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**MARIO KNEZOVIĆ[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**IKO SKOKO[[2]](#footnote-2)**

**DAVORKA TOPIĆ STIPIĆ[[3]](#footnote-3)**

**POPE FRANCIS' MESSAGES FOR WORLD COMMUNICATION DAY**

**ABSTRACT**

Every year, on the occasion of World Communication Day, the Pope sends a special message. For the last six years, those messages focused on the current state of the communications and public relations, have been sent by the pope Francis. Already in 1957, when the pope Pius XII presented media as “wonderful inventions” and “gifts from God,” the Catholic Church became more open to the use of media for public outreach. Stressing the dangers that occur in public relations and media, The Pontifical Council for Social Communications published in 2002 two documents: Ethics in Internet and The Church and Internet. Those documents present the cyberspace as a “new adventure” not being deprived of dangers. On the occasion of the 48th World Communication Day, pope Francis sent an encouraging message to the Church, inviting its members to “boldly become citizens of the digital world.” In such a context, this paper explores the need for crisis communication in situations, especially referring to the Church and its members being accused of corruption and scandals, often in a biased and exclusionary way.

**Keywords:** Catholic Church, messages, Pope, media

**Introduction**

Every year since 1970 the Catholic Church has been sending messages by their pontiff, the Pope on the occasion of celebrating the World Communications Day on 24 January, the memorial of Saint Francis de Sales. The first such message was sent by the Pope Paul VI (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 2013).

Pope Francis, who started his Pontificate in 2013, sent his first message titled *Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter* in 2014 (Francis, 2014a). Beside this message from 2014, till 2019 he has released 5 messages:

2015 – Communicating the Family: A Privileged Place of Encounter with the Gift of Love

2016 – Communication and Mercy: A Fruitful Encounter

2017 – “Fear not, for I am with you” (Is 43:5): Communicating Hope and Trust in Our Time

2018 – “The truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32). *Fake News* and Journalism for Peace

2019 – “We are members one of another” (Eph 4:25). From *Social Network Communities* to *Human Community* (Knezović, 2019).

The Pope is aware of the environment we live in and possibilities offered by the media. Characteristic of the world is culture of greed, hedonism, commercialism and devaluation of values (Bozanić, 2017) and in that environment the Church communication is often conducted as crisis communication. New, digital capabilities of media, can turn the communication into “weapon” of ideologies and spreading lies. They can also be destroyers of human socialization (Benedict XVI, 2009). In the accelerated way of communication and transmitting information, Pope Francis is aware of the fact that official Documents of the Catholic Church and Pope’s messages are not enough and they fade away fast (Šola, 2014). Therefore, Pope Francis puts a strong emphasis on direct communication and sermons in which Pope’s style is important regardless of being secondary. In those sermons, which very often represent the ground for the crisis communication situations, Pope Francis starts with action and gestures and then shapes his speech, what is opposite e.g. to John Paul II (John Paul II, 1993), messages by Pope Francis express how media have a great influence on a modern man and whole society as well. He asks the journalists to do their profession conscientiously (Francis, 2014b). Pope’s messages on the occasion of the World’s Communications Day have the same direction. They communicate about new evangelization areas, culture of encounter, communicating hope, true that is setting free and human community. Brief analysis of this six messages will be the subject of this paper.

1. **Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter**

In the first message, signed by the Pope Francis on 24 January 2014, Pope lectures about communication as the culture of encounter. The task of every Christian preacher and catechist goes in direction of encounter with God and one with another. In that way media represent unavoidable possibility of improvement of both culture and encounter (Vukšić, 2014). While from one side world becomes globalized, at the same time it looks smaller from the communication point of view. Development of communication and transport acceleration do their part (Francis, 2014). The Pope points out the scandalous gap between the rich and poor and emphasizes that the world suffers from exclusiveness and marginalization of the poor ones. That state results in conflict in the political, ideological and religious area. Culture of encounter, Pope emphasizes in his message, has to count on solidarity and serious intercession for human dignity (Francis, 2014). Competing in consumption results in differences in the society, discrimination and division into rich and poor what is called today digital divide (Labaš, 2012). Culture of encounter demands listening and learning one from another. Readiness to give and receive through the usage of means of communication, especially internet, leads to the encounter that enriches (Francis, 2014). Pointing out certain problems, Pope speaks about information that exceed our capability of thinking and judgment. Diversity of opinion can be considered as wealth, but it also enables people to barricade themselves behind the sources of information that are suitable only for their wishes and ideas, as well as certain political and economic interests (Francis, 2014). In that context we can also contemplate a certain alienation which is visible in some persons who are anonymous “online” or have some fictitious identity (Labaš, 2009). Pope wants to annul overemphasized role of technology in communication and says that communication is a human and not technological achievement. Certain characteristics are pointed out in order to spread culture of communication: slackness, composure, listening, silence, patience, tolerance, acceptance, frankness (Francis, 2014). Communication brings people closer and that is why the Pope asks us who our neighbor is. Using biblical picture of Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29) the Pope says that our neighbor is the one who is in need and who we communicate with. Dialogue shapes the space, new reality between the individual and people (Evangelii Gaudium, No. 87). Despite its coldness media world is invited to show its tenderness and digital ways have to turn to the true encounter (Francis, 2014). Interpersonal communication is revealed here as a model which cannot be replaced by technical aids. That form of communication played a great role in Jesus’ life. Jesus communicated with individuals from all levels of society (Skoko, 2008). Pointing out a detail that communication contributes to forming missionary mandate of the entire Church, Pope Francis refers to the message of his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI “…a willingness to give oneself to others by patiently and respectfully engaging their questions and their doubts as they advance in their search for the truth and the meaning of human existence“ (Benedict XVI, 2013). At the end of his message Pope Francis summons that communication becomes “a balm which relieves pain and a fine wine which gladdens hearts“ (Francis, 2014).

1. **Communicating the Family: A Privileged Place of Encounter with the Gift of Love**

Message of Pope Francis from 2015 refers to the family and communication within that fundamental human community where a human learns first how to communicate and where they communicate themselves to the others (Francis, 2015). Title of the Pope’s message on the occasion of the 49th World Communications Day is *Communicating the Family: A Privileged Place of Encounter with the Gift of Love*. Picture of the meeting of Mary and Elisabeth (Lk 1:39-56) is the matrix on which the Pope strengthens his call for the source by communicating. Gestures and symbols are seen in that dialogue. Pope Francis points out that mother’s womb is the first school of communication, the place for listening and physical contact (Francis, 2015). After its birth a person stays in the family atmosphere where they learn about coexistence and differences. Communication in the family is the school about the past of our ancestors, transfer of experience of the older people, place of transferring the basic form of communication such as prayer. Labaš points out that Christianity is marked by communicative type and as such does the most important task of connecting believers with God. In that regard prayer is the first form of the realization of such communication (Labaš, 1993). According to the Pope Francis family is the first school of communication where we teach each other to “…embrace and support one another, to discern the meaning of facial expressions and moments of silence, to laugh and cry together with people who did not choose one other yet are so important to each other.” (Francis, 2015). The family is marked by crises and that is why there will be crises even when we are aware of our own and other people’s limits, says Pope Francis. Every form of communion, either family, social or church, requires dialogue. Authentic communication is unimaginable without dialogue. Dialogue is formed through communication, but from the other side, dialogue is the basic form of every communication (Evangelii Gaudium, No. 87). Pope Francis thinks that forgiveness is one of the most important forms of communication, because a possibility for new conversations and meetings is opened in that way. In the circular letter he emphasizes challenges of communication in a family where motor senses are in crisis or mental limitations which forces people into isolation. Modern media can be an advantage, but also an obstacle for communication. But, silence is according to Pope Benedict XVI a constituent part of communication and there are no words rich with the content without it (Benedict XVI, 2012). According to Pope Francis the fundamental question is how to learn to talk to the others from the beginning (Francis, 2015). Information are important, modern communication tools are also important, but that is not enough for overcoming communication difficulties. Return to communion, that “mystery of communion” (Lumen gentium, No. 9–17) goes through communication, and that is of one the most important aspects of the church speech. That mystery of communion can be crucial in establishing a new dialogue and solving crisis when there performs speaking malicious about the others, defamation and disunion among people, situations in which hate and violence prevail, situations in which families are torn apart by prejudice and resentment. That is why “a Christian should not resign in situation, should not give in to the hopelessness” (Mioč, 2015, pg. 12). Therefore, Pope Francis points out that speech of blessing and not cursing, gestures of meeting and not rejection, acceptance and not fighting should be a recommendation for the fine communication (Francis, 2015).

1. **Communication and Mercy: A Fruitful Encounter**

Since Pope Francis proclaimed the year 2016 as the Jubilee Year of Mercy and published the bull of indiction “Misericordiae vultus – Face of Mercy” it is understandable that he targeted his circular at the communication and mercy. Thus the 50th World Communications Day was marked by the message *Communication and Mercy: A Fruitful Encounter*. Pope Francis starts his speech on communication and mercy with love which is by its nature communication that leads to opening and sharing with others (Francis, 2016). Since we as children of God are invited to communicate, it is important to use that gift since communication makes bridges. New bridges, if we want to make them, appear in the communication of mercy because mercy is a concrete act of love that transforms and changes lives (Misericordia et Misera, 2017, No. 2). Pointing out the power of word, the Pope says in his circular letter that it builds up the bridges among people, families, social groups and nations. Process of leaving the vicious circles of judgment and revenge goes over mercy to the state of returning the broken relations and returns peace (Francis, 2016). Transferring mercy to the global level of politics and diplomacy, the Pope says that at the institutional and political field one thinks of the mercy for those people who think or work differently or have done a sinful deed. Communication is supposed to be a reflection of the heart and humility (Francis, 2013a), and not a reflection of pride and power triumph. Leading a dialogue does not mean we are to give up our own ideas and traditions – it means to give up the aspirations that they are unique and absolute. (Francis, 2014). Considering the global migration crisis, Pope Francis emphasizes that it is essential to cease looking at people as if they were competing foreigners trying to climb to the top, but to create the world in which everyone feels accepted (Francis, 2016). Also in the previous messages the Pope emphasizes the urge to listen, because “listening enables us to adopt the right attitude, and thus avoid being just a passive observer, listener, consumer“ (Francis, 2016). In the bull *Misericordiae vultus*, which was published on 8 December 2015, Pope Francis strongly calls for an open dialogue so that we could better understand each other (*Misericordiae vultus*, No. 23). Despite the advancement of the technological equipment in communication such as mail, social networks, messages and internet, the Pope believes that it is not the technology that decides whether the communication is authentic, but the very human heart. It is not possible to imagine an authentic communication without dialogue. Dialogue is being shaped through the communication, but, on the other hand, dialogue is a basic aspect of every communication (Evangelii Gaudium, No. 87). This authenticity in communication can be seen in the four aspects of church speech: liturgy of the Word, liturgy of the Eucharist, communion and service (Šaško, 2000). The metaphor that the Pope uses is very interesting: he says that the digital world is an “arena“ where we can caress or wound each other, hold a debate or execute a moral lynching (Francis, 2016).

1. **Fear not, for I am with you. Communicating Hope and Trust in Our Time**

On the occasion of the 51st World Communications Day, in 2017, Pope Francis published a message titled *Fear not, for I am with you* *(Isaiah 43:10). Communicating Hope and Trust in Our Time.* In an array of messages Pope Francis, deeply aware of the crisis and fear in the world and among individuals, is sending a message of hope and trust among people (Vukšić, 2017). The Pope is deeply aware of the fact that, thanks to the technological advancements, it is possible to spread suddenly pieces of news that can be good or bad (Francis, 2017). The abundance of information puts people in front of a choice that calls for endeavor and knowledge in the selection. Therefore, the Pope writes, the media professionals, as well as persons participating in everyday communication, should offer to the others the fruits of communication. “I would like to encourage everyone to engage in constructive forms of communication that reject prejudice towards others and foster a culture of encounter, helping all of us to view the world around us with realism and trust.“ (Francis, 2017). People easily focus on bad news, wars, terrorism, scandals and negatives, so that people are in search of a method of crisis communication and strategies in order to diminish the harms caused by such news (Jugo, 2017). The Pope's intention is not to disregard the trauma of suffering but to call for overcoming the feelings of dissatisfaction and resignation that sometimes bring the feeling of listlessness, fear or a feeling that evil cannot be stopped (Francis, 2017). From this point of view, it is completely understandable that the document *Ethics in internet* warns people not to become a consumer emphasizing that “…the economic competitiveness and round-the-clock nature of internet journalism also contribute to sensationalism and rumor-mongering, to a merging of news, advertising, and entertainment, and to an apparent decline in serious reporting and commentary.“ (Ethics in internet, No. 13). Therefore, pope Francis writes, his plea is to contribute to the search of an open and creative style of communication that will not think that the most important thing is what is evil.

To be a part of searching and sending a good piece of news means that you are out of the manipulation space and that you are a factor of “prophetic announcing“ (Valković, 2006) aiming at curbing evil and disinformation. In a world full of ever-growing and often abstract fear, the Pope sends out the message “Fear not, for I am with you (Is 43:10)“. To enter a world of hope means to put on “eye glasses“ in order to be able to see the logic of love. That love will, if we use the metaphor of the seed, bear its fruits when it falls into the ground, when it sacrifices itself, because for a good piece of news one needs a sacrifice (Francis, 2017). It is the trust in the seed of the Kingdom of God that should shape the way of communicating, because, as stated in the document *Rapid Development* by Pope John Paul II, the trust will happen sooner and easier if we presume dialogue, formation and participation in the media (Rapid Development, 2005). Pope Francis concludes that hope is the most famous of all virtues that can be fed upon good news and truth.

1. **The truth will set you free - *Fake News* and Journalism of Peace**

A message dating from 2018 proposes a subject that media workers and media consumers, even more, are confronted with. Referring to the message of Pope Paul VI from 1972 titled *The Media* of *Social communication at the Service of the Truth*, Pope Francis speaks about people as God's beings who can share what is true, good and beautiful. However, in his opinion, if a person follows their own pride and greed than their communication can go along wrong path (Francis, 2018). Truth among people, especially Christians, because “The truth will set you free“ (Jn 8:32), calls for spreading the truth and suppressing lies (Vukšić, 2018). Fake news is deliberate creation of pseudojournalistic disinformation (Egelhofer, Lecheler, 2019). They are based on non-existent facts aim at: hoaxing, manipulation, influencing politics, adjusting economic interests (Francis, 2018) aiming at discrediting someone, spreading arrogance and intolerance. Such form of informing cannot be connected to “the noble motives“ (Cutlip, Center, Broom, 2000). In crisis communication, where one of the types of crisis communication is refuting the lies and telling the truth, it is important to develop an educational programme aiming at helping the persons who interpret and assess information (Francis, 2018). A deep and careful selection process can remove “the snake's manner“ that stems back from the Garden of Eden, when, as Pope Francis writes, the very first fake news came into being (Genesis 3,1-15). “Nowadays in the era of post-truth, the difference between empirical facts and alternative facts has been lost, which urges us to the everlasting questioning of the credibility of the media contents and the voices that speak through them.“ (Bagarić, Mandić, 2019, pg. 2423). According to Pope Francis fake news become viral, they spread so quickly that it is impossible to stop them and with the consumer they aim at insatiability (Francis, 2018). As antidote for this “lie virus“ Pope Francis recommends truth cleansing, which leads us to the old Greek term *aletheia* (Greek a-lethes: not hidden), that can be translated with Heidegger's terms such as *disclosure* or *the state of being unhidden* (Peters, 2019). In a document about social communication means *Inter mirifica,* published in 1963, Pope Paul VI highlights that reporting about wicked evil and its description must be in accordance with moral laws in order not to harm the souls (Inter mirifica, No. 7). Pope Francis insists on searching for relations among people and liberation from lie. He says that a truthful statement can be recognized through its fruits “…whether they provoke quarrels, foment division, encourage resignation; or, on the other hand, they promote informed and mature reflection leading to constructive dialogue and fruitful results.” (Francis, 2018). It is persons, and not mere strategies, that are the antidote of lies. Persons that are ready to listen, liberated from greed and ready for the dialogue. Such persons are, the Pope emphasizes, ready to develop the journalism of peace. Journalism of peace is not a negation of the existence of serious problems but it is a truthful journalism that is against lies and impressive slogans, sensational headlines (Francis, 2018).

1. **We are members one of another - From *Social Network Communities* to *Human Community***

The advantages of the internet have been embraced by the Catholic Church as a new possibility of announcement and communication. Pope Francis followed his predecessors, who were also present at the social networks *Facebook* and *Twitter*, but he has also joined the network *Instagram* (instagram.com/franciscus). New times carry new possibilities for the evangelization (Strujić, 2015). In a message on the occasion of the 53rd World Communications Day Pope Francis expresses his concern that social networks and internet could endanger communication that always has to be a relation among persons and solidarity, and not estrangement space (Francis, 2019). Internet is indeed a resource of our times, but many professionals emphasize the dangers that can lead to the disinformation and endangering human relations. Pope himself was a victim of such media, when he was misinterpreted. “Pope Francis in his conversations with the journalists mostly answers with shorter sentences, without detailed explanations. The danger of wrong interpretation is if you take these sentences out of the context. That can lead to misinterpretation.“ (Valković, 2015, pg. 29). In that light Pope’s crisis communication urge to establish the truth and the broken connection that has to grow based on inclusiveness and trust. Therefore, Pope Francis in his messages, including the message from 2019, talks about dialogue because, in his opinion (Evangelii Gaudium, No. 87), authentic communication without dialogue is unimaginable. Through communication the dialogue is being shaped, but on the other hand dialogue is basic aspect of every communication. The Pope wants that the metaphor of the network creates positive processes in communication. In the world of fake identities everything is based on opposing others, those that are outside the group, outside the network (Francis, 2019). These processes and approaches, from the negative point of view, exclude heterogeneity, produce narcissism, create illusions, and push whole groups of people and individuals into the state of „social hermits“. God, the Pope emphasizes, is not solitude, God approached man through communication, adjusted to our language, he established dialogue (Verbum Dei, No. 2). In apostolic exhortation Evangelii Gaudium Pope writes: “In today’s world of instant communication and occasionally biased media coverage, the message we preach runs a greater risk of being distorted or reduced to some of its secondary aspects. In this way certain issues which are part of the Church’s moral teaching are taken out of the context which gives them their meaning. The biggest problem is when the message we preach then seems identified with those secondary aspects which, important as they are, do not in and of themselves convey the heart of Christ’s message.“ (Evangelii Gaudium 34). Putting away lying and embracing the truth (Eph 4, 25) means to build a communication society that will not endeavor to catch the others into a trap, but will create freedom of community and attract the listener to participate actively (Francis, 2019).

**Conclusion**

The Catholic Church finds that the means of social communication are highly important, furthermore they are something “which men of talent, especially in the present era, have made with God's help“ (Inter Mirifica, No. 1). They influence the “human spirit“ and “large number of people“. At the Second Vatican Council (1962 – 1965) one document was dedicated to this topic. It was the Decree on Means of Social Communication, *Inter Mirifica* that was promulgated on 4 December 1963 by Pope Paul VI and all council fathers. The Church is aware of the fact how many good deeds can be done if the means of social communication are used correctly, but also of the fact that they can be very much misused. The Church uses them to fulfill its mission of spreading the gospel, but it also wants to show how they are used correctly (Inter Mirifica, No. 3). It has been ordered that every year the World Communications Day is celebrated at the level of dioceses so that the believers could get acquainted with and use these means of mass communication. On this very day the holly fathers sent out a suitable message in order to help the bishops and others who are in charge at the level of diocese or bishops' conferences. Pope Francis has continued to do what his predecessors Pope Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI had already been doing.

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**PORUKE PAPE FRANJE POVODOM SVJETSKOG DANA KOMUNIKACIJE**

**SAŽETAK**

Svake godine povodom Svjetskoga dana sredstava društvenih komunikacija Papa odašilje posebnu poruku. Posljednjih šest poruka odnose se na pontifikat pape Franje. Poruke su medijski usmjerene na aktualno stanje u svijetu društvenih komunikacija i odnosa s javnošću. Katolička crkva je još 1957. po riječima tadašnjega pape Pia XII., koji je rekao kako su mediji „divni Božji darovi“, otvorila vrata za medijsko sudjelovanje na društvenoj sceni. Naglašavajući opasnosti koje se pojavljuju u odnosima s javnošću i medijima Papinsko vijeće za medije objelodanilo je 2002. dva dokumenta *Etika na internetu* i *Crkva i internet*. Ti dokumenti naglašavaju da *cyberspace* predstavlja „novu pustolovinu“ koja nije lišena opasnosti. Želeći ohrabriti Crkvu u svijetu novih medija papa Franjo u svojoj poruci povodom 48. Svjetskoga dana sredstava društvenih komunikacija piše da se „ne plašimo postati građani digitalnoga svijeta“. U tom kontekstu se naglašava potreba kriznoga komuniciranja u situacijama kad se Crkva i njezini pojedinci optužuje za skandale, korupciju, te često pristran i isključiv pristup prema djelovanju Katoličke crkve.

**Ključne riječi:** Katolička crkva, poruke, Papa, mediji.

1. University of Mostar, Mostar, B&H, [fra.mario@tel.net.ba](mailto:fra.mario@tel.net.ba) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. University of Mostar, Mostar, B&H, [iko.skoko@ff.sum.ba](mailto:iko.skoko@ff.sum.ba) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
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