis (@Pontifex) March 19, 2014 [11]

Mostly, Pope Francis uses Twitter to dole out daily notes of inspiration to the Twitterverse, whittling complex theological thoughts into 140 characters. Though I?m hoping to wake up one morning to a tweet that reads, ?To my 7+ million Twitter followers who are undoubtedly women, the priesthood is now yours for the taking. #ordainwomen #fem2?

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