

STUDY GUIDE

Blueprint for the Church



Chapter 1 Background and context

It is almost 50 years since the closing of the Second Vatican Council, when bishops from all over the world gathered and drew up a 'charter' for communicating the unchanging message of the Gospel in a language and manner that would touch our hearts and minds and call us to conversion.

In the intervening period, there have been many calls for Church renewal. Apart from the documents of the Council itself, however, hardly any other papal document has received as much attention, whether inside or outside the Catholic Church, as Pope Francis's Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), published in 2013.

With *The Joy of the Gospel* we encounter the distinctive approach of Pope Francis and the direction in which he wishes to lead the Church. Pope Francis' open, straightforward and 'down to earth' style of communication, visible at his weekly audiences at the Vatican and in the reports from his daily masses, has made *The Joy of the Gospel* an international bestseller.

A Pope committed to conversion and renewal

The Synod that preceded the publication of *The Joy of the Gospel* took place from October 7-28, 2012 in Rome with the theme: 'The New Evangelisation for the Transmission of the Christian Faith'. It was convened by Pope Benedict XVI and was attended by almost 350 bishops, heads of religious orders, experts and observers.

The Joy of the Gospel is generally referred to as a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, but this is not entirely accurate because nowhere does the document describe itself as such. Pope Francis says in paragraph 16 that it follows on from the Synod, and draws upon the Synod's work, but officially it is an "Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father, Francis, to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World".

“Brimming with enthusiasm for mission, the Pope exudes passion for the transmission of the Faith on every page”

Pope Francis was not at the Synod on the New Evangelisation, and while he clearly draws upon its conclusions, he also draws extensively upon his previous work among the Latin American Bishops, and especially a charter for renewal they

With just weeks until Pope Francis is in Dublin for the World Meeting of Families, attention is focusing on his teachings and what his message will be to the Church in Ireland. Over the next four weeks, *The Irish Catholic* will publish study guides to the Pope's landmark documents – this week, *Blueprint for the Church*.



drew up in 2007 at a major conference at Aparecida in Brazil.

At Aparecida, the two key issues for renewal were identified as replenishing the vigour and enthusiasm of pastoral workers, priests and lay, and putting the entire Church on a missionary footing. As we will see, these are also the two key objectives of *The Joy of the Gospel*. Pope Francis is also heavily influenced by an earlier post-synodal exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Paul VI, 1975), which he has described as "the greatest pastoral document that has ever been written to this day" and as having not lost any of its timeliness. It is no accident that his exhortation

bears a similar name to this earlier one.

The key word in the subtitle, "the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world", is proclamation. The focus is upon the joy of proclaiming the Gospel, the urgency of doing so, an identification of the obstacles that prevent us proclaiming the Good News, and concrete proposals in regard to how these might be tackled. For people engaged in the mission of the Church these proposals are radical, challenging and potentially life-changing.

Brimming with enthusiasm for mission, the Pope exudes passion for the transmission of the Faith on

every page. Littered with colloquial phrases, metaphors and musings, *The Joy of the Gospel* is written very much in Pope Francis' distinctly personal style.

Pope Francis is interested in identifying and pointing the way in terms of the transformation, personal and structural, we must all undergo if the Church is to remain faithful to its mission of proclaiming the Gospel. He outlines several concrete guidelines, which "can encourage and guide the whole Church in a new phase of evangelisation, one marked by enthusiasm and vitality".

In this context, the Pope discusses at length the following questions:

- the reform of the Church in her missionary outreach;
- the temptations faced by pastoral workers;
- the Church, understood as the entire People of God which evangelises;
- the homily and its preparation;
- the inclusion of the poor in society; peace and dialogue within society;
- (the) spiritual motivations for mission.

Chapter 1 focuses on the missionary renewal of the Church, including the papacy. It is a call to concentrate on the essentials of faith. When we look at the Church through the lens of mission, certain priorities come clearly into focus and other matters we come to recognise as being of secondary importance.

Chapter 2 provides in the first part an overview of the realities affecting the majority of people on our planet who live in poverty, and economic and social exclusion. It is a prophetic call to all Catholics to solidarity and shared commitment. The second part of this chapter details the temptations faced by pastoral workers that weaken commitment and undermine vocation.

“The focus is upon the joy of proclaiming the Gospel, the urgency of doing so...”

Chapter 3 takes up the Exhortation's subtitle: it is about proclaiming the Gospel, a proclamation that is intended to reach all, and in which all Christians have a part to play.

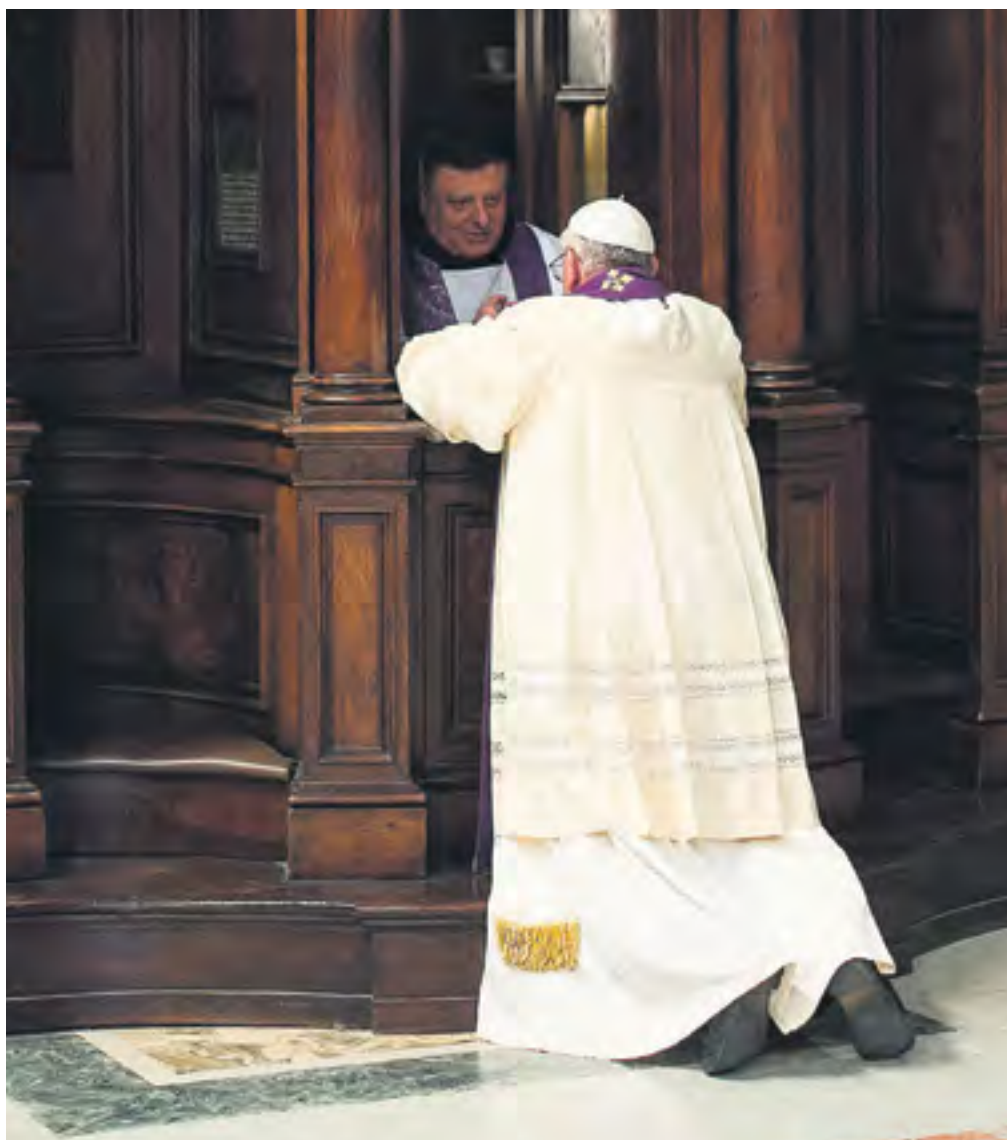
Chapter 4 explores the social dimensions of evangelisation and how the Good News challenges injustices and social exclusion. Here Pope Francis also outlines principles for advancing dialogue and mutual understanding that have developed in the course of his ministry.

Chapter 5, the final chapter, challenges us to have a living, spirit-filled faith, open and responsive to the Church's mission, and reflects on Mary as the Mother of Evangelisation.

The Joy of the Gospel is a truly remarkable and radical document, one that ranges widely and challenges complacency at every level. It offers us powerful challenges and shows that in Francis we have a Pope who cannot be neatly slotted into narrow categories. Ultimately it is Francis' manifesto, a Magna Carta for Church renewal, a renewal underway since Vatican II but which received a new and distinctive impetus in the 2013 conclave when the cardinals elected Jorge Mario Bergoglio who took the name Francis.

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A clergyman hears confession from Pope Francis during a penitential liturgy in St Peter's Basilica. Pope Francis surprised his liturgical adviser by going to confession during the service.



Chapter 2 Francis, in his own words

Jesus Christ

"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 unfailingly each day..."

The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realise that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms." (3)

Divine love and forgiveness

"How good it feels to come back to him whenever we are lost! Let me say this once more: God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy..."

"Time and time again he bears us on his shoulders. No one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by (God's) boundless and unfailing love. With a tenderness which 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. May nothing inspire more than his life, which impels us onwards..." (3)

A permanent state of mission

"... 'today missionary activity still represents the greatest challenge for the Church' and 'the missionary task must remain foremost'. What

would happen if we were to take these words seriously? ... We 'cannot passively and calmly wait in our church buildings'; we need to move 'from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry.'" (15)

"I dream of a 'missionary option', that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelisation of today's world rather than for her self-preservation." (27)

“Frequently, we act as controllers of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse”

"I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are. 'Mere administration' can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be 'permanently in a state of mission.'" (25)

"Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: 'We have always done it this way'. I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities." (33)

Invitation into the Church's sacramental life

"The Church is called to be the house

of the Father, with doors always wide open. One concrete sign of such openness is that our church doors should always be open, so that if someone, moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she will not find a closed door. This is especially true of the sacrament which is itself 'the door': baptism..."

"The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak. These convictions have pastoral consequences that we are called to consider with prudence and boldness..."

"Frequently, we act as controllers of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems." (47)

Conversion of the Papacy

"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 evangelisation..." (32)

A Church of the streets

"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 and then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures." (49)

Overcoming defeatism

"One of the more serious temptations which stifles boldness and zeal is a defeatism which turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, 'sourpusses'. Nobody can go off to battle unless he is fully convinced of victory beforehand. If we start without confidence, we have already lost half the battle and we bury our talents." (85)

Overcoming internal divisions

"It always pains me greatly to discover how some Christian communities, and even consecrated persons, can tolerate different forms of enmity, division, calumny, defamation, vendetta, jealousy and the desire to impose certain ideas at all costs, even to persecutions which appear as veritable witch hunts. Whom are we going to evangelise if this is the way we act?" (100)

The indispensable contribution of women

"The Church acknowledges the indispensable contribution which women make to society through the sensitivity, intuition and other distinctive skill sets which they, more than men, tend to possess. I think, for example, of the special concern which women show to others, which finds a particular, even if not exclusive, expression in motherhood. I readily acknowledge that many women share pastoral responsibilities with priests, helping to guide people, families and groups and offering new contributions to theological reflection. But we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church..." (103)



Then US President Barack Obama shakes hands with Pope Francis during a private audience at the Vatican in March, 2014.

A Church which is 'poor and for the poor'

"They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the sensus fidei, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelised by them. The new evangelisation is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the centre of the Church's pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them." (198)





"No one must say that they cannot be close to the poor because their own lifestyle demands more attention to other areas. This is an excuse commonly heard in academic, business or professional, and even ecclesial circles. While it is quite true that the essential vocation and mission of the lay faithful is to strive that earthly realities and all human activity may be transformed by the Gospel, none of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice..." (201)

"Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades." (2)

The Parish: community of communities

"The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration..."

"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..."

"We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented." (28)

Ecclesial movements

"Frequently they bring a new evangelising fervour and a new capacity for dialogue with the world whereby the Church is renewed..."

"But it will prove beneficial for them not to lose contact with the rich reality of the local parish and to participate readily in the overall pastoral activity of the particular Church. This kind of integration will prevent them from concentrating

only on part of the Gospel or the Church, or becoming nomads without roots." (29)

Bishops to foster communion

"The bishop must always foster this missionary communion in his diocesan Church, following the ideal of the first Christian communities, in which the believers were of one heart and one soul. To do so, he will sometimes go before his people, pointing the way and keeping their hope vibrant. At other times, he will simply be in their midst with his unassuming and merciful presence. At yet other times, he will have to walk after them, helping those who lag behind and – above all – allowing the flock to strike out on new paths." (31)

The family in crisis

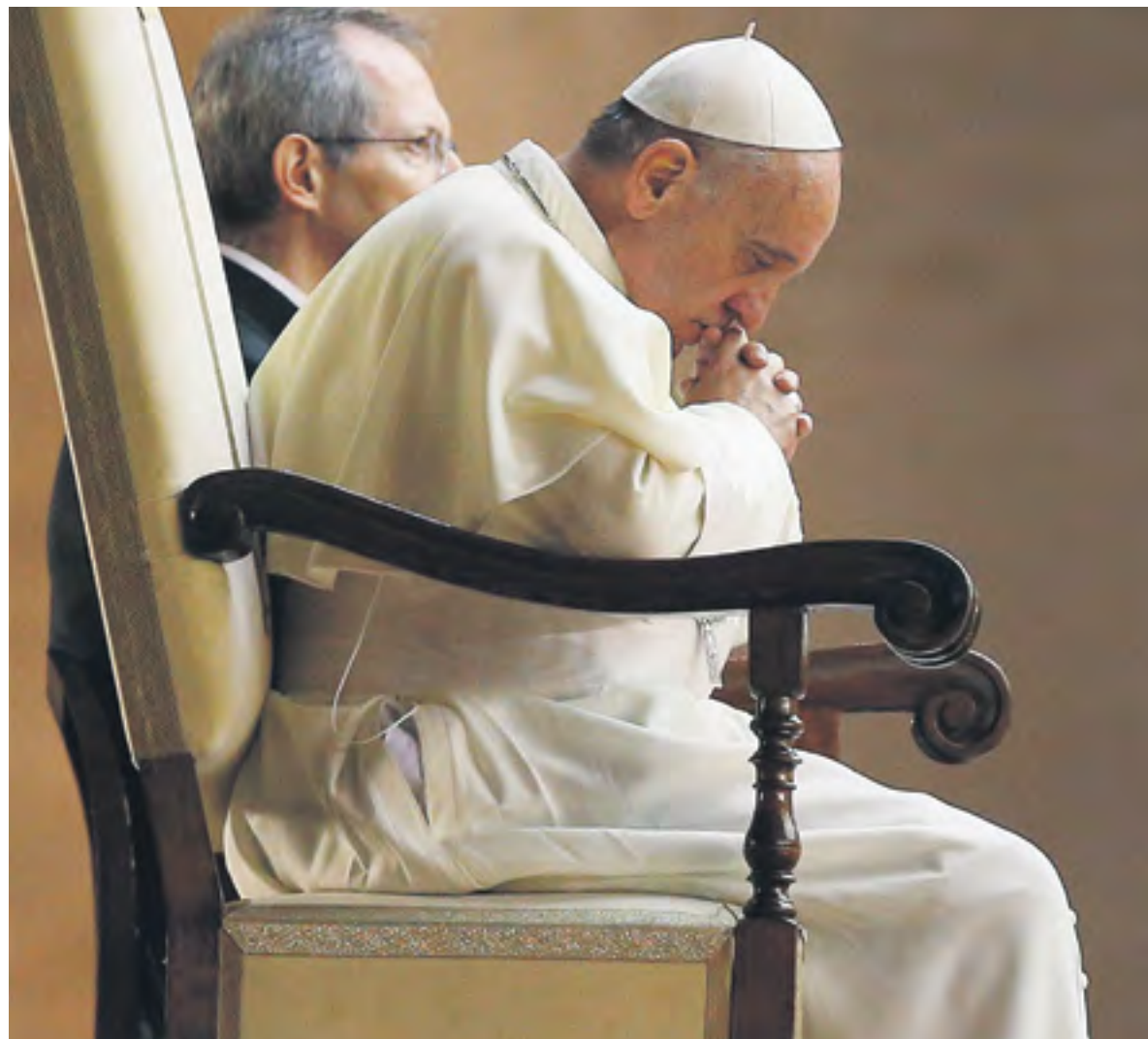
"The family is experiencing a profound cultural crisis, as are all communities and social bonds. In the case of the family, the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the Faith to their children." (66)

The priesthood as service

"The ministerial priesthood is one means employed by Jesus for the service of his people, yet our great dignity derives from baptism, which is accessible to all..."

"The configuration of the priest to Christ the head – namely, as the principal source of grace – does not imply an exaltation which would set him above others..."

"The reservation of the priesthood to males, as a sign of Christ the Spouse who gives himself in the Eucharist, is not a question open to discussion, but it can prove especially divisive if sacramental power is too closely identified with power in general." (104)



The indispensable contribution of marriage

"Marriage now tends to be viewed as a form of mere emotional satisfaction that can be constructed in any way or modified at will. But the indispensable contribution of marriage to society transcends the feelings and momentary needs of the couple." (66)

Vocations

"Wherever there is life, fervour and a desire to bring Christ to others, genuine vocations will arise. Even in parishes where priests are not particularly committed or joyful, the fraternal life and fervour of

the community can awaken in the young a desire to consecrate themselves completely to God and to the preaching of the Gospel. This is particularly true if such a living community prays insistently for vocations and courageously proposes to its young people the path of special consecration." (107)

"On the other hand, despite the scarcity of vocations, today we are increasingly aware of the need for a better process of selecting candidates to the priesthood. Seminaries cannot accept candidates on the basis of any motivation whatsoever, especially if those motivations have to do with affective insecurity or the pursuit of power, human glory

or economic well-being." (107)

Catholic education

"Catholic schools, which always strive to join their work of education with the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, are a most valuable resource for the evangelisation of culture, even in those countries and cities where hostile situations challenge us to greater creativity in our search for suitable methods." (134)

Unborn children

"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. Frequently, as a way of ridiculing the Church's effort to defend their lives, attempts are made to present her position as ideological, obscurantist and conservative. Yet this defence of unborn life is closely linked to the defence of each and every other human right. It involves the conviction that a human being is always sacred and inviolable, in any situation and at every stage of development. Human beings are ends in themselves and never a means of resolving other problems..."

"Precisely because this involves the internal consistency of our message about the value of the human person, the Church cannot be expected to change her position on this question. I want to be completely honest in this regard. This is not something subject to alleged reforms or 'modernisations'. It is not 'progressive' to try to resolve prob-



lems by eliminating a human life..." (212-213)

Politics

"I ask God to give us more politicians capable of sincere and effective dialogue aimed at healing the deepest roots – and not simply the appearances – of the evils in our world! Politics, though often denigrated, remains a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good."

"It is vital that government leaders and financial leaders take heed and broaden their horizons, working to ensure that all citizens have dignified work, education and health-care. Why not turn to God and ask him to inspire their plans? I am firmly convinced that openness to the transcendent can bring about a new political and economic mindset which would help to break down the wall of separation between the economy and the common good of society." (205)

Consumerism

"Today's economic mechanisms promote inordinate consumption, yet it is evident that unbridled consumerism combined with inequality proves doubly damaging to the social fabric." (60)

Criticising Global Indifference

"To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a globalisation of indifference has developed. Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else's responsibility and not our own." (54)

Challenging economic injustice

"In this context, some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world..." (54)

“Nor does true peace act as a pretext for justifying a social structure which silences or appeases the poor”

"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 efficient way of interacting which, with due regard for the sovereignty of each nation, ensures the economic well-being of all countries, not just of a few." (206)



Pope Francis greets the crowd as he arrives to lead his general audience in St Peter's Square.

"Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved? Where is the brother and sister whom you are killing each day 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! This infamous network of crime is now well established in our cities, and many people have blood on their hands as a result of their comfortable and silent complicity" (211)

Against income inequality

"While the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few. This imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation..." (56)

Pope Francis washes the foot of a prison inmate during the Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper at Rome's Casal del Marmo prison for minors.



Widespread corruption

"Debt and the accumulation of interest also make it difficult for countries to realise the potential of their own economies and keep citizens from enjoying their real purchasing power. To all this we can add widespread corruption and self-serving tax evasion, which have taken on worldwide dimensions." (56)

Peace

"Peace in society cannot be understood as pacification or the mere absence of violence resulting from the domination of one part of society over others. Nor does true peace act as a pretext for justifying a social structure which silences or appeases the poor, so that the more affluent can placidly support their lifestyle while others have to make do as they can..." (218)

Education

"We are living in an information-

driven society which bombards us indiscriminately with data – all treated as being of equal importance – and which leads to remarkable superficiality in the area of moral discernment. In response, we need to provide an education which teaches critical thinking and encourages the development of mature moral values." (64)

"Universities are outstanding environments for articulating and developing (an) evangelising commitment in an interdisciplinary and integrated way. Catholic schools, which always strive to join their work of education with the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, are a most valuable resource for the evangelisation of culture, even in those countries and cities where hostile situations challenge us to greater creativity in our search for suitable methods." (134)

Being prophetic

"The dignity of the human person

and the common good rank higher than the comfort of those who refuse to renounce their privileges. When these values are threatened, a prophetic voice must be raised." (218)

Prayer

"...without prayer all our activity risks being fruitless and our message empty. Jesus wants evangelisers 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. Even so, 'we must reject the temptation to offer a privatised and individualistic spirituality which ill accords with the demands of charity, to say nothing of the implications of the incarnation'. There is always the risk that some moments of prayer can become an excuse for not offering one's life in mission; a privatised lifestyle can lead Christians to take refuge in some false forms of spirituality." (262)

Chapter 3 Understanding Pope Francis' Approach

First, proclaim God's saving love

Following the path set by the Second Vatican Council, *The Joy of the Gospel* confronts the contemporary realities of modern life and identi-

fies both the opportunities and the obstacles these present for Christian proclamation today.

We cannot underestimate the significance of the fact that the Church is now being led by someone from outside of Europe, the first time this has happened in almost thirteen hundred years. The majority of the world's Catholics now live in Africa and Latin America; they are poor and live in cities, often without even the basics in terms of education and health-care. Pope Francis' approach is understandably heavily influenced by his experience of being a pastor in the developing world.

Pope Francis' approach to evangelisation is pragmatic. As a son of Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, and as a faithful servant of the Church, he deeply understands and accepts what is required to live the Christian life faithfully. At the same time, as a priest and a pastor with decades of practical pastoral experience and insight into the realities and complexities of the human condition, and furthermore, as a man of deep personal prayer, he has a keen sense of what 'works', and doesn't 'work', in enabling people to encounter Christ and live their lives according to the Gospel.

“We need to be realistic and not assume that our audience understands the full background to what we are saying”

As Pope Francis sees it, God's love and mercy are not 'bargaining chips' to be used in the battle to win people's compliance with the demands of the Gospel. We have to speak of the demands of the Gospel in a context. That context is the mercy and love of God. This precedes our response to the moral demands of the Gospel and enables our fidelity, a fidelity which, even at its best, remains flawed and fragile.

Early on in *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis explains that to place the emphasis on the prior gift of God's unconditional mercy and love is exactly what he means when he asks us to transpose all our activity into 'a missionary key':

"If we attempt to put all things in a missionary key, this will also affect the way we communicate the message. 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." (34)

Begin with the essentials

Essentially, Pope Francis' view seems to be that there has been poor and inadequate formation in Christian doctrine, especially for adults. More



Pope Francis embraces Vinicio Riva, 53, during his general audience in St Peter's Square. Riva, who is afflicted with neurofibromatosis, said receiving the Pope's embrace was like being in paradise.

fundamentally, there has not been sufficient initiation in to a deep and personal encounter with the living Christ, an encounter which gives the moral demands of the Gospel their legitimacy and renders them compelling.

"We need to be realistic and not assume that our audience understands the full background to what we are saying, or is capable of relating what we say to the very heart of the Gospel which gives it meaning, beauty and attractiveness." (34)

"Pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed. When we adopt a pastoral goal and a missionary style which would actually reach everyone without exception or exclusion, the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary. The message is simplified, while losing none of its depth and truth, and thus becomes all the more forceful and

convincing." (35)

Since the Council, papal teaching has stressed that evangelisation must focus on bringing about a personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

Pope Francis stresses repeatedly the centrality of bringing about this personal encounter repeatedly in *The Joy of the Gospel*.

This encounter is mediated in and through the sacramental life of the faith community, but also in a particular way in the encounter with the poor and those on the peripheries (88). From the beginning of his ministry Pope Francis has spoken of the importance of Christians contributing to a 'culture of encounter' (220) in which they themselves would be confronted with the newness of God who "inspires, provokes, guides and accompanies in a thousand ways". (12)

Humility and respect for the complex situations that face people

As an experienced pastor, Pope

Francis is keenly aware of the need for the Church to acknowledge the wrong that has been done by some of its representatives in its name. This requires the Church to be humble in how it approaches the task of evangelisation.

“The Church is a community growing in faith as it journeys through time”

Speaking at the Synod on the New Evangelisation, Adolfo Nicolás SJ, Father General of the Jesuits, called for a humbler Church, pointing out that previous efforts at evangelisation had not sufficiently "found God in all things". Such efforts had not been open to the "surprise factor" of the Holy Spirit who is at work in cultures before the Gospel reaches them, "and who makes the seed grow even while the farmer is asleep or the missionary is absent". He suggested that the lack of sufficient respect for cultures that we sought

to evangelise meant that there was a failure to harvest new insights and discoveries in regard to the Good News already working in the people we encountered.

Not surprisingly, Pope Francis endorses this perspective in *The Joy of the Gospel* when he writes: "God's word is unpredictable in its power. The Gospel speaks of a seed which once sown, grows by itself, even as the farmer sleeps (Mk 4:26-29). The Church has to accept this unruly freedom of the word, which accomplishes what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking." (22)

Humility is needed for a second reason. There is a need to acknowledge the complex human predicaments in which people find themselves, and which call in the first instance for acts of mercy, rather than words of judgment and condemnation. As a pastor who has always been close to people, Pope Francis knows that people grow more readily when they experience love and respect than fear and criticism. It is in this context that the much reported comment "Who am I to judge?" made by Pope Francis in an interview is to be understood.

Enabling people to grow

Related to exercising humility and showing respect, Pope Francis also speaks countless times of spiritual growth as a gradual process, one that takes patient commitment, time, and careful nurturing.

The capacity to grow is a gift of God who alone "gives the growth" (12, 1 Cor 3:7). We cannot expect to become flawless (151), yet as Christians we are expected to commit ourselves to continual personal and spiritual growth (69).

The purpose of all catechesis, and education generally, is growth (163, 166, 168, 169). The clearest sign that we have achieved growth in our spiritual lives is our willingness to go forth from ourselves in service to our brothers and sisters (179).

The Church is a community growing in faith as it journeys through time (161). It is called to continual growth in its understanding of the Gospel and in discerning the promptings of the Holy Spirit (15, 40, 45). Facilitating growth is one of the key tasks of the parish community (28).

The enemy of spiritual growth is individualism (235).

Enabling growth involves, on the one hand, recognition and acceptance of the reality of people's lives and "where they are at", while, on the other, gently confronting them with the possibilities of a much richer life based on the truth and goodness which can only be found in the Gospel (9). It also involves being always ready to leave behind securities and comfort zones and "go forth", Abraham-like, to new lands (20). The theme of leaving, departing, exiting, is a common one in *The Joy of the Gospel*.

'Tough' love for pastors and ministers

A central theme of *The Joy of the Gospel* is the reinvigoration of pas-

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Pope Francis baptises an infant in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican. The pope baptised 32 children during the celebration on the feast of the Baptism of the Lord.



toral workers. Pastors and ministers have a special responsibility for the growth of others (15) and should show mercy and patience as they accompany them (164). In particular, Pope Francis warns against the confessional being experienced as a “torture chamber” (44).

Pastors must also attend to their own personal and spiritual growth. (This was a key theme at the synod as well). Their love of the Word of God must continue to mature in its intensity (149). They must never forget that they themselves are also in need of continuing evangelisation (164).

It is clear, in his view, that to those who have been given much, much more is expected. Readers will be struck by how hard Pope Francis is on priests, bishops, religious and other evangelisers. He warns about not succumbing to defeatism and becoming “querulous and pessimistic sourpusses” (85) or going about looking like they have just come from a funeral (10).

Drawing on his experience both as a member of a religious order and as a diocesan bishop, Pope Francis also warns against ministers seeking spiritual worldliness and personal or political gain (95), or “warring among ourselves”. (98)

Clearly he is keenly aware of the need to improve the quality of homilies and gives detailed instructions for preachers to follow (135-149). The richness of the homily is a key indicator of the quality of the preacher’s own prayer life and the sincerity of his pastoral commitment. His words should “set hearts on fire” (142), and always begin with the proclamation of salvation before drawing moral consequences.

He cautions pastors against using the sacraments as “instruments of power” (104). Overall, being a minister in Pope Francis’ church is meant to be demanding and challenging. Everything we do is to be in a “missionary key” (33, 34). We are to leave our comfort zone (20), be open to continual pastoral and ministerial

conversion (25), and avoid settling for mere administration (25) or for doing things the way we always did them (33). In one of several military-type allusions, he criticises those “who are content to have a modicum of power and would prefer be the general of a defeated army than a mere private in a unit which continues to fight” (96).

Those whose task it is to evangelise are to seek out and take upon themselves the “smell of the sheep” (24), a phrase Pope Francis also used in the *Civiltà Cattolica* interview. We should be very good listeners (171), and exercise a particular duty of care for society’s “discards” (195), a theme he also spoke about in his 2014 Lenten address when he focused upon the various forms of destitution in society today.

Pope Francis’ approach to change in the Church

Pope Francis speaks of the need for decentralisation (16) and for local Churches to take responsibility for realising the mission of the Church in their own particular situations and circumstances (30, 33). He calls for greater collegiality (32, 247), and he puts collegiality into practice by citing texts from several bishops’ conferences around the world, thus effectively endorsing their teaching authority, the first time ever that this has been a key feature of a papal document.

Pope Francis states clearly the kind of Church he wants to see, “a Church which is poor and for the poor” (198). A permanent state of mission, evangelisation, catechesis and service of the poor, are to be the identifying marks of a Church living out fully *The Joy of the Gospel*.

Echoing views expressed repeatedly at the Synod on the New Evangelisation, for Pope Francis the laity are to be involved in and to be enabled to participate fully in the work of evangelisation. They should be formed properly for it, and room should be made for them to speak and act (102, 169).

However, Pope Francis’ approach to change is as significant as the changes he proposes. The key concept here is, not unsurprisingly for a Jesuit, ‘discernment’, and several times in *The Joy of the Gospel* Pope Francis urges those in leadership to engage in this process (16, 30, 33, 43, 50, 64, 78, 133, 154, 166). We can therefore safely conclude that discernment is also central to the approach to change being taken by Pope Francis himself, and this can already be seen in the many advisory bodies and committees he has already established.

“It is clear, in his view, that to those who have been given much, much more is expected”

Discernment is only authentic when guided by the Holy Spirit, to whom Pope Francis refers throughout the document. The Holy Spirit is the principal agent of the missionary spirit of the people of God (122) and missionary disciples must always submit themselves to the Holy Spirit’s strength and light (50).

The managing of change needs time, patience, and prayer. Those who think Pope Francis is changing things too quickly, or too slowly, can be reassured that the Ignatian process of discernment lies at the heart of his approach and they are invited to apply that same process in their own consideration of the direction the Church should take.

Finally, it would be wrong to think that apparent indecisiveness or uncertainty on Francis’ part is a sign of weakness. Some level of uncertainty and doubt is necessary as creatures and is a sign of our humility before the mystery of God. As Francis says:

“If a person says that he met God with total certainty and is not touched by a margin of uncertainty, then this is not good. For me, this is an important key. If one has the answers to all the questions - that is

the proof that God is not with him. It means that he is a false prophet using religion for himself” (*Civiltà Cattolica* interview).

Chapter 4 Avoiding misunderstanding Pope Francis

Fair criticism?

From the very beginning of his papal ministry Pope Francis has been criticised by some faithful Catholics for not emphasising sufficiently key aspects of the Church’s moral teaching. He has been accused of relativising and even undermining the importance of the Church’s teaching on certain moral issues such as abortion, contraception, homosexuality and the indissolubility of marriage.

The concern seems to be as follows. Credible witness to the God of love involves not only preaching a Gospel of mercy but also standing up and being counted in the face of the many threats to innocent human life such as abortion and euthanasia, and to the sanctity of marriage and sexuality, especially in contemporary culture. However, Pope Francis’ approach conveys the impression that energetic promotion of the Church’s teaching in these areas is only of relative importance and can be postponed or relegated. So the criticism goes. Is this criticism fair?

In a ‘soundbyte’ communications culture it is very difficult to communicate a complex message without risking distortion. In *The Joy of the Gospel*, most of Pope Francis’ references to the media are, in fact, critical (34, 63, 70, 79, 138). As Archbishop of Buenos Aires he seldom gave interviews. Although clearly aware of the real risk of misrepresentation, as Pope, Francis seems convinced that one must make full use of various popular media to communicate the Gospel.

Protecting human life

Whatever impression has been conveyed at times in the media, and leaving aside who is to blame for this, there is no basis for saying that core moral issues are only of secondary importance to Pope Francis or that he does not see them as the logical consequence of what is revealed in Jesus Christ about the full dignity of the life to which every human being is called. In fact, he has referred to these issues explicitly on several occasions, including in *The Joy of the Gospel* (213-214).

His statements are utterly uncompromising and unambiguous, both in their language and approach.

At the same time the Pope draws our attention to the real human dilemmas in which people find themselves, and calls upon each of us to act to remove the circumstances in which some people feel compelled to take innocent 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?” (214)

Marriage and the family

Pope Francis speaks about the profound cultural crisis affecting marriage, and in particular how “the sacredness of marriage and the stability of the family” are threatened by “negative aspects of the media and entertainment industries” (62).

He points out that marriage “now tends to be viewed as a form of mere emotional satisfaction that can be constructed in any way or modified at will”. “But the indispensable contribution of marriage to society transcends the feelings and momentary needs of the couple,” (66, edited) he says.

Pope Francis’ dedication of two World Synods of Bishops (2014 and 2015) to the issue is evidence that the sanctity and stability of marriage is an immediate priority of his pontificate.

Weakened sense of sin

More generally, Pope Francis, in keeping with his predecessor, Benedict XVI, also speaks of the weakening of the sense of personal and collective sin and a steady increase in moral relativism (64). He stresses that this has led to a general sense of disorientation especially among adolescents and youths. He goes on to say, referring to the US Bishops’ *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care* (2006):

“... while the Church insists on the existence of objective moral norms which are valid for everyone, “there are those in our culture who portray this teaching as unjust, that is, as opposed to basic human rights. Such claims usually follow from a form of moral relativism that is joined, not without inconsistency, to a belief in the absolute rights of individuals. In this view, the Church is perceived as promoting a particu-

lar prejudice and as interfering with individual freedom" (64).

In the same place he notes how the information society can lead to a superficiality in the area of moral discernment and calls for better education in critical thinking and in the development of mature moral values.

Have mercy first

At the same time as he reiterates the objective moral norms, Pope Francis draws our attention to the Second Vatican Council's teaching on the "hierarchy of truths", arguing that there are some moral teachings that are more important than others "for giving direct expression to the heart of the Gospel". "In this basic core", he says, "what shines forth is the beauty of the saving love of God" (36). There is a "hierarchy" among the virtues and what matters most are "works of love directed to one's neighbor". These "are the most perfect external manifestation of the interior grace of the Spirit" (37). Like his predecessors, Pope Francis seeks to connect our concern about the Church's sexual moral teaching to our concern for social justice and our moral responsibility to care for creation.

It is not true that certain contentious moral teachings are unimportant to Pope Francis. It is rather that his own formation as a Jesuit, his personal spiritual journey, and his pastoral experience have convinced him that the Church's teaching on these matters cannot be 'heard' until people have first experienced the love and the mercy of Christ.

“The intention is that, knowing our wretchedness, we will recognise and appreciate, all the more, the power of God's unconditional love”

To understand Pope Francis' approach it is helpful to consider briefly the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. In the first stage of the Exercises we are invited to make a profoundly open and honest assessment of our lives. We are encouraged to be honest and self-aware about our weakness and sinfulness, and our helplessness without God's grace.

This is not, however, an end in itself; a futile exercise in experiencing our wretchedness. Rather, the intention is that, knowing our wretchedness, we will recognise and appreciate, all the more, the power of God's unconditional love. As our awareness of our sinfulness grows, so also does our recognition of the depth of the love of God who pursues us persistently and is not defeated by our failings. In fact, it is only the awareness of being held and sustained by God's love that makes it possible for us to be utterly self-effacing; to be truly honest with ourselves. If we think, for instance, of moments of trauma we have had in our lives: at the time, we probably have not been fully able to grasp just how awful they were, or perhaps how precarious our situation was.



Newly married couples pictured near Swiss Guards as they attend Pope Benedict XVI's general audience in St Peter's Square at the Vatican in 2012.

Only subsequently, from a state of security and safety have we been able to look back and appreciate fully the mess we were in.

Similarly, it is only from the state of knowing ourselves to be loved without limit that we can face the full reality of our lives, "warts and all". We become aware that we are helpless and lost without God, and yet are not crushed by this awareness, because at that same moment we also become aware that we are, in fact, held and embraced by God's mercy.

'Mercy-ing'

Pope Francis' episcopal motto, which he explained in the Jesuit *Civiltà Cattolica* interview, helps us to under-

stand how he has been aware of this dynamic of mercy and love at work in his own life. The motto is *Miserando atque Eligendo* (by having mercy and by choosing him). It is taken from the *Homilies of Bede the Venerable*, referring to the calling of Matthew (Matt 9: 9-13).

Pope Francis has said he likes to translate the Latin *miserando* with (in English) 'mercy-ing' as this conveys the sense of it as something really dynamic and active in one's life.

In Pope Francis' judgment, the gaze of Christ is simultaneously both an experience of love beyond any possible anticipation, and a call to renunciation and conversion. Until people have experienced this gaze, that is, God's 'regard' for them,

the various moral demands of the Gospel cannot really resonate with them. They cannot fully appreciate their own sinfulness and thus the need for repentance and conversion.

Mercy: not an 'optional extra'

The word 'mercy' occurs over thirty times in *The Joy of the Gospel*, and in various contexts. Citing St Thomas Aquinas, Pope Francis refers to it as the greatest of the virtues (37). God's mercy brings about forgiveness (3), overcomes divisions (24) and lifts burdens (43). The experience of God's mercy draws the Church and each of us as individual disciples to respond to the poor, those on the periphery, and those economically

exploited, in order to alleviate their suffering (193, 215, 252).

A sinner Pope?

On several occasions, Pope Francis has acknowledged publicly his sinfulness. In *Civiltà Cattolica*, he speaks of it in answer to the very first question about who he really is: "... I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner."

And he spoke of his reaction on being elected Pope: "And this is what I said when they asked me if I would accept my election as pontiff... I am a sinner, but I trust in the infinite mercy and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ, and I accept in a spirit of penance" (*Civiltà Cattolica* interview).

On Good Friday 2014, Pope Francis broke with tradition by going in full view of others in St Peter's to have his confession heard by one of the ordinary priests rather than in private by his personal confessor.

It has been suggested by some commentators that Pope Francis' emphasis on his sinfulness is a sign of his profound regret for mistakes he made as a young provincial in Argentina. Pope Francis has openly admitted that in his early years in authority he mishandled difficult situations, acted insensitively at times and showed poor judgment. But his emphasis on his sinfulness has much deeper roots than this.

Acknowledging one's sinfulness and trying to learn from mistakes should be a part of every Christian's identity. We recall that St Patrick, for instance, began his Confession with "I, Patrick, a sinner."

But this attitude is central to the Ignatian way, and therefore to be expected of a Jesuit Pope.

In *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis refers to sin and sinfulness countless times, always in the context of God's greater mercy, forgiveness and healing. Acknowledging oneself as a sinner held in a loving



Pope Francis, as bishop, is seen celebrating Mass at the Villa 21-24 slum in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1998.

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Argentine Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, right, now Pope Francis, is pictured traveling by subway in Buenos Aires in 2008.

embrace by Christ who continually pours out divine mercy and love: this is the fundamental message of Ignatius, of Pope Francis, and of *The Joy of the Gospel*.

Chapter 5 Living the Joy of the Gospel

Joy: both the means of proclamation, and its fruit

The title of the Pope's first apostolic exhortation links his ministry back to that of Paul VI and the early stages of the implementation of Vatican II. In 1975, Pope Paul VI issued two exhortations: *Gaudete in Domino* ("Rejoice in the Lord"), and *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, ("Proclaiming the Gospel"). The word "joy", occurs ninety-nine times in *The Joy of the Gospel*; the same frequency with which it features in the Latin-American bishops' Aparecida text of which it is also a central theme.

For Pope Francis, joy is both the means by which we proclaim the Gospel, and that which results from our proclamation, for us and for those to whom we proclaim the Good News. The only way to proclaim faith effectively is with joy in our hearts.

Our joy comes from recognising that God is with us; that even though we are sinners, the Lord has looked upon us with mercy. Joy is the opposite of desolation (2). It is to be found in little things (4). It is a characteristic of genuine discipleship (5) and is often found among the poor (7).

The work of mission and evangelisation fills us with joy (9, 10, 83). Its absence in a Christian is a practical denial of the reality of the resurrection (3, 110, 276-277).

Lack of joy leads to narrowness and self-absorption (8). The enemies of joy are sterile pessimism (84), spiritual sloth, and selfishness (81-83, 275).

Joy is to be distinguished from

pleasure. Pope Francis quotes Pope Paul VI: our "technological society has succeeded in multiplying occasions of pleasure, yet has found it very difficult to engender joy" (7).

The more we are caught up in a calculating world, determined and shaped by the calculus of the marketplace and by consumption, the harder it is to be filled with a sense of joy and be open to being surprised by it.

The Word of God, well preached, should fill us with a sense of joy, and set our hearts burning.

How do we live *The Joy of the Gospel* when faced with contentious issues in the public square?

The Pope's most fundamental appeal in *The Joy of the Gospel* is to transform everything we do into a missionary key.

There is a battle on, and in time of battle "special measures" are necessary. At this urgent time of mission we are to concentrate on the essentials. For now, what is essential is to communicate the core of our faith, which is God's unconditional mercy and love; without an understanding and experience of this, some Church teaching can come across as cruel, or simply incomprehensible.

We convey this core message most eloquently by our compassion and mercy, and by radiating the joy that we ourselves experience from responding to the Gospel. If true joy is in our hearts, we can trust that we will be given the right words to say (Matt. 10:19). Only an experience of God's mercy and love can transform what might seem like impossible and unreasonable Gospel demands into loving responses to God's ever-greater love.

Thus, Pope Francis urges us to communicate the Church's teaching on important but divisive issues, e.g. abortion or gay marriage "in a context" (34). The context is that the Gospel in its entirety is, literally, Good News. It is meant to be Good News, life-giving and liberating news, not just for some people, but for all.

In approaching difficult topics



in the public square it follows that we should speak as positively as we can. We need to avoid getting locked into ideological battles that distract and prevent us from proclaiming the Gospel in its entirety. When Church teachings are communicated only piecemeal, their deepest truth can often be distorted or betrayed.

So, to take a current example, same-sex marriage, it is clearly the Pope's view that we should underscore firstly the goodness, beauty and preciousness of marriage between a man and a woman, and the unique role marriage plays in bringing forth and nourishing new human life. From this perspective we can try to show that it makes sense to reserve the term marriage as a special way of protecting this unique relationship in the interests of the common good.

When it comes to abortion, our pleas in the defence of defenceless human life must be matched, as Pope Francis states, by the witness of our concrete accompaniment of women who find themselves in appallingly painful situations and our efforts to address the circumstances that lead to abortion (214).

At the end of the day, Pope Francis expects individual episcopal conferences to deliberate upon what is necessary and appropriate in their particular contexts. As he says, "it is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory" (16). Apart from wishing to put collegiality and decentralisation into practice, Pope Francis recognises that the relationship between faith and culture is multifarious and complex and requires careful and intelligent discernment at grassroots level (30, 33)

How do we personally respond to *The Joy of the Gospel*?

Pope Francis certainly intends us to take his exhortation very seriously. He sees it as a set of guidelines directing the Church into a new phase of evangelisation (17). He expressly says that his document "has a programmatic significance and important consequences" (25).

At the same time, paradoxically, a key element of his message is that we are to take responsibility ourselves, all of us, for the evangelisation of the local Church to which we belong. As he sees it, we should not be expecting the papal magisterium to offer "a definitive or complete word on every question which affects the Church and the world" (16).

Pope Francis is calling all Christians to a new level of seriousness and personal maturity in regard to our faith and our day-to-day spirituality. In a strikingly straightforward and insightful manner he knocks on the head many of the ways we can allow our faith to become merely a private and individualistic comfort blanket (262). He also clearly names and shames the ways we can seek to avoid responsibility for the renewal of the Church and engage in various kinds of blame games.

Conclusion

The Joy of the Gospel is an essential guide to becoming a missionary disciple. We hope that this introduction encourages people to read the exhortation itself and has assured them in regard to its accessibility.

No one can read *The Joy of the Gospel* carefully without coming away feeling deeply challenged

personally about the integrity and authenticity of their faith. But this challenge is presented in the context of an invitation to an ever-deeper appreciation of and trust in God's mercy, healing, compassion and love.

So we respond most fundamentally to *The Joy of the Gospel* by allowing our lives to be more fully rooted in God's mercy, healing, compassion and love. This happens in honest prayer, and in activities of service and self-giving that build up our "spiritual muscle", and that give us regular experiences of the joy that living according to the Gospel brings. In this way we play our part in the renewal of the Church and the building up of the kingdom in accordance with our gifts, and the opportunities the Holy Spirit gives us.

Acknowledgments

The following texts have been particularly helpful:

Evangelii Gaudium (*The Joy of the Gospel*) by Vatican Press, <http://www.vatican.va/evangelii-gaudium/en/>

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