

2025 CATHOLIC CITIZENSHIP ESSAY CONTEST

Popes by Katey

“Leadership is about making others benefit as a result of your presence and making sure that impact lasts in your absence.” This inspiring quote said by Sheryl Sandberg truly embodies the leadership role that the pope undertakes when he enters into the papacy. The pope’s purpose in the Catholic Church is to make sure that all Catholics come together to worship God, to ensure the prosperity of the church and to make sure that all of the church’s leaders work together in harmony. Throughout 2,000 years of our church’s history, we have had 267 popes. Each pope has led with humbleness, dignity, and love. The three most notable popes in our church’s history are Pope Francis, Pope John Paul II, and Pope John XXIII.

Pope Francis served as pope from 2013-2025. Jorge Mario Bergoglio grew up in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Pope Francis loved to play soccer with his friends, going to school, and learning. Pope Francis heard a calling toward priesthood after he had just recovered from a lung infection when he was a teenager. He became a priest at the age of 32. Pope Francis was elected pope on March 13, 2013. After Pope Francis was elected pope, he focused on creating peace and acceptance throughout the Catholic Church. A few things that Pope Francis did during his papacy was that he advocated for the poor, focused on the need for mercy in the church, and encouraged interreligious dialogue. Pope Francis once said, “Life is a journey. When we stop, things don’t go right.” This quote sums up the life that Pope Francis lived. He never second-guessed his decisions, which enabled him to lead the Catholic Church in humility, compassion, and empathy.

Pope John Paul II served as pope from 1978-2005. Karol Josef Wojtyla grew up in Wadowice, Poland. Pope John Paul II loved to do soccer, swimming, and skiing. Pope John Paul II even considered becoming an actor instead of having a religious vocation, but in the end, Karol chose the religious vocation. Pope John Paul II found his religious life at a young age because he became very close with a Jewish group within his community. Pope John Paul II was ordained a priest on November 1, 1946, at the age of 26. Karol was elected pope on October 16, 1978, and he chose the name of Pope John Paul II. Some of the amazing things that Pope John Paul II did was that he advocated for human rights, traveled around the world and preached the Gospel, and connected with the youth of the Catholic Church. Pope John Paul II was known as “The People’s Pope” not just because he connected with young Catholics, but because he truly connected with Catholics of all ages. Pope John Paul II made the religion of Catholicism what it is today because he led all Catholics with humility, simplicity, and love.

Pope John XXIII served as pope from 1958-1963. Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli grew up in Sotto il Monte, Italy. Pope John XXIII was an intelligent student that entered into an Italian seminary at the age of 11 or 12. Angelo was very religious because his family prioritized strong, core family values and a religious connection with God. Angelo was ordained a priest in 1904 at the age of 23. He became pope on October 28, 1958, and he took the name of Pope John XXIII. Pope John XXIII held the 2nd Vatican Council for the Catholic Church, which brought the church into the 21st Century. During his papacy, he focused on making peace within the Catholic Church, the social Justices around the world and outreaching to people around the world to become Catholic. Pope John XXIII is regarded as “the Good Pope” because he was humble, gentle, and kind to everyone that he met. In addition, Pope John XXIII led

the Catholic Church in humility, kindness, and sympathy, which truly formed the Catholic Church and Catholicism into what it is today.

In conclusion, a pope's job during his papacy is that he has to make sure that all Catholics come together to worship God, ensure the prosperity of the Catholic Church, and unite all of the leaders of the Catholic Church. Each pope that has entered into the papacy has led with humility, kindness, and love. The three most notable popes that have shaped the religion of Catholicism and the Catholic Church itself are Pope Francis, Pope John Paul II and Pope John XXIII.