

Joy of the Gospel Study and Action Guide

Working on issues of justice in federal policy is sometimes frustrating and spirit-grinding work. It is difficult to stay hopeful in the face of such governmental dysfunction. One of our members said to us, "How can you be joyful in this mess?" Pope Francis underscores the call to joy in this work by calling us to remember that God's love is the reason we work for justice. When we live in love, we can't be anything but joyful.

In our extremely rich and privileged society it is sometimes easy to forget that it is God's work that we are about. More often I think it is about my control or my project. *Joy of the Gospel* reminds us that "Goodness always tends to spread. Every authentic experience of truth and goodness seeks by its very nature to grow within us, and any person who has experienced a profound liberation becomes more sensitive to the needs of others" (9). Because of this Francis says that we who do this work "must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral! Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm" and be "ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ" (10).

A SHARED MISSION FOR THE 100%

"Every authentic experience of truth and goodness seeks by its very nature to grow within us, and any person who has experienced a profound liberation becomes more sensitive to the needs of others" (Joy of the Gospel 10).



We are people rooted in the Gospel and as such know the joy of Christ. It is this joy that we share in our creation of community and the quest for justice. Joy is alive in our midst when we know that the Spirit is with us all the time and will never leave us orphan. This is the joy that is so attractive to many. Despite setbacks and the long, hard road toward justice, gifts are given all along the way. It is the spirit of joy that is the nourishment for the long haul. Together we live in the Spirit, knowing the love of God beyond all understanding.

Sister Simone Campbell, Executive Director



NETWORK's Joy of the Gospel Study and Action Guide: An Introduction

When Argentina's Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected pope March 13, 2013, who could have predicted the whirlwind his papacy's first year would be? Pope Francis is inspiring people in the Church all over the world to live out their Christian identity more authentically, and is engaging non-Catholics in finding common space to share and build community for the betterment of all. To celebrate this fascinating Church leader and to honor NETWORK and Pope Francis's shared dedication to improving the lives of not only "the 47%" or "the 99%," but the 100%, NETWORK is living 2014 as a year of *Joy of the Gospel*.

In the first year of his papacy, Pope Francis has given extensive interviews, delivered numerous thought-provoking homilies, and made public remarks on a number of important topics. This guide specifically addresses Francis's first apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* or *Joy of the Gospel*. Many apostolic exhortations are written in response to a bishops' synod. While *Joy of the Gospel* makes use of the 2012 Synod on the New Evangelization it is not a specifically post-synodal document. Rather than being the basis for *Joy of the Gospel*, the 2012 synod seems to be pretext for Pope Francis' work.

Similar to a papal encyclical in depth and breadth, *Joy of the Gospel* is as unique as Francis himself: it combines theology, social analysis, friendly and very practical advice, and a sense that the Church is on the verge of entering an exciting new era of evangelization, if only the people of faith will embrace the call to holiness. This Study and Action Guide can be used for individual reflection or group study, and will hopefully help build bridges between this inspiring written work and the activist discipleship it joyfully anticipates.

LIVING WITH JOY

"I realize of course that joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at moments of great difficulty. Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved"
(*Joy of the Gospel*)

A Brief Biography of Pope Francis

Pope Francis was born Jorge Mario Bergoglio on December 13, 1936 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the son of Italian immigrants. After graduating as a chemical technician, he entered the seminary. In 1958, he entered the Jesuit novitiate, and after additional studies received philosophy and theology degrees. While studying, he also taught literature and psychology.

He was ordained a priest in 1969 and made his final profession with the Jesuits in 1973. He served as Jesuit Provincial for six years and then as a university rector and parish priest. After completing his doctoral work, he served as a spiritual director and confessor.

In 1992, he was appointed Bishop of Auca and Auxiliary of Buenos Aires by Pope John Paul II. He was named an Archbishop in 1998 and Cardinal in 2001. He became president of the Argentine Bishop's Conference in 2005.

As Archbishop of Buenos Aires, he had a four-point plan: open and familial communities; an informed laity playing a lead role; evangelization efforts targeting everyone in the city; and assistance to those who are poor and sick. When he was elected pope on March 13, 2013, newly named Pope Francis brought that agenda to the global Church.

How to Use This Guide

The intended audiences for this guide include active as well as inactive Catholics, along with Christians and other faith-curious social justice-seekers who are interested in studying the words of Pope Francis.

The Study Guide may be used individually or in a group. Consider engaging the introduction and each chapter on a different occasion to give yourself plenty of time to dive into the pope's thought-provoking work. Each section has a summary of main ideas, followed by questions for reflection.

This guide has two parts: study and action. The Study Guide summarizes each section of *Joy of the Gospel* and offers analysis and questions for reflection, while the Action Guide offers a variety of ways you and your faith community can join NETWORK in living *Joy of the Gospel*.

*To make the most of the Study Guide, you'll need a copy of Pope Francis' *Joy of the Gospel*, which can be found on the Vatican website: www.vatican.va

*Consider keeping a Bible handy to look up passages referenced by Pope Francis throughout the exhortation. A recommended reading list at the end of this Guide lists relevant Church documents cited by Francis, all of which can also be found on the Vatican website www.vatican.va

*Before you start reading, look over the Table of Contents and consider the initial question list.

*The question list at the end of each chapter is geared toward a general audience. Questions in the *Delve Deeper* section in the appendix are oriented toward social justice activists.

* Visit www.networklobby.org/JoyoftheGospel to see NETWORK's plans to live out *Joy of the Gospel*

Joy of the Gospel: What to Expect

Joy of the Gospel is a lengthy document that asks many important questions about the way the Church should serve in the world and the way Christians can live their faith. Pope Francis is writing "to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization" (1). For Pope Francis, this going forth into the world, when grounded in a strong relationship with Jesus, will be marked by joy and have a central goal of improving the lives of those living in poverty. The document combines Pope Francis's obviously deep, authentic love of Jesus with a prophetic rejection of modern economic structures. His message is consistent with long-standing Church teaching, yet feels new and exciting.

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Before Beginning *Joy of the Gospel*

Before you begin reading *Joy of the Gospel*, read the summary and table of contents above. Ask yourself:

- *Which words and ideas sound new to me?
- *Which words and ideas sound familiar to me and where have I heard them before?
- *What catches my interest or particularly intrigues me?
- * How do I currently think about what it means to have joy?
- *Who do I think of when I hear “Church”?
- *What do I think of when I hear “mission”?
- * What do I think of when I hear “evangelization”?
- *What am I hoping to get out of exploring this papal exhortation?
- *Where might I go with questions, if I have them?

A CHURCH GOES FORTH

“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, he has loved us first, and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast...Let us try a little harder to take the first step and to become involved” (Joy of the Gospel 24)



Study Guide: The Introduction

Main Ideas

*Encounters with Jesus set all people of faith and the Church free from burdens such as loneliness and sorrow.

*Christ continually brings joy anew, and the best way to be filled with that joy is to recommit to a relationship with Christ.

*God never tires of forgiving all people, but people may get tired in seeking God's mercy. Mt 18:22

*The Gospel invites us to rejoice in our faith. Encounters with Christ can allow joy and love to grow even in difficult and challenging circumstances.

*Goodness tends to multiply: leading a rich and dignified life means seeking the same for others.

*Preaching and evangelization must be renewed to be effective.

*The new evangelization is for everyone: the ministers of the faith, the faithful, those who may have fallen away from the commitment of their baptism, and those who may never have encountered Christ.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

"You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil" (Isaiah 9:3)

"Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted" (Isaiah 49:13)

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice" (Philippians 4:4)

ADVOCATING FOR THE 100%

"Goodness always tends to spread. Every authentic experience of truth and goodness seeks by its very nature to grow within us, and any person who has experienced a profound liberation becomes more sensitive to the needs of others. As it expands, goodness takes root and develops. If we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good"
(Joy of the Gospel 9)

Questions for Reflection

*As you read the Introduction, what words, phrases, and ideas struck you? Why?

*Can you think of a time when you had an "authentic experience of truth and goodness" (9)? Have you ever experienced goodness multiplying in your life? In your community? How?

*Pope Francis spends a good deal of space in his introduction explaining what he means when he talks about joy. What aspects of his explanation resonate with you? What doesn't make sense?

*Where and how do you find joy? Does your faith bring you joy? If so, how do you share that joy with people around you? Where do you see joy in the communities where you celebrate your faith?

Study Guide: Chapter One

The Church's Missionary Transformation

Main Ideas

*Joy from the Gospel should enliven our work with hope and lightness, and people of faith should not underestimate the power and reach of the Gospel.

*For the Church to be herself authentically, people of faith must build community and invite everyone to experience the joy of the Gospel.

*Discipleship means making your life a witness to a relationship with Jesus.

*The Church needs to focus on going out into the world to build strong communities that are encountering Christ, rather than on her self-preservation. There is an especially important place for parish work, then, which is flexible to the needs of individual communities.

*Pope Francis, using his papacy as an example, would like to see members of the Church hierarchy listen and dialogue with the faithful, as well as use bold and creative thinking to revive missionary work.

*Church structures must serve the heart of the Gospel: we must organize more around grace than law, Christ than Church.

*The Church must be open to any who want to come home and use the Eucharist as an opportunity for healing, not a reward for perfect discipleship.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

“And he said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.’” (Mark 4:28-29)

NETWORK & POPE FRANCIS BOTH WANT:

Creative political solutions:

“I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities” (Joy of the Gospel 33)

Policies that prioritize people living in poverty:

“We have to state, without mincing words, that there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor. May we never abandon them” (Joy of the Gospel 48)

Questions for Reflection

*Pope Francis uses the Gospel to stay energized doing God's work. What energizes you to act on your values?

*Can you recall a time you were sincerely moved by the Gospel? What spoke to you and in what way?

*Are you involved in the life of a congregation or other faith community? Why or why not? How might you become more involved?

*Pope Francis says “works of love directed to one's neighbor are the most perfect external manifestation of the interior grace of the Spirit” (37). Is serving people on the margins directly a part of your life?

*If you are a Christian, do you think acquaintances would know you are a Christian? Do you want them to know? How might your life change if you made new effort to share your faith?

Study Guide: Chapter Two

Amid the Crisis of Communal Commitment

Main Ideas

*Some challenges facing the modern world include a lack of respect for those suffering from an increasingly wide gap between those who have enough and those who do not, as well as unwillingness to use the great advancements of science and technology to serve the common good.

*We must recognize that an economy of exclusion is as much an infringement on the care for and dignity of human life as any other threat. Trickle-down economics and a so-called free market do not serve those living in poverty. We must make better choices to include all.

*The current economy of exclusion is the result of choices we make, which have numbed us to the consequences of unfettered capitalism.

*We must pray for the conversion of those who benefit from this economy, for financial reform, and for an economy that serves rather than rules.

*While those living in poverty are accused of violence, we must recognize that the economy that prevents them from having enough is its own violence, for which we are all responsible.

*There is a threat of empty faith: that Catholicism that does not live from the heart of the Gospel has seemed unwelcoming and isolating to some.

*Education and rich spiritual formation are the antidotes to moral relativism.

*Building stronger families and supportive communities will help address cultural ills; faith must remain at the center of community life and resist the cultural pressure to become “private.”

*While we work toward New Jerusalem, we recognize that urban settings are a breeding ground for injustices, even more difficult to root out for the isolation they create.

*Work should not be separate from life, but an integral part of it.

*Resisting spiritual sloth requires embracing the joy of the Gospel, integrating our missionary work into all areas of our lives, and never becoming numb to the miracle of Jesus in our world.

*A healthy ministry will begin with individuals resisting the temptations of selfishness and jealousy; living a ministry to those on the margins is a balm on our sins.

*A joyful faith is an act of peacemaking and we should respond to difficult relationships with prayers for those who challenge us

*Other ecclesial challenges include clericalism that divides lay and ordained faithful, finding a way to empower women within the Church, capitalizing on the leadership of young people who are giving their lives in volunteering and service. These problems are real, but we must approach them with joy and hope that they will be overcome.

NETWORK & POPE FRANCIS BOTH WANT:

Just tax reform:

“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...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 widespread corruption and self-serving tax evasion, which have taken on worldwide dimensions. The thirst for power and possessions knows no limits (Joy of the Gospel 56)

Questions for Reflection

* What prejudices or preconceived ideas might you hold toward people living in poverty or people who are homeless? How can you begin to break down those barriers to more Christian relationship?

*Do you agree with Pope Francis that advancements in science and technology have disproportionately benefitted the wealthy? Are there advancements in science and technology you would be willing to do without to shift resources toward serving those on the margins?

*Pope Francis makes some frank comments about the free market and trickle-down economics. What do you think? Would you be willing, for example, to pay more for a meal if you knew the server was being paid a just wage? Where else in your life would you be willing to sacrifice for a more just economy?

*How has your family or community been a place of healing for you? Where else have you seen families and communities heal their members?

*If you live in a city, what are some ways you see isolation keeping people from connecting? How can you answer Pope Francis's challenge to see the ills of urban life more clearly?

*How do you feel about the work or hobby you spend the most time on? Does it energize you and add meaning to your life? Does it feel separate from the things in life you truly enjoy?

*Pope Francis lists difficult challenges we need to overcome to build a more just Church (clericalism and sexism, for example). How do you see these challenges in your parish or community? How do they make you feel? What are some first steps to addressing these challenges? How can you answer them, as Pope Francis suggests, with joy and hope?

NETWORK & POPE FRANCIS BOTH WANT:

Equal pay for equal work:

“A financial reform open to such ethical considerations would require a vigorous change of approach on the part of political leaders. I urge them to face this challenge with determination and an eye to the future, while not ignoring, of course, the specifics of each case. Money must serve, not rule!”(Joy of the Gospel 58)

More women in leadership roles:

“The Church acknowledges the indispensable contribution which women make to society through the sensitivity, intuition...Because ‘the feminine genius is needed in all expressions in the life of society, the presence of women must also be guaranteed in the workplace’ and in the various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures.”(Joy of the Gospel 103)

Study Guide: Chapter Three

The Proclamation of the Gospel

Main Ideas

- *Being God's people means being leaven for the world, giving hope and strength as we journey.
- *God calls to each of us with the joys of community and missionary discipleship is the most natural and rewarding response Mt 28: 18.
- *Cultural diversity is a gift to embrace; the Church should joyfully celebrate the variety of gifts the Holy Spirit pours into the world's many cultures.
- *By virtue of our baptism, all people of faith are missionary disciples. We all need to be always evangelized to deepen our faith and commitment.
- *Expressed in the form of prayer and worship inspired by culture, popular piety is an invitation from the Holy Spirit.
- *Informal preaching is present in all personal relationship, and relationship is the foundation on which all evangelization should be built.
- *All of society needs evangelizing, including professional, scientific, and academic circles.
- *Homilies need to add life and meaning to the liturgy. They should be thoughtfully prepared, connect the Gospel to the lives of the faithful, and build a bridge between the heart of the Gospel and the heart of the community.

NETWORK & POPE FRANCIS BOTH WANT:

Thriving communities:

"The salvation which God has wrought, and the Church joyfully proclaims, is for everyone. God has found a way to unite himself to every human being in every age. He has chosen to call them together as a people and not as isolated individuals. No one is saved by himself or herself, individually, or by his or her own efforts. God attracts us by taking into account the complex interweaving of personal relationships entailed in the life of a human community."(Joy of the Gospel 113)

NETWORK and Pope Francis Both Want...

Civility and openness:

"All this demands on the part of the evangelizer certain attitudes which foster openness to the message: approachability, readiness for dialogue, patience, a warmth and welcome which is non-judgmental."(Joy of the Gospel 165)

*All people of faith must practice listening and a genuine accompaniment.

Questions for Reflection

- *At what points in your life have you felt closest to God? Through what experiences or people has God felt most near? What gifts do you have that you can use in showing God to those around you?
- *How do you celebrate your culture? What are your favorite cultural traditions? How might you learn more about other cultures and celebrate diversity in your parish, neighborhood, or wider community?
- *Pope Francis cautions against living like a Christian on Sunday and a business person at work. How have you seen yourself create separate identities at work and at home? What small steps might you take to integrate your faith into your work life?

Study Guide: Chapter Four

The Social Dimension of Evangelization

Main Ideas

- *The very heart of the Gospel is life in community and engaging with others.
- *Authentic response to God's love means protecting the good of others.
- *Accepting the message of salvation and divine love means doing more than simply repeating it in words or in disjointed sporadic acts of charity. We must live a commitment to participating in God's work.
- *The Church cannot remain on the sidelines of society, but must engage for societal change.
- *Each person of faith is called to hear the cry of the poor, and to liberate and promote people living in poverty. This means taking political action, as well.
- *Ensuring the dignity of all includes securing education, access to healthcare, and employment with just wages that enable people to access other goods.
- *The Church and all people of faith should allow an evangelization by those experiencing poverty—it will help us build a ministry that is attentive to their suffering and the discrimination against them.
- *No one is exempt from direct service to those living in poverty.
- *Structural causes of poverty must be dismantled, because welfare projects serve a good but temporary role in alleviating the social ills fueled by poverty.
- *We must pray for the conversion of people in business and politics, that they will be truly moved by the suffering of those on the margins and lead us toward more just policies.
- *We must embrace and not demonize the vulnerable in all areas of our culture, including people on the margins and the earth and natural resources.
- *Peace is more than the absence of war. We must patiently practice building just relationships at each level of society and confront conflict to resolve it.
- *Realities are more important than ideas: ideas must translate to realities that improve our world and should be measured by the impact they.
- *Both Church and state have an obligation to promote the common good.
- *Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue strengthens all faith witness, especially where we focus on shared convictions.

NETWORK & POPE FRANCIS BOTH WANT:

A living wage:

"A just wage enables them to have adequate access to all the other goods which are destined for our common use" (Joy of the Gospel 192)

Structural changes to reduce the need for safety net programs:

"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, to any problems. Inequality is the root of social ills." (Joy of the Gospel 202)

Questions for Reflection

*Which people in your life make you feel most supported and connected? Does that happen at school, work, home, church, or in your neighborhood? What about that community makes you feel safe?

*Would you treat strangers differently if you thought of them as Jesus? Why, when we know that all people are created in God's image, do we not see all strangers this way and treat them with dignity?

*Pope Francis says that occasional good works are not enough, that all people are morally obligated to serve those living in poverty directly. What is your reaction to that? How can you better answer his challenge to make direct service to those living in poverty a central part of your life?

*People of faith and the Church must be political actors, Pope Francis says, in order to build justice. Do you agree? Do you consider yourself political? Do you vote? Where can you become a more political person to work for the social change required by your faith?

*According to Pope Francis, ensuring dignity for all necessitates three things: education, healthcare, and employment with just wages. Do you agree? Which structures for delivering these things are functioning in our society? Which need to be added or changed?

*How do you see people who are vulnerable being devalued in our culture? For example, do you agree that our culture assigns more value to people who are smart and business-savvy?

NETWORK & POPE FRANCIS BOTH WANT:

Equitable access to education, healthcare, and employment:

"We are not simply talking about ensuring nourishment or a 'dignified sustenance' for all people, but also their 'general temporal welfare and prosperity'. This means education, access to health care, and above all employment, for it is through free, creative, participatory and mutually supportive labor that human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives. A just wage enables them to have adequate access to all the other goods which are destined for our common use." (Joy of the Gospel 192)



Study Guide: Chapter Five

Spirit-Filled Evangelizers

Main Ideas

- * We need work rooted in fervor, joy, generosity, courage, and boundless love.
- * Prayer should ground all evangelical work.
- * Personal encounters with the saving love of Jesus opens hearts and fills the voids in ourselves and our society. People of faith carry on his ministry in pursuit of the joy and meaning it brings.
- * Loving others brings us close to God and reveals God's reign in the world.
- * Faith requires the confidence that God is working through us and that our missionary work will bear fruit we may not see.
- * When we are grateful for others and seek more just relationships, that attitude becomes a prayer that brightens the world.
- * Mary, an example of bold and courageous faith in service to making the world better, can become the mother of the new evangelization.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

“And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”(Acts 20:32-35)

NETWORK & POPE FRANCIS BOTH WANT:

Politics grounded in real experiences: “We have politicians – and even religious leaders – who wonder why people do not understand and follow them, since their proposals are so clear and logical. Perhaps it is because they are stuck in the realm of pure ideas and end up reducing politics or faith to rhetoric. Others have left simplicity behind and have imported a rationality foreign to most people.”(Joy of the Gospel 232)

Questions for Reflection

- * Pope Francis says our missionary work needs to be grounded in fervor, joy, generosity, courage, and boundless love. Which of those feels the most challenging to you? Can you think of a person you know who exemplifies that quality? How?
- * Do you pray? What is your favorite type of prayer? How do you feel when you pray?
- * Pope Francis suggests that gratitude adds lightness to the world. How do you practice gratitude? Where in your life is there room to be more grateful?



Joy of the Gospel Action Guide



Read and Reflect

*Read *Joy of the Gospel* and use this Study Guide to reflect on Pope Francis's important themes. Consider gathering a group in your parish or community to reflect on the document together.

*Consider which themes and ideas strike you most as you read *Joy of the Gospel*. Follow up by reading the scripture passages and other papal writings Pope Francis cites in sections that speak to you most.

Pray

*Pray over parts of the exhortation that you find confusing or that you find especially challenging.

*Pray intentions in personal prayer, or before gatherings, that highlight themes in *Joy of the Gospel*.

*Set aside five minutes a day to pray your gratitude and joy, to avoid becoming a Christian who is like "Lent without Easter" (6).

*Pray for those who make you mad (101), for business people and politicians (205), and for peace (227).

Act

*Take action on issues before Congress right now by visiting NETWORK's Action Center at www.networklobby.org/Act

*Learn about the divides in society and what we can do to mend the gaps with our Mend the Gap toolkit www.networklobby.org/mendthegap

*Connect with NETWORK on social media on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NETWORKLobby, on Twitter at www.twitter.com/@NETWORKLobby and on YouTube at www.youtube.com/NETWORKLobbies.



APPENDIX

DELVE DEEPER: MORE JOY OF THE GOSPEL QUESTIONS FOR CHRISTIAN FAITH ACTIVISTS

Feeling the need for a *Joy of the Gospel* reflection encore? Here are some additional questions for reflection, crafted with the NETWORK community particularly in mind.

Introduction

* Pope Francis points to some social ills from which we could be liberated if our society had more joy in the Gospel: complacency, greed and blunted conscience (2) as well as the mistaken interchangeable understanding of pleasure and joy (7). Do you see these challenges within you? Around you? If so, where are they and how do they influence you?

*Some feel squeamish about the idea of missionary work or evangelizing. Pope Francis draws a distinction between proselytizing and evangelizing (15). Were you familiar with that distinction? Do you think most people are? What relationship do you see between evangelizing and working for social justice? How, if at all, do you see social justice work as being connected to the type of pastoral, missionary and evangelizing work referenced in the introduction? Do you use words like pastoral, missionary and evangelizing to describe what you do? Why or why not?

* At NETWORK, we sometimes joke around about doing “grocery store missionary work.” We wonder how society would change if more people would strike up values-based conversations with strangers in the grocery line about an issue that matters to the common good. Have you ever done anything like that with an acquaintance before? Would you? Why or why not?

Chapter 1

* Pope Francis describes life in a congregation as “a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey and a center of constant missionary outreach” (28). Does this describe your understanding of what congregations are supposed to be? Does this describe your experience of congregational life today? If not, what would you improve? How can you be a part of making the congregation a space where more people find nourishment?

*Have you thought much before about how to try to live as a good disciple? Can you think of ways to begin or be renewed in your discipleship, as Pope Francis is encouraging?

* Many members of the NETWORK community are Catholic sisters, brothers, priests or lay associate members of religious orders within the Catholic Church (i.e. Benedictine, Dominican, Franciscan, etc.). These communities offer particular “charisms,” or unique gifts to bring to the Catholic community. Pope Francis notes that these communities often “bring a new evangelizing fervor and a new capacity for dialogue with the world whereby the Church is renewed.” Do you find this to be true? If so, what are some examples you can point to? Pope Francis urges these communities “not to lose contact with the rich reality of the local parish” (27). Do you see evidence of separation of religious orders from local parishes or dioceses? If so, how and why do you think that happens? In the U.S. context, do you notice differences in social and political perspectives between dioceses and religious orders? What might change that dynamic?

* Pope Francis talks about the need to “abandon the complacent attitude toward ministry that says ‘We have always done it this way.’” When NETWORK decided to leave Capitol Hill and hit the road with our Nuns on the Bus tours, we did something radically different, and it opened up a new world of Gospel joy. Where are the places in your faith community and/or your social justice work that could be well served by “bold and creative communal search for the means of achieving” goals (33)?

* Pope Francis has become known for being an effective communicator to the media. He says when people of faith attempt to convey a message rooted in the Gospel and Church teachings, there is “risk of (the message) being distorted or reduced to some of its secondary aspects” (34). Have you noticed times when the media or politicians have tried to co-opt the Pope’s message? In your own efforts to advocate for social justice, have your messages ever been misinterpreted by others to conform to their idea of what they wanted you to say? Has your message become diluted by forces out of your control? How have you dealt with these challenges?

CHAPTER 2

*In this chapter, Pope Francis introduces the concept of “an economy of exclusion” (53), which he argues violates the commandment “thou shall not kill.” In your local community, how and where do you see any dynamics of an economy of exclusion is at work? Who and what are the perpetrators and victims in a local economy that kills? How does the economy of exclusion in your local context connect with state, federal or international policy issues?

*Pope Francis argues our world suffers from an “idolatry of money” (55) and a “deified market” (56). In the United States, capitalism is deeply rooted in our culture. Yet, there have been times in our history when money served and did not rule. When the NETWORK staff viewed former U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich’s film *Inequality for All*, we watched Reich trace U.S. wealth inequality history across many decades. We were struck by how younger staff members were surprised at how much more equitable our nation’s economic arrangements used to be. We benefitted greatly from having an intergenerational conversation about it. Have you seen changes in your lifetime? What are the changes that have caused money’s influence to spiral out of control?

*NETWORK’s Executive Director Sister Simone Campbell has stated that she sees radical individualism as an unpatriotic myth. How do you think Pope Francis would respond to this claim?

*Pope Francis points out that some Christians have “an individualistic and sentimental faith life” that lacks a communal dimension (70). At NETWORK, we often say that faith is personal, but not private. We are always striking a balance between bearing witness to our Catholic faith and sharing faith-rooted priorities in a way that can be heard in a pluralistic culture. How do you perceive Pope Francis engages with this tension? Do you wrestle with this tension in your own social justice activism?

CHAPTER 3

*Pope Francis says, “In the Christian customs of an evangelized people, the Holy Spirit adorns the Church, showing her new aspects of revelation and giving her a new face” (116) and “We would not do justice to the logic of the incarnation if we thought of Christianity as monocultural or monotonous” (117). These sentiments contribute to why the Catholic Church champions justice for immigrants. A spirit of fear in our country has prevented an influential few from embracing immigration reform. How might your faith community offer revelations and signs of incarnation that could alleviate those fears?

*Pope Francis says “differences between persons and communities can sometimes prove uncomfortable, but the Holy Spirit, who is the source of that diversity, can bring forth something good from all things” (131). Have you ever had an experience when you had to work toward a common goal with someone who from a different culture? What insights did you glean from that experience about the difference between unity and uniformity? Why is it important to distinguish between the two?

*When engaging in social justice activism from a faith-based perspective, we often look to our Catholic Social Tradition and the scriptures for guidance, nourishment and theological grounding. Many of Pope Francis’s tips for priests preparing homilies would serve Christian social justice activists well. Approaching texts with a “humility of heart which recognizes that the word is always beyond us” and refraining from “looking for quick,

easy and immediate results” (146) are important. It is also key to remember that people “thirst for authenticity” (150). Can you think of an example when you heard someone share a faith-inspired approach to advocacy that inspired you? Can you think of an alternate example that seemed careless and spurious? What was the difference between the two? What steps can you take to further develop your faith perspective on justice work?

CHAPTER 4

*Pope Francis’s prayer is NETWORK’s prayer: “I beg the Lord to grant us more politicians who are genuinely disturbed by the state of society, the people, the lives of the poor!” (205). Each election season, the NETWORK community urges candidates to pay attention to the needs of their constituents who live on the margins of society. Are your members of Congress disturbed by the state of society and the state of people in poverty? If not, what will you do about it during election seasons?

*The pope offers some insight about conflict that deeply resonates with what is happening today in Congress as well as many state legislatures: “Conflict cannot be ignored or concealed. It has to be faced. But if we remain trapped in conflict, we lose our perspective, our horizons shrink and reality itself begins to fall apart. In the midst of conflict, we lose our sense of the profound unity of reality” (226). Francis also argues that the incarnation showed us that reality trumps ideas (223). One of the powerful reality-check tactics NETWORK uses with policymakers is a *site visit*. We invite policymakers to visit a ministry site where people living on the margins of society find help and community to get by. The site visit is meant to offer policymakers a new source of compassion, perspective and inspiration rooted in the real struggles of their constituents. Is there an issue on which your policymakers are losing perspective because they are stuck in ideological fights? How might you contribute to their civic dialogues by helping them gain some different perspectives?

*NETWORK strives to speak truth to power, but we always do it with love. Pope Francis says the only way to heal a conflict is to “go beyond the surface of the conflict and to see others in their deepest dignity” (228). While we deeply disagree with Rep. Paul Ryan’s austere federal budget proposals, which would devastate the social safety net, we respect him as a fellow Catholic striving to contribute to the common good. Can you think of a time when you strongly disagreed with someone, but you still could respect them? If so, what work did you have to do to be able to get there? Did you spend time deeply listening to that person? Did you pray for that person?

CHAPTER 5

*Pope Francis reminds us of God’s invitation “to recognize that we are a people: ‘Once you were no people but now you are God’s people’ (1 Pet 2:10)”. Our deepest identity is that we belong to God, and we are sent by God. This requires “a spiritual taste for being close to people’s lives” (268) and getting away from “personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune” (270). How, if at all, might holding such an identity as one of God’s people influence and enrich your individual contributions to being a part of “We the People” of the United States? How does your faith community as a whole contribute to the identity of “We the People”?

*One NETWORK member called the NETWORK office to react to NETWORK’s 2014 *Joy of the Gospel* theme. She commented that she likes the pope, but she is frustrated at congressional inaction on so many important issues. “How can you be joyful in this mess?” she asked us. NETWORK Executive Director Sister Simone Campbell offers her thoughts on the first page of this study guide. Now that you have read and reflected on *Joy of the Gospel*, how would you answer that NETWORK member’s question?

NETWORK Staff Reflections on the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium (Joy of the Gospel)* of Pope Francis

Read *Evangelii Gaudium* online: <http://www.vatican.va/evangelii-gaudium/en/#28>

Learn more: www.network-education.org/joyofthegospel

Sister Simone Campbell, Executive Director



I am delighted by many parts of *Joy of the Gospel*, but the one at this moment that speaks most to me is the point that in peace-building, "realities are more important than ideas." (231-233) This becomes important for my work here at NETWORK because it is sometimes tempting to become quite academic and caught in theories and statistics. What Pope Francis tells us is that we need to be rooted in the real-life stories of people in order to really create peace. It is easy to fight a theory, but peace is built person by person, ensuring that there is room for all of us in the process. I learned this powerfully on the bus. Joy of the Gospel for me is the call to the 100%. Stay REAL!

Sister Marge Clark, Lobbyist

Over the years, I have studied Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry, excited by their view of a universe evolving to more complexity, becoming more spiritual, coming together at an "omega point." I hear this same sense of directionality in the pillars Pope Francis lays out as leading to peace; particularly in saying, "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" and in "time is greater than space." His image is of "a polyhedron, which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness..."

There is a place for the poor and their culture, their aspirations and their potential." (236)

The Gospel "will always remain good news until it has been proclaimed to all people, until it has healed and strengthened every aspect of humanity, until it has brought all men and women together at table in God's kingdom." (237) Convergence, one body, the "kingdom of God" in our time. Pope Francis sets this vision in the personal and concrete as he moves beyond the limitations of Vatican space, touching and ministering to people distant from recent popes.



Paul Marchione, Managing Director



"An authentic faith – which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it." (183) In his chapter on the Social Dimension of Evangelization, Pope Francis reminds us that, when authentic, faith should move us beyond ourselves and our comfort zones. For when our faith truly feeds us, then our own growth is not enough; we want to see change in our worlds – whether our neighborhood or our planet. Being at NETWORK, I am fortunate to be able to live out this "deep desire" of my faith on a daily basis with my colleagues, while I continue to strive for more authenticity and continue to live in the uncomfortableness of faith.

LaTreviette Matthews, Executive Assistant



While I am not Catholic, I find *The Joy of The Gospel* to be in all religions. I believe in the power of the spoken word. Speak it and it shall be. When I was unemployed, I would often hear people say that this is a bad economy and there aren't any jobs out there. I didn't believe that to be so for ME. I would never use negative words referring to my situation. I spoke only positive words about what I was going through, knowing that the word could move mountains. Someone once told me that when you speak negatively, you are only creating more negativity so I stopped, and things quickly changed for me. Like the Pope says, when you remain positive, God's Word can surprise you. "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)

Laura Peralta-Schulte, Lobbyist

Much of beauty contained in *The Joy of the Gospel* is a wonderful restatement of long-held principles of our Catholic faith that echo back to Christ's own words as well as faithful followers across time. What struck me as new and spoke to me personally is Pope Francis's call to be steadfast and hopeful in difficult times. "The joy of the Gospel is such that it cannot be taken away from us by anyone or anything (cf. *Jn* 16:22). The evils of our world – and those of the Church – must not be excuses for diminishing our commitment and our fervor." It is easy to feel defeated with the problems we face – violence, poverty, despair, selfishness – and yet we are reminded that joy must be central in our mission. This isn't foolish wishful thinking, but rather, optimism grounded in faith with the knowledge that God's love can and does change the world. I am reminded once again to keep my chin up and continue working for peace and justice.



Ashley Wilson, Communications Coordinator



"There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter. I realize of course that joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at moments of great difficulty. Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved." (6) To me, living out the *Joy of the Gospel* means sharing love and passion for living a faith that does justice, and I am inspired by the call of Pope Francis to welcome all with unwavering love. It is why I find such joy in my work at NETWORK, both in the field department and in the lobby department. It is why I believe so strongly that we can, and will, encourage Congress to pass legislative reform. Certainly, there are many times when I become frustrated or discouraged in advocating for social justice. But I am reminded by Pope Francis that, even in difficult times, I am loved, and it is my responsibility to go out and share that love with our global community.