



The Joy of the Gospel

*A resource for discussion and
reflection on the letter of Pope Francis
on the Gospel in today's world*

Written by Janet Somerville and William F. Ryan sj
with Anne O'Brien gsic and Anne-Marie Jackson


Jesuit Forum
for Social Faith and Justice





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Jesuit Forum
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A few months into Pope Francis' pontificate, the Italian monk and theologian Enzo Bianchi did an analysis of the Pope's writings to that point and noted that the two words he used most often were *joy* and *mercy*. Of course the two are related. At the heart of Christian faith is the encounter with God's infinite mercy, revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of God's saving love is "a treasure which makes us more human" (264) and which helps us to live deeply and joyfully.

The joy of the Gospel is meant to be shared; "there is nothing more precious which we can give to others" (264). The Gospel is meant to overflow in us, to send us out into our neighbourhoods and into our world (cf. 120). As Pope Francis puts it, a Church that has deeply experienced God's mercy "has an endless desire to show mercy." (24) Indeed in responding to God's great mercy it is summoned to a "revolution of tenderness." (88)

But what does it mean to be faithful to the Gospel in a world marred by injustice and extreme poverty, in a world, notes Pope Francis, where a homeless person dying on the street is not news, but a drop of two points in the stock market is a disaster?

It was on the third day of his pontificate that Pope Francis, speaking to the large gathering of journalists who had covered the conclave, explained why he chose the name Francis, and exclaimed: "How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor!" The provocative sentence, reiterated in *The Joy of the Gospel* (198), summarizes the profound challenge he has placed before the Church. "I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security." (49)

This simple study guide provides a way into a truly extraordinary document, one which points us relentlessly to Jesus and the joy, hope and challenge which he brings us. May you find this study guide a valuable source of reflection and discussion, and may you know and live ever more faithfully *The Joy of the Gospel*.

+ Most Rev. Donald Bolen
Bishop of Saskatoon



This guide is offered as a way to explore Pope Francis' rich and energizing letter written to *every believer in Jesus Christ*. It is designed for small (5-8) group discussion. We encourage its use in parishes, justice and peace committees, universities, high schools, unions, community groups, religious communities, workplace environments, etc.

The leader's role is important for the success of the sessions. He or she will be someone who is passionate about what is going on in our world, the Church, and what Pope Francis is saying to us. The group process is neither an intellectual exercise, nor a debate. It is much more about getting to know each other and sharing with one another.

The written reflections for each session provide ideas about one of the themes in *The Joy of the Gospel*, along with carefully chosen quotes. The participants will expand on these insights and bring their own experience to the group. The process of listening to each other deeply and exchanging ideas will foster creativity and ways to respond to the Pope's call for a "revolution of tenderness."

Thoughts on starting a group

People will come, if you invite them! If you are interested in delving into the Pope's letter, talk to a couple of others, together you'll find a small group. If you're in a parish or school, ask your pastor or principal for their support and blessing. They may identify one or two participants, too. Decide on a date and place for the first session and make sure to offer coffee, tea and snacks. The group can then decide the best date and time for the on-going meetings.

Recommended steps for preparing each session:

- 1) The reflections in this guide are meant to be read by all participants before each session. Ask your group members to read the first reflection before your initial meeting. The leader should be especially familiar with the reading offered for each session.
- 2) Allow about an hour and a half for your meeting.
- 3) The role of the leader is to ensure the discussion begins and ends on time, to read the questions and ensure maximum participation. The leader welcomes everyone and opens with a short prayer.



- 4) Begin the first session by asking each person to take a couple of minutes to introduce themselves. This helps to build trust in the group. The emphasis should be on personal stories, rather than on what they do. It helps to ask people to include an event that has marked their life.
- 5) Listening is key to group discussion. Limiting each participant's sharing to two or three minutes keeps the momentum going. We recommend sharing in rounds, each taking a turn, but passing as desired. For the first part of your meeting, it's best to listen to each other and to move to discussion later.
- 6) Before each round, you might take a minute or two of silence to allow participants to gather their thoughts. This will encourage reflective sharing rather than debate.
- 7) Close by agreeing on the date and time for the next session and end with a short prayer.

You can purchase *The Joy of the Gospel* from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops at www.cccbpublications.ca.

You can also download the text from: www.vatican.va/evangelii-gaudium/en.



Some questions to get started:



What is your impression of Pope Francis? What are your sources of news or commentary about him?

The letter from Pope Francis that we are exploring is called *The Joy of the Gospel*—in Latin, *Evangelii Gaudium*. Have you read it already? Do you have your own copy?

Now let's delve into the text of this letter from Pope Francis.

Let's face it. Most of us don't get around to reading the official letters of popes, even when they are addressed to "the Clergy and Faithful of the Whole World." Many of us have a general impression that papal documents are meant to be read only by a Learned Minority—bishops, professional theologians or canon lawyers.

Of course, you may be one of the Learned Minority who have always read the official letters of popes. Or maybe you are a pastor, or a member of a pastoral team, and you have persevered in reading and teaching papal documents, because the believers for whom you are responsible have a right to know about such things.

Or maybe you belong to one of the committed networks of lay Catholics who find their inspiration in a specific spiritual devotion, or moral issue, or in the need to challenge a social injustice. In the Church there have always been associations of like-minded believers who are well versed in the teaching of the popes on the topic that has inspired the founders of their particular organization.

Or maybe you haven't read an Apostolic Exhortation (the official term for this letter) in your entire life. Maybe you are coming into this exploration with an open mind and a battery of fresh questions.

Either way—any way—you are in for a new experience when you take the plunge into *Evangelii Gaudium*.

Pope Francis did not write this letter to settle a scholarly argument about doctrine, or to promulgate a new rule or relax an old one, or to promote a particular devotion, or to take a careful step forward in the development of Catholic social teaching. This passionate letter, "written in the year 2013, the first of my pontificate," is meant for all of us. *The Joy of the Gospel* was written to urge us to allow the amazing delight of meeting and being loved



and saved by Jesus Christ to take over our whole hearts, revolutionize our lives, and turn us into *missionary disciples* of the Lord. Just listen:

The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ, joy is constantly born anew. In this Exhortation, I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church's journey in years to come. (1)

There are three interconnected convictions that unify this wonderful letter from Pope Francis. All of them come straight from the Gospel. The way he writes about them is personal and direct and needs no explanation. But because *The Joy of the Gospel* is rather long, a summary of these three main themes might help your reading of the letter.

First of all, Pope Francis wants to say that what the Gospel proclaims above all is that we are loved by God—each one of us personally, and all of us as a human community. God loves us tenderly and faithfully in Jesus Christ, who has come to join us, to be our brother and to save our world. That is the central proclamation of this letter from the pastor of our world-wide Church.

And yes: exactly the same central proclamation was made by the Gospel writers and by St. Paul at the very beginning of the Church. So it's nothing new. Except that it's always new. It's always a shock to our natural unease, to our skepticism, and to our fragile, limited hopes. It is always astonishing, the more we grasp it. We need to keep opening our hearts to it afresh:

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unflinchingly every day. No one should think that this invitation is not for him or her, since 'no-one is excluded from this joy brought by the Lord.'

The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. ... With a tenderness that never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew. Let us not flee from the resurrection of Jesus, let us never give up, come what will. (3)

Why should we not also enter into this great stream of joy?

The Christian vocation to joy, even in the midst of the tears and tragedies of life in this world, is proclaimed over and over again by Pope Francis. For him, receiving and returning the tender love of God in Jesus Christ is the inexhaustible fountain of Christian joy. Sharing that love with others, through daily life lived as a missionary disciple, is what matures and completes the joy. Here is a sample of how Pope Francis, drawing on New Testament passages, expresses his conviction about joy:

The Gospel, radiant with the glory of Christ's cross, constantly invites us to rejoice... 'Rejoice!' is the angel's greeting to Mary (Luke 1:28)... Jesus himself 'rejoiced in the Holy Spirit' (Luke 10:21). His message brings us joy: "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and so that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11). ... He promises his disciples: "You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy" (John 16:20).

In the Acts of the Apostles we read that the first Christians "ate their food with glad and generous hearts" (2:46). Wherever the disciples went, "there was great joy" (8:8); even amid persecution they continued to be "filled with joy" (13:52). ... Why should we not also enter into this great stream of joy? (5)

Sharing your insights



When you were learning about our faith, did you absorb the message that joy is the first gift we receive when we truly meet Jesus Christ? How do you feel when you read Pope Francis saying things like: "with Christ, joy is constantly born anew?"

Does someone come to your mind, someone you know, or a community you have read about, who seems to live in the joyful, generous, Spirit-filled way that Pope Francis is describing?



A second burning conviction of *The Joy of the Gospel* is that the encounter with Christ, as it wakes us up to the astonishing fact that we are God's beloved, changes us. It unites us to our brother Jesus, and it also turns us in love and respectful concern towards the world. We become missionary disciples. Here is Francis again:

Thanks solely to this encounter—or renewed encounter—with God's love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. We become fully human ...when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelizing. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others? (8)

In May 2007, the then Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio of Buenos Aires attended a meeting of the Latin American Episcopal Conference in Aparecida, Brazil. Cardinal Bergoglio was elected to chair the committee charged with drafting the final message of the meeting, known as the Aparecida Document.

Six years later, the Argentinian Cardinal who is now Pope Francis quotes from that document: "Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others. ... Life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give life to others. This is certainly what mission means."

"Consequently, writes Pope Francis, an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!" (10)

Sharing your insights



Can you remember a moment when someone you love came rushing to see you in order to tell you some good news he or she couldn't wait to share? Do you connect that kind of happy sharing with words like *evangelization* or *mission*?

Why should we not also enter into this great stream of joy?

The third burning conviction of this letter is about how centrally the Lord of the Gospel belongs with the poor, the afflicted, the excluded and ignored in our over-busy, success-addicted world.

Like the other great themes in this letter, God's special solidarity with the poor of this world has been a central affirmation in Christianity from the very beginning. But since we so often forget it, this conviction surfaces again and again through many saints and movements in Christian history. And it has certainly arrived again in Pope Francis.

According to some reports after the papal election, his love for the poor was a major reason why some of the Cardinals particularly wanted Cardinal Bergoglio to be the next pope. He himself tells about one moment in the conclave: "During the election, I was sitting next to the archbishop emeritus of São Paulo, Cardinal Claudio Hummes, a good friend. When things started to move in a dangerous direction, he comforted me. And when the votes reached the two-thirds (the number for election) ... he hugged and kissed me and told me: 'Do not forget the poor.' And that word made an impact on me. ... Immediately I thought of Francis of Assisi in relation to the poor."

The entire history of our redemption is marked by the presence of the poor. Salvation came to us from the "yes" uttered by a lowly maiden from a small town on the fringes of a great empire.

The Saviour was born in a manger, in the midst of animals; like children of poor families, he was presented in the Temple along with two turtledoves, the offering made by those who could not afford a lamb (cf. Luke 2:24; Leviticus 57); he was raised in a home of ordinary workers and worked with his own hands to earn his bread.

When he began to preach the Kingdom, crowds of the dispossessed followed him, illustrating his words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18). He assured those burdened by sorrow and crushed by poverty that God has a special place for them in his heart: "Blessed are you poor, yours is the Kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20). He made himself one of them: "I was hungry and you gave me food to eat," and he taught them that mercy towards all of these is the key to heaven (Matthew 25:5ff). (197)

In all places and circumstances, Christians, with the help of their pastors, are called to hear the cry of the poor... Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully part of society. This demands that we be docile and attentive to the cry of the poor and come to their aid. (187)

Sharing your insights



Can you name some people and some movements who have persisted in challenging divisions within society so as to include and respect people who have been excluded, ignored, or seen merely as a problem, rather than as our brothers and sisters?

What is your personal reaction as you read these excerpts from Pope Francis' description of the Christian life? What does your heart say?

After this introductory session, do you feel inclined to meet again and explore *Evangelii Gaudium* in more detail?



Some questions to get started:



When you hear the words *evangelizing* and *missionary*, what images come to mind?

If you knew that someone belonged to a Church in which every member is expected to be a missionary and to find joy in evangelizing, would you assume that person must be an Evangelical, or perhaps a Mormon? Would you be quite certain that the person was not a Roman Catholic?

Well ... is the Pope Catholic? Listen to what he says about the call to evangelize.

Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus. We no longer say that we are "disciples" or "missionaries" but rather that we are "missionary disciples."

Look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: "We have found the Messiah!" (John 1:41). The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus, and many Samaritans came to believe in him "because of the woman's testimony" (John 4:39). ... So what are we waiting for?" (120)

Scattered through *The Joy of the Gospel* are several short, pithy questions which Pope Francis tosses out to us. The Pope's question at the end of this paragraph—"So what are we waiting for?"—is certainly a call to action. It is also a bit of a shock, since a great many Catholics have not exactly grown up with the idea that, if you're a Christian, then of course you share the good news of Jesus Christ, of his love and his salvation, every chance you get, with or without those words.

What? You say you don't feel entirely prepared to spread the Gospel in the context of today's complicated, pluralistic, secular and skeptical world? Pope Francis concedes that we do need to grow into the life-style of being a missionary disciple. Change, development, and new insights are part of the process. But, he insists, that doesn't mean we can't start today.

Of course, all of us are called to mature in our work as evangelizers. We want to have better training, a deepening love, and a clearer witness to the Gospel. In this sense, we ought to let others be constantly evangelizing us. But this does not mean that we should postpone the evangelizing mission; rather, each of us should find ways to communicate Jesus wherever we are. All of us are called to offer others an explicit witness to the saving love of the Lord who, despite our imperfections, offers us his closeness, his word and his strength, and gives meaning to our lives.

In your heart you know that it is not the same to live without him; what you have come to realize, what has helped you to live and given you hope, is what you also need to communicate to others. Our falling short of perfection should be no excuse; on the contrary, mission is a constant stimulus not to remain mired in mediocrity but to continue growing. (121)

The Joy of the Gospel, a kind of handbook about spreading the Gospel, is decidedly in favour of action. Pope Francis is acutely aware that organized religion often turns out to be a great many words without much follow-up; and he considers that kind of all-talk religion a betrayal of the Gospel, even if it is housed in a well-attended parish church with all the correct canonical credentials. In this letter, Pope Francis insists that the love of Jesus is intended to overflow in us and send us out to our neighbourhood—and to the world—in a sisterly/brotherly eagerness to love the people we meet, to respect, help and serve them, and to delight in sharing with them the joy of salvation in Jesus.

How I long to find the right words to stir up enthusiasm for a new chapter of evangelization full of fervour, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction! Yet I realize that no words of encouragement will be enough unless the fire of the Holy Spirit burns in our hearts. A spirit-filled evangelization is one guided by the Holy Spirit, for he is the soul of the Church called to proclaim the Gospel. ... I implore the Holy Spirit to come and renew the Church, to stir and impel her to go forth boldly and to evangelize all peoples. (261)



If you're inclined to pin denominational labels on certain kinds of Christian language, you might be saying by now: this Pope is not only an Evangelical, he's Pentecostal too! Well, yes, he is evangelical, and yes, he has a pentecostal message, but part of his point is that you can't be a Catholic Christian without those dimensions. In one way or another, the Church has been conveying this message about the outreach of faith and love for all of its two thousand years. Yet for many Catholics in North America, the language of this passionate papal letter sounds new and very challenging. Missionary disciples? Who, us?

Sharing your insights



Do you have a personal vision of what it means to be in mission as a Christian? Where do you think it comes from?

If you have access to the internet, it might be illuminating to look up a few websites of Christian organizations that consider themselves committed to a mission. Do these varied descriptions of mission add to your own sense of what mission means today?

Can you describe a moment when you have been conscious of the Spirit of Christ encouraging you to be a missionary disciple?

Now, let's get back to "So what are we waiting for?"

In spite of this challenging message, there really are obstacles to growing into our call to mission. Many of them are deeply personal, and will melt away only with God's grace and our own willingness to grow in whole-hearted responsiveness. That takes time, and we sometimes need help from a spiritual advisor or from a fellow Christian whose own sense of mission inspires us.

Other obstacles come from the kind of world we all live in these days—which, of course, has its influence on the kind of Church we turn out to be. *The Joy of the Gospel* mentions several ways in which our complicated, noisy, often stressful century can distract us badly from the spiritual joy of sharing the good news of Jesus with others.

One problem Pope Francis mentions is the overload of information which comes at us all the time. Information overload can make us feel frantically busy and pressured. When we feel this way, we can get highly defensive about our privacy and our leisure. That defensiveness can cause what the Pope calls "spiritual sloth":

At a time when we most need a missionary dynamism which will bring salt and light to the world, many lay people fear that they may be asked to undertake apostolic work, and they seek to avoid any responsibility that may take away from their free time. For example, it has become very difficult to find trained parish catechists willing to persevere in this work for some years.

Something similar can happen to priests who are obsessed with protecting their free time. This is frequently due to the fact that people feel an overbearing need to preserve their personal freedom, as though the task of evangelization was a dangerous poison rather than a joyful response to God's love which summons us to mission and makes us fulfilled and productive. (81)

Another problem mentioned in *The Joy of the Gospel* is the kind of individualism that makes it hard for us to enter into real, extended community. Pope Francis considers that the state of being "self-enclosed," or sheltered inside an elite or closed group, is very far from the gifts of the Spirit. He calls it a "bitter poison," and says that "humanity will be worse for every selfish choice we make."

Here is a challenging fragment of the Pope's vision of what being self-enclosed can do to religion:

The Christian ideal will always be a summons to overcome suspicion, habitual mistrust, fear of losing our privacy, all the defensive attitudes which today's world imposes on us. Many try to escape from others and take refuge in the comfort of their privacy or in a small circle of close friends, renouncing the realism of the social aspect of the Gospel. For just as some people want a purely spiritual Christ, without flesh and without the Cross, they also want their interpersonal relationships provided by sophisticated equipment, by screens and systems that can be turned on and off on command.



Meanwhile, the Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction. True faith in the Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others. The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness. (88)

Sharing your insights



Do you find it difficult to witness to your faith in conversation with others—in your family, your school or workplace, and in your friendship networks? In light of this letter from Pope Francis, do you think that speaking about Jesus and the Gospel is something you could do more readily? What kind of help might you need? How could your parish or diocese help you to grow in that readiness?

The Joy of the Gospel insists that our response of love to Jesus' love of us, and our willingness to share that love with others, is the most important reality in our lives, and not just when we are doing something "religious." Are there things in your life—worries, or pressures, or distractions, or habits—that blot out your awareness of your life in Christ much of the time? What can you do about that?

"True faith in the Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others." If community is so essential to a full Christian life, how can we help it happen? Can you name some ways in which your parish has been able to offer real community to people? If you are already in a small community that is very important to you—perhaps your family, or a special circle of friends—does it remain inclusive and open to others?

The Pope speaks of our being summoned to the "revolution of tenderness." What do you think he means? How can those words be understood as a description of evangelization, of being "in mission?"



Some questions to get started:



When do you feel proud of your Church, and grateful for it?
When do you feel ashamed of your Church, or frustrated by it?

We in Canada have lived through a time of grave scandal affecting the Church, primarily because of the many instances of sexual abuse of minors by members of the clergy. How has that scandal affected your own faith?

A concrete example of reform within the Church in our time is the system of safeguards and the standards of disclosure that have been worked out, with help from experts, by the bishops of Canada, in conformity with Canadian law. Do you have intuitions about what else needs to happen, to heal the wounds from the sexual abuse scandal?

*No to a sterile pessimism! Yes to the new relationships brought by Christ!
(84, 87)*

If someone you know has stopped going to church, maybe she or he would enjoy reading *The Joy of the Gospel*. Here is a sample of what Pope Francis thinks of a church ministry that has succumbed to "the gray pragmatism of the daily life of the Church."

Today's obsession with immediate results makes it hard for pastoral workers to tolerate anything that smacks of disagreement, possible failure, criticism, the cross.... And so the biggest threat of all gradually takes shape: "the gray pragmatism of the daily life of the Church, in which all appears to proceed normally, while in reality faith is wearing down and degenerating into small-mindedness." (82, 83)

A tomb psychology thus develops and slowly transforms Christians into mummies in a museum. ... Called to radiate light and communicate life, in the end they are caught up in things that generate only darkness and inner weariness, which slowly consume all zeal for the apostolate. For all this, I repeat: Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the joy of evangelization! (83)



Let us go forth, then, let us go forth to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ. Here I repeat for the whole Church what I have often said to the priests and laity of Buenos Aires: I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.

I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre which then ends up caught in a web of obsessions and procedures. If something should rightly trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light, and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life.

More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits that make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: "Give them something to eat!" (Mark 6:37) (49)

In this first letter of his pontificate, Pope Francis is startlingly frank about how urgently reform is needed on all the levels of the Church—parishes, lay associations, religious communities, dioceses, national conferences of bishops, the Vatican, and the papacy itself.

The Joy of the Gospel insists that the needed conversion is a missionary conversion. It is a re-evaluation of all church structures and activities so that mission—outreach to people in the love of Jesus—is clearly the first priority. Sometimes the Pope calls it a pastoral conversion, but the emphasis is always on mission, on going out.

For Francis, it is obvious that every Christian who has fallen in love with Jesus Christ and has experienced the joy of salvation in Christ will feel impelled to reach out and share that joy, in every human situation of that person's life.

But sometimes, that simple but essential response of grace is put to sleep by a church that lives sleepily—or perhaps more accurately, by "churchy habits" that have slipped away from the Gospel and which make us self-satisfied rather than joyfully missional.



The Church which "goes forth" is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice. An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, that he has loved us first (cf. 1 John 4:19), and that therefore we can move forward boldly, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast. ...

An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on "the smell of the sheep," and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be. (24)

Sharing your insights



Here and now, if you were inspired to "stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast," what would it look like? What organization might you join? Where are the outcast, and how would you connect with them?

An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives, says Pope Francis. Can you mention some ways in which your parish, or your family, already does exactly that? How is it done?

Since I am called to put into practice what I ask of others, I too must think about a conversion of the papacy. It is my duty, as the Bishop of Rome, to be open to suggestions which can help make the exercise of my ministry more faithful to the meaning which Jesus Christ wished to give it and to the present needs of evangelization. Pope John Paul II asked for help in finding "a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation." We have made little progress in this regard. (32)



The media have picked up on several clues of how Pope Francis is changing the style and pace of work and protocols in the Vatican. Everyone knows that he has chosen to live in a modest residence for clergy rather than in the official papal apartments; that he doesn't bother with some items of the traditional papal "uniform;" that he drives, not a Mercedes Benz, but an older-model Ford Focus, and that he sometimes answers reporters' questions in a way that most previous papal advisors would consider to be—well, imprudent. Your Holiness, you will be misunderstood!

When he wrote to the new Cardinals whose appointment was announced in February 2014, the Pope's short letter said this: "The Cardinalate does not signify a promotion, nor an honour nor a decoration. It is simply a service that demands a broader vision and a bigger heart. And, although it seems a paradox, this ability to look further and love more universally ... (comes) only by following the way of the Lord: the way of lowliness and humility, taking the form of a servant (cf. *Philippians* 2:5-8). Therefore I ask you, please, to receive this appointment with a simple and humble heart ... in a way that is far from any kind of worldliness, from any celebration alien to the evangelical spirit of austerity, moderation and poverty."

Those small external symbols are the easy part. The harder part is thinking through, in community with committees of cardinals, bishops, lay experts and others, the careful restructuring that might help the fresh wind of the Spirit blow unimpeded through the institutions of the Church.

News reports tell us that a committee has begun work on a new constitution for the Curia—the network of Vatican officials who staff the various administrative centres in the Church's system of global governance. Another committee of cardinals and lay experts has been set up to oversee Vatican financial institutions and to make sure their operations are trans-parent, accountable, scrupulously ethical, and as helpful as possible to the Church missions they are intended to support.

Some of the Pope's sermons preached to workers in the Vatican have been published; they warn strongly against the evil of gossip, against mediocrity in work and slowness in method, and they call Church workers to aspire to the highest standards of their profession.

There are other difficult new balances to be worked out. Pope Francis takes seriously the criticism that the Catholic Church is over-centralized—too much decision-making power in Rome, not enough at local levels or with national conferences of bishops.



The Second Vatican Council emphasized the ancient conviction that a local bishop is no mere “branch-plant manager,” mandated only to implement the blueprint from head office. Every bishop is a member of the *collegium*, the organic unity of the bishops of the whole world who are called to discern together what God wills for the Church. Although in existing canon law, national conferences of bishops have very little authority, *The Joy of the Gospel* says:

The papacy and the central structures of the universal Church also need to hear the call to pastoral conversion. The Second Vatican Council stated that, like the ancient patriarchal Churches, episcopal conferences are in a position “to contribute in many and fruitful ways to the concrete realization of the collegial spirit.” Yet this desire has not been fully realized. ... Excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church’s life and her missionary outreach.” (32)

Sharing your insights



Do you think that decision-making in the Catholic Church is too centralized?

Do you worry that unity in faith might easily be fragmented if decision-making becomes more local or more participatory?

Each particular Church, as a portion of the Catholic Church under the leadership of its bishop, is likewise called to missionary conversion. ... (The diocese) is the Church incarnate in a certain place, equipped with all the means of salvation bestowed by Christ, but with local features. Its joy in communicating Jesus Christ is expressed both by a concern to preach him to areas in greater need and in constantly going forth to the outskirts of its own territory or towards new socio-cultural settings.

Wherever the need for the life and light of Christ is the greatest, it will want to be there. To make this missionary impulse ever more focussed, generous and fruitful, I encourage each particular Church to undertake a resolute process of discernment, purification, and reform. (30)



Pope Francis often speaks about how bishops need to be very close to their people, more evidently full of mercy than full of rules, and brotherly and fatherly in their style rather than princely and hard to reach. But it is when he is talking about the possibilities of the parish that Pope Francis gets really enthusiastic.

The parish is not an outdated institution. Precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution that evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be "the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters."

This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people, or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few. ... In all its activities, the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach. (28)

Sharing your insights



Can you recall some moments when your own parish felt like the Church alive "in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters?" Can you describe one of those moments, and say why it felt important to you?

Pope Francis urges the members of the Church, in the communities to which they belong, to "undertake a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform." What might such a process look like in your parish or diocese, and how would it begin? What steps for reform are needed in your own life, so that you can take a personal part in the renewal of the Church?

Session Four: No to an economy of exclusion!



Just as the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say "thou shalt not" to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills.

Some questions to get started:



Describe the employment/unemployment picture in your line of work and in your community?

Youth unemployment in Canada, at just over 15%, is about twice the level for other workers. In some countries (Greece, for example), youth unemployment hovers around 65%. If you are a young person, how do you feel about your chances for steady work? If you are an older person, are you close to younger people who haven't been able to get stable, decently-paid work that would enable them to start their lives as adults and potential parents?

In your own experience, what are some of the causes of unemployment and of chronically insecure employment?

Are you in touch with the reality of living and/or raising a family on welfare in Canada?

In world-wide terms, Canada is a rich country, a developed country, in which it is possible to enjoy a level of security and a standard of living that is completely out of reach for most human beings on this planet. There are, of course, some dark shadows in this picture. Inequality leaps to mind: the benefits of Canada are so much more available to some Canadians than to others, and the gap between rich and poor in Canada is growing.

But it remains true that the so-called average Canadian lives inside a network of laws, institutions, tax-supported services (including health care and education) and economic initiatives that, together, build for our population a shared common good that most nations in this world can only dream of.

Increasingly, however, Canadians are feeling some anxiety that their Age of Prosperity might be ending as the cold winds of the world economy in the 21st century blow against it. The worrisome sign that most people notice is that it is considerably more difficult to hold a stable, long-term, decently-paid job, complete with benefits, than it was 40 years ago. In Canada, unemployment is a serious and growing problem, particularly affecting some communities and some age groups. If it is a threat in fortunate Canada, what is it like in the rest of the world?

In many countries, unemployment is catastrophic, out of control, crippling. Here is how today's economic picture looks to the first pope from the global South:

In our time, humanity is experiencing a turning-point in its history. ...

The majority of our contemporaries are barely living from day to day, with dire consequences ... It is a struggle to live and, often, to live with precious little dignity. Today, everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape. ...

Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. ... It is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new. Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society's underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised—they are no longer even a part of society. The excluded are not the exploited but the outcast, the leftovers. (52-53)

Sharing your insights



Does the Pope's stark description of economic exclusion remind you of situations you know of, in Canada or elsewhere? What happens to people who find themselves chronically "not needed" in their own city or country? What does it feel like to be a "leftover"?



Chronic unemployment can be at crippling high levels in communities whose economy has been by-passed by modern technology and patterns of development. Many Aboriginal communities in Canada have suffered that kind of economic exclusion. Many communities in rural Canada are starved for jobs, as big food stores prefer cheap food imports over local harvests, or traditional factories close, moving jobs to low-wage locations in other countries.

Even among big city dwellers, the most favoured demographic for today's economic planners, more and more people live with precarious employment. Their jobs can vanish if the company adopts a new technology. Increasingly, positions are temporary rather than permanent. There are fewer guarantees—of health benefits or vacation time, of company pensions, of anything like seniority or job security. An editorial in the January 18, 2014, issue of *The Economist* estimates that within the next two decades 47% of today's jobs could be replaced through the use of robots.

The economy that now dominates the world is brilliant at mass production and at technological innovation. On several levels, the world has never been as rich as it is now. Yet economic inequality has grown ruthlessly, not only between rich countries and poor countries, but also within most countries of the world.

Recently there has been intense discussion about the fact that, for at least 70% of the world's population, economic inequality has increased in the last 30 years. In January 2014, OXFAM published *Working for the Few*, calling on the business elite who would shortly be gathering for the annual World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, to make the commitments needed to counter the growing tide of inequality. The World Economic Forum itself acknowledged that increasing income disparity is a major risk to human progress, impacting social stability within countries and threatening security on a global scale.

To put it mildly, it is not obvious how to fix the serious human problems that have resulted from the one-sided success of the economy that the world has inherited from the 19th and 20th centuries and their (ambiguous!) progress. So Pope Francis challenges our generation to *think deeply* about how to move forward globally, in solidarity, as a human family living in a vulnerable natural environment:

Growth in justice requires more than economic growth ... it requires decisions, mechanisms and processes specifically geared to a better distribution of income, the creation of sources of employment, and an

integral promotion of the poor which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality. ... The economy can no longer count on remedies that are a new poison, such as attempting to increase profits by reducing the work force and thereby adding to the ranks of the excluded. (204)

There are other weak and defenceless beings who are frequently at the mercy of economic interests or indiscriminate exploitation. I am speaking now of creation as a whole. We human beings are not only the beneficiaries but also the stewards of other creatures. Thanks to our bodies, God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement. Let us not leave in our wake a swath of destruction and death which will affect our own lives and those of future generations. (215)

Sharing your insights



What are some of the ways in which governments, local communities, labour unions and non-governmental organizations have been striving to provide security or new opportunities to people facing today's problems of unemployment or precarious employment? Has your own parish also discovered some ways to help people dealing with those problems?

Has concern for the human impact on the natural environment become part of your journey of conscience and faith? Has your parish or diocese begun to offer resources that help you make the connection between economic pressures and the danger of leaving a swath of destruction and death wounding the fragile world in which we live?

For Pope Francis, the fundamental problem is rooted deep in our powerful economic system, which he sees as distorted by the idolatry of money. Here's how he puts it:

We have created new idols. The worship of the ancient golden calf (cf. Exodus 32:1-35) has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry



of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose. The worldwide crisis affecting finance and the economy lays bare the imbalances and the lack of real concern for human beings; human kind is reduced to one of its needs alone: consumption. ...

While the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by the few. This imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation. Consequently, they reject the right of states, charged with vigilance for the common good, to exercise any form of control. A new tyranny is thus born, invisible and often virtual, which unilaterally and relentlessly imposes its own laws and rules.

Debt and the accumulation of interest also make it difficult for countries to realize the potential of their own economies and keep citizens from enjoying their real purchasing power. To all this we can add corruption and self-serving tax evasion, which have taken on worldwide dimensions. In this system, which tends to devour anything that stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile—like the environment—is defenceless before the interests of a deified market, which becomes the only rule. (55 and 56)

Sharing your insights



In *The Joy of the Gospel*, we read a series of nos: "No to an economy of exclusion; No to the new idolatry of money; No to a financial system which rules rather than serves; No to the inequality which spawns violence."

What is your reaction to these phrases—or any of the quotes from *The Joy of the Gospel* in these pages? Do you feel encouraged, discouraged, annoyed, indifferent, energized? What experiences of your own might account for your reactions to this critique of the dominant economy in the world?

As a priest and then a bishop in Argentina, Pope Francis stayed closely in touch with communities in devastating poverty. He is painfully aware of how inequality works on the global level. He knows what an enormous effort it will take, on all levels, to build a web of changes that would help to turn the global economy away from the path of enriching some while impoverishing and excluding others.

Yet he insists that the time to strive for such transformation is now. Two great issues, he says, will shape the future of humanity: first, the inclusion of the poor in society and, second, peace and social dialogue—in your neighbourhood, and in the world.

Economy, as the very word indicates, should be the art of achieving a fitting management of our common home, which is the world as a whole. Each meaningful economic decision made in one part of the world has repercussions everywhere else; consequently, no government can act without regard for shared responsibility. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find local solutions for enormous global problems which overwhelm local politics with difficulties to resolve. If we really want to achieve a healthy world economy, what is needed at this juncture of history is a more effective way of interacting which ... ensures the economic wellbeing of all countries, not just a few. (206)

When we hear about the interconnected global reality of our distorted economy, so tragically split between rich and poor, most of us feel overwhelmed and helpless.

Well, that's the last thing Pope Francis wants Christians to feel. His is a vision that sees the all-merciful God loving the world and everyone in it through all the hearts that reach out in love to others, near and far. God, who is love, cannot stop loving and saving. And God contains the whole universe, not only our dear battered planet.

And precisely because everything is so interconnected, each of us really can help the world, and everyone in it: by loving the neighbours who enter into our lives, then working and praying to understand how we can genuinely help. The ripples from each of us reach all of us. When we discover and respond to our particular mission within God's healing intentions for the world, the merciful reign of God in the whole world draws a little closer.

All of us are needed. Every life-circumstance, every particular compassionate vision, can fit into God's big picture of a world healed and saved.

Sharing your insights



Pope Francis chose to name two saints—Francis of Assisi and Teresa of Calcutta—when he was speaking about the obligation of religion to work to influence public policy and civil institutions. Why do you think he chose those two? Whose names (not necessarily canonized saints) would you like to add to that list?

Does your parish or diocese and its leaders speak out against injustice, or draw attention to the needs and struggles of those on the peripheries of our society? If they do, how does that make you feel? What is your role in all of this?



Some questions to get started:



Do you find it difficult, even embarrassing, to talk about poverty and the poor? Why or why not?

In Canada, people who do statistics agree (except when they disagree)! on a poverty line or low-income cut-off¹. In 2012, the poverty line for a large urban area in Canada was set at \$19,597 for an individual and \$37,052 for a family of four. On which side of that line do you find yourself?

Would it be difficult, in your parish or community, to draw people into the same discussion group from both sides of the poverty line?

For Pope Francis, if there is one thing that necessarily follows from becoming a disciple of Jesus, it is that your heart and your mind will go out to the poor, the excluded, "those whom society discards."

Our faith in Christ, who became poor and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society's most neglected members. (186) Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society. (187)

It is not a question of a mission reserved only to a few: "The Church, guided by the Gospel of mercy and by love for the human family, hears the cry for justice and intends to respond to it with all her might."

In this context we can understand Jesus' command to his disciples: "You yourselves give them something to eat!" (Mark 6:7) It means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter.

The word "solidarity" is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by the few. (188)

¹ www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75f0002m/2013002/tbl/tbl01-eng.htm

These convictions and habits of solidarity, when they are put into practice, open the way to other structural transformations and make them possible. Changing structures without generating new convictions and attitudes will become, sooner or later, corrupt, oppressive and ineffectual. (189)

The Joy of the Gospel reminds us again and again that Jesus chose to be poor and spent most of his time with poor people. As a teacher, Jesus began his beatitudes, the charter proclamation about how to welcome the Reign of God, with the cry: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20).

Pope Francis isn’t speaking about a detached concern, or about providing only the minimum and keeping your distance—what he calls a *simple welfare mentality*. No, he is speaking about two interconnected revolutions.

The first revolution is personal. It’s about going out of ourselves and entering deeply into friendship with people in dire need, with *loving attentiveness*.

This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us ... in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them ... and to put them at the centre of the Church’s pilgrim way. (198)

We may not always be able to reflect adequately the beauty of the Gospel, but there is one sign that we should never lack: the option for those who are least, those whom society discards. (195)

Sharing your insights



What are some of the facts and feelings that make it hard for most Canadians to cross the line that separates people into rich, middle class, working poor, unemployed, respectable, illegal, dangerous-looking, etc.?

Do you know some people who have become really good at crossing those lines and finding friendships on the other side?



The second revolution is about changing the way the world works, a challenge that was the focus of the previous session in this discussion guide.

An authentic faith, which is never comfortable or completely personal, always involves a deep desire to change the world. (183)

The need to resolve the structural causes of poverty cannot be delayed, not only for the pragmatic reason of its urgency for the good order of society, but because society needs to be cured of a sickness which is weakening and frustrating it, and which can only lead to new crises. Welfare projects, which meet certain urgent needs, should be considered merely temporary responses.

As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world's problems, or for that matter, for any problems. Inequality is the root of social ills. (202)

Economic inequality isn't the only divide that Christians are challenged to bridge. Isolation, or prejudice, or a sort of socially tolerated contempt for a group of people, can be worse than poverty.

We saw in the previous session how Pope Francis objects to the way in which modern economies can exclude masses of people by simply moving on—to new markets, a new technology, a new country, a lower-paid work force. Equally, on the social level, he deplores the way in which some people can be isolated by society so that they are thought of, not as us or part of us, but as a problem out there, a blight on our social landscape.

Here are some of the "excluded groups" Pope Francis especially worries about:

It is essential to draw near to new forms of poverty and vulnerability, in which we are called to recognize the suffering Christ. ... I think of the homeless, the addicted, refugees, Indigenous peoples, the elderly who are increasingly isolated and abandoned, and many others. (210)

Migrants present a particular challenge for me, since I am the pastor of a Church without frontiers, a Church which considers herself a mother to all. For this reason, I exhort all countries to a generous openness which, rather than fearing the loss of local identity, will prove capable of creating new forms of cultural synthesis. (210)

I have always been distressed at the lot of those who are victims of various kinds of human trafficking. How I wish that all of us would hear God's cry, Where is your brother? (Genesis 4:9) Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved ... in clandestine warehouses, in rings of prostitution, in children used for begging, in exploiting undocumented labour? Let us not look the other way! There is greater complicity than we think. The issue involves everyone! (211)

Doubly poor are those women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence, since they are frequently less able to defend their rights. Even so, we constantly witness among them impressive examples of daily heroism in defending and protecting their vulnerable families. (212)

Among the vulnerable for whom the Church wishes to care with particular love and concern are unborn children, the most defenceless and innocent among us. Nowadays efforts are made to deny them their human dignity and to do with them whatever one pleases, taking their lives and passing laws preventing anyone from standing in the way of this. ...

Yet this defence of unborn life is closely linked to the defence of each and every other human right. ... It is not "progressive" to try to resolve problems by eliminating a human life. On the other hand, it is also true that we have done little to adequately accompany women in very difficult situations, where abortion appears as a quick solution to their profound anguish, especially when the life developing within them is the result of rape or a situation of extreme poverty. Who can remain unmoved before such painful situations? (213-214)

Sharing your insights



The pro-life movement is often under attack in public opinion. How do you personally deal with the minority status of the conviction that unborn life is sacred, as is all human life? How do you express your own reverence for life from "conception until natural death" in terms that might make sense to today's pro-choice majority?

How does your Christian community reach out to the homeless? Can you name some of your favourite organizations that put homes first, either here or abroad? How are they supported?

What do you know about the presence in your neighbourhood of refugees and undocumented immigrants? Are you in touch with any of the people or agencies who welcome refugees, assist immigrants or defend migrant workers?



How can we hold together these two interconnected revolutions—the personal one and the structural economic/political transformation—that Pope Francis addresses with such intensity? On the one hand, we are called to know, befriend and learn from *those who are least, those whom society discards* and, on the other hand, it is our responsibility to acquire enough expertise to *attack the structural causes of inequality*.

Sounds impossibly difficult? Well, it is: unless huge numbers of us get genuinely, intelligently involved, with the Holy Spirit guiding our efforts. But the seeds of such a two-edged effort (i.e., personal and systemic) have already been planted. There are so many already-organized openings, so many ways to begin!

Take for example the members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society who work out of many of our parishes, tirelessly responding to people in need of assistance with clothing or food or shelter—the traditional works of mercy. Many of those same parishes also have a Development and Peace group, working to help us understand and respond to the rich-poor gap in the global economy, not by traditional charity methods but by forming alliances with local leaders in the global South who are working towards a just and sustainable economic development.

The Catholic Women's League, of course, does excellent advocacy work. Another option is Christian Life Community which has small groups across Canada and around the world.

Or consider the ecumenical justice organization, KAIROS, with its networks across Canada and in the global South, dedicated to enabling us to hold together both local and international dimensions of justice work.

These are our brothers and sisters who have found differing ways to become friends and allies with the poor. There are many other such initiatives. And they always have a welcome mat out for more of us to join them.



Sharing your insights



Does your parish have a St. Vincent de Paul Society, or another organized way of encouraging friendly, one-on-one attention and support for people in the neighbourhood who are poor, sick, isolated, or overburdened? How do you support this effort?

Does your parish have a Development and Peace group, or another justice-seeking group that deals with the policy dimension of social action, or with the global rich-poor gap?

In the world beyond your parish, do you have a favourite organization whose commitment to meeting the needs of people in very difficult circumstances earns your admiration? How do you support its work?

Pope Francis admits that neither he nor anyone else has all the answers to today's heart-rending problems. But once we are committed to caring about the poor and the excluded, with a heart full of respectful love and an open, inquiring mind, the opportunities are endless. He urges all of us to keep our eyes open, trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to see what particular mission each of us is called to embrace in our own place and at this moment.

Near the end of *The Joy of the Gospel*, the Pope offers a glimpse of how to stay with the struggle to carry Christ's all-embracing love into the world.

Sometimes we are tempted to be the kind of Christian who keeps the Lord's wounds at arm's length. Yet Jesus wants us to touch human misery, to touch the suffering flesh of others. He hopes that we will stop looking for those personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune, and instead enter into the reality of other people's lives and know the power of tenderness. Whenever we do so, our lives become wonderfully complicated and we experience intensely what it is to be a people, to be part of a people. (270)

It is true that in our dealings with the world, we are told to give reasons for our hope, but not as an enemy who critiques and condemns. We are told quite clearly: "do so with gentleness and reverence" (1 Peter 3:15) and "so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Romans 12:18). ... Far from trying to appear better than others, we should "in humility count others better than ourselves" (Philippians 2:3).



Clearly Jesus does not want us to be grandees who look down upon others, but men and women of the people. This is not an idea of the Pope, or one pastoral option among others; they are injunctions contained in the word of God which are so clear, direct and convincing that they need no interpretations which might diminish their power to challenge us. Let us live them. ... By so doing we will know the missionary joy of sharing life with God's faithful people as we strive to light a fire in the heart of the world. (271)

Sharing your insights



Does this advice from Pope Francis cast some light on your own path? Is it a good description of the "missionary style" of your particular Christian community?

Session Six: *Spirit-filled evangelizers: what do we need?*



We have a treasure of life and love which cannot deceive, and a message which cannot mislead or disappoint. It penetrates to the depths of our hearts, sustaining and ennobling us. It is a truth which is never out of date because it reaches that part of us which nothing else can reach. Our infinite sadness can only be cured by an infinite love. (265)

Before he reaches the final chapter of his long and ardent letter to all of us, Pope Francis rushes through a breathtaking agenda of tasks that the Church must not neglect. After first making sure that we have grasped the Gospel's insistence that Jesus is found first of all among the poor and the neglected of this world, and that when the world hurts or despises them we need to change the world, Pope Francis then reminds us of other dimensions of "the inescapable social dimension of the Gospel message." (258)

He urges Christians to work tirelessly at peace-building and reconciliation in all its aspects. This emphasis on social dialogue—the search to build a new unity through the reconciliation of conflicts—is strong also in paragraphs 217 to 237 (The Common Good and Peace in Society). He encourages an ongoing effort to "build communion amid disagreement" in society, confident that God's all-inclusive love will enable us to "make history in a life setting where conflicts, tensions and oppositions can achieve a diversified and life-giving unity." (228)

And so Pope Francis urges political participation and social dialogue: dialogue with "cultures and the sciences" and "dialogue with other believers who are not part of the Catholic Church." And he does not mean only dialogue with other Christians: no, he warmly recommends the friendship and mutual learning that can grow when we engage with the Jewish people, with Muslims, and with "those who do not consider themselves part of any religious tradition, yet sincerely seek the truth, goodness and beauty which we believe have their source in God. We consider them as precious allies in the commitment to defending human dignity, in building peaceful coexistence between peoples and in protecting creation." (257)

Sharing your insights



The Church in Canada, and the Church internationally, is engaged in a number of official dialogues, both ecumenical (among Christians of different denominations) and interfaith. Most interfaith dialogue, however, arises from life situations and is not officially planned. Who are the people with whom you feel called to be in dialogue?

The agenda for the Church of our generation, as envisioned by Pope Francis, is impossibly huge. So how might we develop the wisdom, the energy, and the hope to stay engaged in such an open-ended commitment to loving concern and generous action? It is in answer to that question that *The Joy of the Gospel* ends with "Spirit-filled Evangelists," a chapter on what we need in order to live this way.

The Holy Spirit grants the courage to proclaim the newness of the Gospel with boldness (parrhesia) in every time and place, even when it meets with opposition. Let us call upon the Holy Spirit today, firmly rooted in prayer, for without prayer all our activity risks being fruitless and our message empty. Jesus wants evangelizers who proclaim the good news not only with words, but above all by a life transfigured by God's presence. (259)

Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the word, of sincere conversation with the Lord, our work easily becomes meaningless; we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties, and our fervour dies out. The Church urgently needs the deep breath of prayer, and to my great joy groups devoted to prayer and intercession, the prayerful reading of God's word and the perpetual adoration of the Eucharist are growing at every level of ecclesial life. (262)

Prayer, for Pope Francis, is "a personal encounter with the saving love of Jesus." If we have not yet experienced the two-way character of this exchange—if we have not seen and felt that Jesus is actively reaching out to us, personally loving us—then we need to ask for that grace.

The primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received, the experience of salvation which urges us to ever greater love of him. What kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, to point him out, to make him known? If we do not feel an intense desire to



share this love, we need to pray insistently that he will once more touch our hearts. We need to implore his grace daily, asking him to open our cold hearts and shake up our lukewarm and superficial existence.

Standing before him with open hearts, letting him look at us, we see that gaze of love which Nathaniel glimpsed on the day when Jesus said to him, "I saw you under the fig tree" (John 1:48). ... What then happens is that "we speak of what we have seen and heard" (1 John 1:13). The best incentive for sharing the Gospel comes from contemplating it with love, lingering over its pages, and reading it with the heart. If we approach it in this way, its beauty will amaze and constantly excite us.

But if this is to come about, we need to recover a contemplative spirit which can help us to realize ever anew that we have been entrusted with a treasure which makes us more human and helps us to lead a new life. There is nothing more precious which we can give to others. (264)

Sharing your insights



Have you found ways of reading the Gospel with the heart that draw you into personal prayer?

Can you name some supports, or groups, or persons that have helped you make "the deep breath of prayer" a daily source of strength, hope and love?

Again and again, Pope Francis insists on the love that Jesus has for everyone—for every person that we meet or hear about. So, in agreement with the Gospel and with the Christian tradition ever since, Francis draws the conclusion that love is the energy that makes faithful mission possible:

Loving others is a spiritual force drawing us to union with God; indeed, one who does not love others "walks in darkness" (1 John 2:11), "remains in death" (1 John 3:14) and "does not know God" (1 John 4:8). Benedict XVI has said that "closing our eyes to our neighbour also blinds us to God," and that love is, in the end, the only light that "can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working."



When we live out a spirituality of drawing near to others and seeking their welfare, our hearts are opened wide to the Lord's greatest and most beautiful gifts. Whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God. (272)

Pope Francis assures us that once we are in the habit of encountering people with the love that springs from Jesus opening our hearts, we will have lots of company. Love doesn't only link us to other persons one-on-one; it makes us part of a people, God's people.

The word of God also invites us to recognize that we are a people: "Once you were no people, but now you are God's people" (1 Peter 2:10). To be evangelizers of souls, we need to develop a spiritual taste for being close to people's lives and to discover that this is itself a source of greater joy. Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people.

When we stand before Jesus crucified, we see the depth of his love which exalts and sustains us, but at the same time, we begin to realize that Jesus' gaze, burning with love, expands to embrace all his people. We realize once more that he wants to make use of us to draw closer to his beloved people. Without this sense of belonging, we cannot understand our deepest identity. (268)

All of this—the faith, the hope, the prayer, the openness to love—is life in the Spirit. It depends on:

Firm trust in the Holy Spirit ... and so we need to invoke the Spirit constantly. There is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail, and instead letting the Spirit enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us wherever the Spirit wills. (280)

To put the same truth in different words: a missionary life in the Spirit is life lived with faith in the power of Christ's resurrection.

Some people do not commit themselves to mission because they think that nothing will change and that it is useless to make the effort. ... If we think that things are not going to change, we need to recall that Jesus Christ has triumphed over sin and death and is now almighty: Jesus Christ truly lives. Put another way, "if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain." (Corinthians 15:14)



The gospel tells us that when the first disciples went forth to preach, “the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message (Mark 16:20). The same thing happens today. We are invited to discover this, to experience it. Christ, risen and glorified, is the wellspring of our hope, and he will not deprive us of the help we need to carry out the mission which he has entrusted to us. (275)

Christ’s resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. ... Often it seems that God does not exist: all around us we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty. But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit. On razed land, life breaks through, stubbornly yet invincibly.

However dark things are, goodness always re-emerges and spreads. Each day in our world, beauty is born anew, it rises transformed through the storms of history. Values tend to reappear under new guises, and human beings have arisen time after time from situations that seemed doomed. Such is the power of the resurrection, and all who evangelize are instruments of that power. (276)

Sharing your insights



From your own experience, or from your knowledge of history, can you think of some situations that have been transformed by a person or group acting in response to the Gospel?

In your own day-to-day situation, do you find it hard to believe that you are called to live your commitment to Christ in a way that transforms you and the world around you?

The astonishing centre of the Good News is that God crowned Christ’s loving and sacrificial death on the cross with the mighty, fate-transforming gift of the resurrection.

Like many others before him in the long tradition of the Church, east and west, Pope Francis sees in Jesus’ words on the cross a particularly intense moment of revelation. Thus, he understands Jesus’ words to his mother Mary and his disciple John—that they should accept one another as mother and son—not simply as an expression of Jesus’ concern for his mother’s future.



Rather (these words reveal)... the mystery of a special saving mission. Jesus left us his mother to be our mother. Only after doing so did Jesus know that "all was now finished" (John 19:28). At the foot of the cross, at the supreme hour of the new creation, Christ led us to Mary. He brought us to her because he did not want us to journey without a mother, and our people read in this maternal image all the mysteries of the Gospel. (285)

And so this letter about missionary discipleship ends with a prayer to Mary, "the Mother of the living Gospel", as Pope Francis calls her. Perhaps the members of your group would take turns praying it, a few lines at a time.

*Mary, Virgin and Mother,
you who, moved by the Holy Spirit,
welcomed the word of life
in the depths of your humble faith:
as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One,
help us to say our own "yes"
to the urgent call, as pressing as ever,
to proclaim the good news of Jesus.*

*Filled with Christ's presence
you brought joy to John the Baptist,
making him exult in the womb of his mother.
Brimming over with joy, you sang of the great things done by God.
Standing at the foot of the cross with unyielding faith,
you received the joyful comfort of the resurrection,
and joined the disciples in awaiting the Spirit
so that the evangelizing Church might be born.*

*Obtain for us a new ardour born of the resurrection
that we may bring to all the Gospel of life which triumphs over death.
Grant us a holy courage to seek new paths,
that this gift of unfading beauty may reach every man and woman.*



*Virgin of listening and contemplation,
Mother of love, Bride of the eternal wedding feast,
pray for the Church, whose pure icon you are,
that she may never be closed in on herself,
or lose her passion for establishing God's kingdom.*

*Star of the new evangelization, help us to bear radiant witness
to communion, service, ardent and generous faith,
justice and love of the poor,
so that the joy of the Gospel may reach to the ends of the Earth,
illuminating even the fringes of our world.*

*Mother of the living Gospel,
wellspring of happiness for God's little ones,
Pray for us.*

Amen. Alleluia!



Now What?

Joy. Poverty. A church that is poor and is for the poor. Mercy. Building communion amid disagreement so that tensions can lead to diversified and life-giving unity. Dialogue. Witness. The delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing. Peace. The deep breath of prayer. Going forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the peripheries in need of the light of the Gospel. Transforming the world.

Pope Francis has proposed quite an agenda! It makes sense only in terms of Resurrection hope and “firm trust in the Holy Spirit who helps us in our weakness.”

The Joy of the Gospel which you have been reading and discussing asks all of us some radical questions. It is likely to plant desires in your heart and questions in your mind that could be too life-changing to handle in a small group. But your questions might be very important. They might be hints from the Holy Spirit who needs every one of us to pray and act if the vision of renewal is to come true in our time.

Does your life need to change to enable you to play your own best role in the renewal for which Pope Francis longs? For example: does *The Joy of the Gospel* leave you feeling invited to join an existing group or movement that is already “in mission”?

The Joy of the Gospel also reveals a vast need for new initiatives. From your life experience you will know of areas of unmet need that speak to your heart and mind. Are you being called by the Holy Spirit to take the leadership in starting a new group, or building up a new institution?

How does your heart respond to the Pope’s passionate summons to make solidarity with the poor central to your own life and to the life of every Christian community? Where is the right place for you to intensify this commitment to share the best of what we have with those who are poor, suffering or excluded?

Sometimes it’s the interior changes, inside your own spirit, that we hardly even know how to ask for. When Pope Francis speaks about the abounding joy and trust that flow from belonging to Jesus, do you get the feeling you have been missing something important? If so, do you need to talk to someone—perhaps your pastor, a spiritual director or a trusted friend who is rich in faith—so that you can respond to who Jesus wants to be in your life?

May God’s holy Spirit give us all the courage and faith to “lead a new life” according to God’s invitation, in the energy that comes from the redeeming love of Jesus.



Established in 2007, the Jesuit Forum for Social Faith and Justice wants to make a difference. We engage people in deeper thinking and sharing on what's going on in the world, starting with their own experience.

While we humans are social beings who depend on community, many of us experience isolation and a sense of powerlessness that leaves us disengaged in the face of a chaotic world. The daily headlines warn us of failing democracies, conflict and unpredictable environmental changes. This creates fear, often unexpressed, and a preoccupation with personal security. Social media compound this by replacing depth in communication with information overload that can overwhelm us.

To achieve its goal of building a better world, the Jesuit Forum brings together small groups of people who want to—and can—make a difference to reflect, share and speak openly and honestly on a range of issues. Through active listening and dialogue—two critical skills Jesuit Forum participants practise—these small groups work to build trust and foster effective decision-making in confronting injustices.

The hope is that this trust-building approach will counteract the growing privatization of peoples' faith and deepest convictions. Rather, it fosters friendship, energy, enthusiasm and a deeper understanding of the world in which we live. The Jesuit Forum helps to uncover creative solutions that are within us and direct them outward, helping us determine what we can do with others to build a better world.

In addition to facilitating small groups, the Jesuit Forum also produces materials that help groups discern the “signs of the times” and understand the complexities of the many social and ecological justice issues we face.

This publication and another recent workbook, *Living with Limits, Living Well! Hints for neighbours on an endangered planet*, are both grounded in Catholic Social Teaching and published by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Visit our website to discover *Open Space*, our regular publication that you can download in PDF format.



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An authentic faith, which is never comfortable or completely personal, always involves a deep desire to change the world.

Pope Francis



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