

D I S C O V E R I N G

The Joy of the Gospel



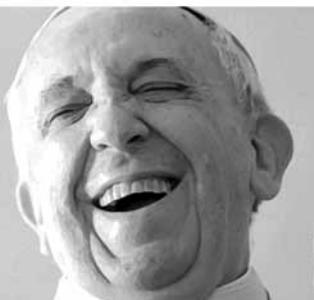
A Small Group Study Guide



CATHOLIC DIOCESE
OF LEXINGTON

DISCOVERING

The Joy of the Gospel



A Small Group Study Guide

The great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. 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. This is a very real danger for believers too. Many fall prey to it, and end up resentful, angry and listless. That is no way to live a dignified and fulfilled life; it is not God's will for us, nor is it the life in the Spirit which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ.

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ... Now is the time to say to Jesus: "Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace."

From *The Joy of the Gospel*, Sections 2-3

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Introduction To Catholic Social Teaching

Two thousand years ago Christ told the crowds that the Kingdom of God was at hand. Many were puzzled: “Where is it?” they asked. “When is it coming?” Two thousand years later we have similar questions: “It’s been so long,” we say. “Why isn’t it here yet?”

Christ also told people to love God with their whole being, and to love their neighbor as themselves. This teaching stunned the Pharisees. “But why?” we ask. “What makes it so radical?”

Christ even baffled His own disciples. He told them that He was in the Father, and that they were in Him. He told them that He was the vine, and they were the branches. Apart from Him, He said, they could do nothing.

Most controversially, Christ taught that unless we eat His flesh and drink His blood, we will not have life within us. He was talking about the Eucharist, through which we enter communion with God. Here is the answer to our questions: this teaching unlocks the others.

If we are in communion with God, then He is in us, and we are in Him. If many of us are in communion with God, then we are also in communion with one another. If we are in communion with God, we will love Him with our whole being. If we are in communion with God, we will love all His children as He loves them. Then we will love our neighbors – all our neighbors – as ourselves.

The Kingdom of God is not a time or place. It transcends the very idea of time and place. It is a communion that encompasses Christians of all times and places, living and dead. It flows from God Himself, and links us together through the eternal presentation of the Eucharist, which is the flesh of Christ.

Saint Paul taught the Philippians that such communion grants us the same mind, love, and understanding. He told them it was the key to both evangelization and charity, and would make them “beacons to the world, upholding the message of life.” Paul’s message is timeless: through communion in Christ, we reach out to the world in love. Through that love, we bring others to truth, and then into communion.

Christ held up these teachings as inseparable, but it wasn’t long before humanity began wedging them apart. In His time on earth Christ resisted the reductionist, legalistic teachings of the Pharisees. In the years since, the Church has fought other forms of reductionism. Humanity has tried it all: the separation of faith and works, the separation of truth and charity, and many more. For two thousand years the Church has held Christ’s teachings together in the face of such attempts. It has been a bumpy ride.

That ride began within a hostile Roman culture. Christ had spoken of communion and taught that love of neighbor included care for the poor. The Roman view was different: take

care of your family and social network, but no more. Roman duties to the poor – and the gods – were simple: bribe them both to preserve the status quo. No riots, no natural disasters, no problem. To the Romans, more than that was unnecessary.

Roman persecutions forced the Church underground. Masses were held in catacombs or people's homes. The Church was unable to conduct organized charity efforts, but these early Catholics found a way. They found personal ways to help the poor and destitute. Slowly, such intimate encounters with Christ's love opened the Romans to Christ's truth. By loving God and neighbor, the early Church fulfilled another of Christ's commandments: go forth and make disciples of all nations.

After the persecutions ended, the Church found itself in a different world. Catholics could openly build churches and worship God. They could also organize large-scale efforts to love their neighbors. Hospices and hospitals, relief centers for the poor, the elderly, and the destitute: the early Church built them all. The world had changed, and the Church was able to change with it.

The world continues to change. For two thousand years the Church has navigated a world of shifting ideologies, political systems, and economic philosophies. Every time the world changed, the Church had adapted its teaching to contemporary problems. Such adaptations were and are a matter of approach and methodology, not of content. Yet while the message doesn't change, the world does. The Church has to be in constant dialogue with the world to deliver its message.

The current phase of this dialogue began 125 years ago, when Pope Leo XIII diagnosed the condition of the modern world. Looking out at a working class steeped in misery and poverty, Leo saw a world crafted by systematic ideologies. These ideologies were creating the structural causes of the workers' plight. Part of helping the workers, Leo contended, was confronting the systems that were oppressing them.

Leo's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (*On the Condition of Labor*) pointed to two major problems. The first was the ideology that had created oppressive conditions for the working class: unregulated, laissez-faire capitalism. By holding up profit as the highest product of human work, capitalism had dehumanized the working class. Leo held that this system concentrated wealth and capital in the hand of a financial oligarchy, and transformed workers into replaceable cogs in a profit machine.

The second problem, Marxism, was a false solution to the first. Marxists argued that the wealthy should be overthrown, and that all capital and property should be controlled by the government. They believed this would end the misery caused by unregulated capitalism.

Pope Leo told the world that Marxism was no solution at all. It subjected the worker to the

absolute power of the government, rather than the unchecked power of the capitalist. Marxism was just as dehumanizing, just as reductionist as the system it claimed to fix. Both were atheistic, both ignored human dignity, and both reduced people to cogs in an economic machine. Unregulated capitalism and Marxism were simply different sides of the same coin.

Leo argued that capital and labor were out of balance. Wage slavery had to stop: capitalists should not work people all day, every day, for pennies a day – especially not children. This would require labor unions and government regulations. Yet Pope Leo neither condemned wealth nor advocated big government. He simply believed that all classes of people should be able to own property and provide for their families.

The Church responded magnificently to Leo's call. From Chesterton's *Distributism* to Father Plater's Catholic Social Guild, from Father Ryan's *The Living Wage* to Dorothy Day's Catholic Workers: two generations of Catholics helped usher in a wave of reforms. Soon workers were protected by labor unions, a standardized work week, a minimum wage, and child labor laws. The Church was bringing the Gospel to the modern world, and the new phase of dialogue had begun.

That dialogue has progressed rapidly since the time of Leo XIII. There have been dramatic crescendos under Pope Saint John XXIII and Pope Saint John Paul II, and quiet reflections under Pope Benedict XVI. The Church's dialogue with the modern world is the accumulation of such moments. Over time, the Church's half of this dialogue has coalesced into a body of doctrine. That doctrine is known as Catholic Social Teaching, and the Church has compiled it in *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. For those interested in further reading, the Compendium is freely available from the Vatican's website. It can also be purchased as a book.

The Church's dialogue with the modern world goes on. The Church expresses that dialogue by proclaiming the Gospel and applying it to the modern world. As Catholics, we are called to express it through our lives. We are still called to be "beacons to the world," and to hold together Christ's two great commandments. In recent days, Pope Francis has reminded us of this calling through his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*).

The Joy of the Gospel shares many characteristics with other recent papal teachings. It points to the links between evangelization and the call to love our neighbors. It encourages us to live out Christ's love of the poor, and to examine the structural causes of poverty and misery in our own time. Yet *The Joy of the Gospel* is also unique, because we live in a unique moment in time.

We still live in a world dominated by ideologies, but technology, economics, global politics, etc. have all changed in the last few decades. These elements have intertwined in new ways, creating new challenges to the Gospel. It is the role of the Church to recognize these

new challenges, and to respond accordingly.

The Joy of the Gospel is part of Pope Francis' efforts in this regard. It relates the fullness of the Gospel to today's world. It brings forward both of Christ's great commandments, and shows that they must be held together for the fulfillment of Christ's Kingdom. Yet it is more than a teaching document. It is a call to action. The Pope has called us to take part in God's plan for the world.

Let's take a look at what he has to say.

Introduction To The Booklet

The Joy of the Gospel is traditional and unique at the same time. The same could be said for its author. Pope Francis is the first Jesuit pope, the first South American pope, and the first pope named Francis. Yet he is also the bearer of a great tradition. He is the 266th pope, part of a line that stretches back 2,000 years to St. Peter. Like many of his predecessors, he has great concern for the condition of the poor and the working class. Like many of his predecessors, he sees our love for the poor as inseparable from our love for God. Like many of his predecessors, he has issued a set of teachings on how to live these commandments in today's world.

Unlike those predecessors, however, Pope Francis is constantly confronted with a culture of sound bites and media spin. Ideologues and pundits give us countless interpretations of Pope Francis' words. Many of them contradict each other. The Pope's message is vital, but how can we find it amidst so many distortions?

Ideally, we should read the Pope's words for ourselves. That's easier said than done, though. Today's busy world runs us all ragged. Even if we had the time, we often don't have the energy. Reading the Pope's message in its entirety can seem like an overwhelming task.

This booklet is meant to help readers make a start. It isn't intended to be comprehensive. It wasn't possible to do justice to *The Joy of the Gospel* in so few pages. It was possible, however, to pull out passages containing some of the Pope's major themes. We hope these passages will serve as a doorway to Pope Francis' message.

The booklet in your hands contains eight excerpts from *The Joy of the Gospel*. Each is paired with discussion points, questions, and prayers. The booklet can be used in any number of formats. A longer study (e.g. eight weeks) might cover a passage a week. A shorter study (e.g. a four-week Advent group) might cover two passages a week, or simply choose four of the eight.

These formats are only suggestions. Each group will have to decide what format works best for them. Regardless, we hope that each participant will take the time to read all the passages at some point, and perhaps read all of *The Joy of the Gospel* when time permits.

I. Missionary Impulse & Parish Renewal

27. 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 evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself. As John Paul II once said to the Bishops of Oceania: “All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion”.

28. The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be “the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters”. This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few. 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. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach. 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.

1. A missionary identity leads to transformation within the Church. This transformation leads to missionary activity, which in turn reinforces missionary identity. Rather than discuss “methods” for evangelization, Pope Francis directs us to the cycle that naturally produces it.

a) “Mission” and “missionary” come up many times in this passage. What does the Pope mean by “mission?” Is this how you understood “mission?” Have you ever felt such a “missionary impulse?” What did you do with it?

b) The Pope calls for a transformation of the Church in order to evangelize the world. Elsewhere he makes clear that we cannot change doctrine to accomplish this. Holding these two imperatives together produces a certain tension. Have you ever felt the strain of this

tension? What did you do with it?

c) When discussing transformation, Pope Francis focuses on introspection and conversion. He declines to give an “action plan” for evangelization or an agenda for “doing” missionary work. Why might that be? Have you ever seen the opposite approach? How did it turn out?

2. Parishes are “the presence of the Church in a given territory.” Catholics and non-Catholics both experience the life of the Church in the parishes. For transformation to be effective, it must take place in the parishes under the direction of their pastors.

a) Calls for transformation can stir deep emotions. We must be careful not to allow dialogue to devolve into negativity and antagonism. Concentrate on a positive experience you had in your parish. How did it change you?



b) Pope Francis views the parish as a base of operations for evangelization and outreach. Talk about a time when your parish did these things well. How did they come together?

c) Pope Francis has called for parishes become “field hospitals” for Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Why might non-Catholics need healing and refuge in our parishes? How does this relate to Pope Francis’ call for parishes

to be “more inclusive and open,” while not changing doctrine?

3. Calls to renewal carry a hidden temptation. Zeal for our goal can lead us to view other parishioners as obstacles. This path leads to frustration, which can cause us to divide a parish into the good “us” and the bad “them.”

The best of intentions can lead “reformers” to schism and violence. To avoid this we must spend less time addressing the shortcomings of others, and more time addressing our own. We must remember that we are the Body of Christ. The members of that Body are not meant to judge one another.

If circumstances permit, consider a prayerful reading of 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. Should this not be possible, pray together for each others’ intentions.

II. The Economy Of Exclusion & The Common Good

53. Just as the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say “thou shalt not” to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills. How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? This is a case of inequality. Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape.

203. The dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all economic policies. At times, however, they seem to be a mere addendum imported from without in order to fill out a political discourse lacking in perspectives or plans for true and integral development. How many words prove irksome to this system! It is irksome when the question of ethics is raised, when global solidarity is invoked, when the distribution of goods is mentioned, when reference is made to protecting labour and defending the dignity of the powerless, when allusion is made to a God who demands a commitment to justice. At other times these issues are exploited by a rhetoric which cheapens them. Casual indifference in the face of such questions empties our lives and our words of all meaning. Business is a vocation, and a noble vocation, provided that those engaged in it see themselves challenged by a greater meaning in life; this will enable them truly to serve the common good by striving to increase the goods of this world and to make them more accessible to all.

1. The “economy of exclusion” is based on unchecked competition. Free from ethics and regulations, economic competition naturally favors the rich and strong. The poor and weak lose the competition, and are further excluded from economic benefits.

a) What are the Church’s responsibilities to the poor and the weak? What is the relationship between these responsibilities and the Church’s stance on economic and political issues? What, then, is the Church’s role in the public sphere?

2. All persons have the right to food, shelter, education, religious freedom, and the ability to support a family. The Church teaches that society must ensure these rights. Sometimes, we must all make sacrifices to achieve this “common good.”

a) We are all called to sacrifice for the common good. Yet many of us shoulder legitimate

family responsibilities. How might we balance these obligations? How might this balance change at different stages in our lives?

b) The same Proverb teaches us to “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray,” and that “Oppressing the poor in order to enrich oneself, and giving to the rich, will lead only to loss.” How might these two passages help answer the previous question?

b) “Economy of exclusion” and “the common good:” big ideas like these often take time to absorb. We digest them gradually, and not everyone starts with the same piece. What, then, is your main takeaway from these readings?



3. Wealth and business are not evil. Wealthy and successful people have fostered many of the greatest charitable

efforts in the history of the world. The economy of exclusion, however, can strip wealth of virtue, and transform benefactors into oppressors.

God is very clear about our duties to the common good. Both Testaments abound with commandments about justice. Both Testaments heap praise on the just and give dire warnings to the unjust. Wealthy or not, we are called to espouse the common good.

If circumstances permit, consider a prayerful reading of Isaiah 58:6-10. Should this not be possible, pray together for greater understanding of God’s justice.

III. The Church In Today's Society

81. At a time when we most need a missionary dynamism which will bring salt and light to the world, many lay people fear that they may be asked to undertake some apostolic work and they seek to avoid any responsibility that may take away from their free time. For example, it has become very difficult today to find trained parish catechists willing to persevere in this work for some years. Something similar is also happening with priests who are obsessed with protecting their free time. This is frequently due to the fact that people feel an overbearing need to guard their personal freedom, as though the task of evangelization was a dangerous poison rather than a joyful response to God's love which summons us to mission and makes us fulfilled and productive. Some resist giving themselves over completely to mission and thus end up in a state of paralysis and acedia.

183. Consequently, no one can demand that religion should be relegated to the inner sanctum of personal life, without influence on societal and national life, without concern for the soundness of civil institutions, without a right to offer an opinion on events affecting society. Who would claim to lock up in a church and silence the message of Saint Francis of Assisi or Blessed Teresa of Calcutta? They themselves would have found this unacceptable. 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. We love this magnificent planet on which God has put us, and we love the human family which dwells here, with all its tragedies and struggles, its hopes and aspirations, its strengths and weaknesses. The earth is our common home and all of us are brothers and sisters. If indeed “the just ordering of society and of the state is a central responsibility of politics”, the Church “cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice”. All Christians, their pastors included, are called to show concern for the building of a better world. This is essential, for the Church's social thought is primarily positive: it offers proposals, it works for change and in this sense it constantly points to the hope born of the loving heart of Jesus Christ. At the same time, it unites “its own commitment to that made in the social field by other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, whether at the level of doctrinal reflection or at the practical level”.

1. Today's pattern of life seems to alternate between hyperactivity and exhaustion. Such an environment can breed a weary apathy that stifles the missionary impulse.

a) Worn out from our many obligations, we sometimes try to protect our remaining time from the “demands” of others. Taken far enough, this approach divides our time between stressful activity and an exhausted isolation. Talk about a time when you fell into this trap. How did it affect your faith and prayer life?

b) *Given enough time, this isolation can lead to cynicism, anger, and apathy. It can also leave a trail of resentments and broken relationships in its wake. Talk about a time when you or someone close to you fell into such isolation. How did it change your/their life?*

c) *Christ offers escape from this trap. We can find true rest and new energy when alone with Him in quiet prayer. Talk about a time when you found rest in prayer. Have you ever had to relearn this lesson? Why?*

2. Religious freedom means a healthy give and take between religious and non-religious



viewpoints in the public sphere. If people can live out their convictions behind the closed doors of their homes, but not in their public or professional lives, that is not religious freedom. To force religious convictions and institutions out of public life is not fairness. It is exclusion.

a) *A tension is developing in our society. The Church is straining to hold together her Catholic identity and her public institutions. Individuals are straining to hold together their religious convictions and their social or professional standing. Have you ever experienced this tension? Where does it come from?*

b) *Pope Francis reminds us of our call “to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it.” He offers examples of openly religious persons who made great social contributions, like St. Francis and Mother Teresa. Can you think of openly Christian persons or institutions that have brought positive social change in American history? How might the absence of such contributions affect our past, present, and future?*

3. The missionary imperative remains through all the seasons of our lives. At times this means participation in public and parish ministries. At other times we are called to practice mission in the home. The latter is not an easy out: the home is not called the domestic church without reason. Evangelization, catechesis, and the works of mercy all begin in the home.

If circumstances permit, consider a prayerful reading of 1 John 4:9-21. Should this not be possible, pray together for the grace to be a missionary people.

IV. Scripture & Evangelization

174. Not only the homily has to be nourished by the word of God. All evangelization is based on that word, listened to, meditated upon, lived, celebrated and witnessed to. The sacred Scriptures are the very source of evangelization. Consequently, we need to be constantly trained in hearing the word. The Church does not evangelize unless she constantly lets herself be evangelized. It is indispensable that the word of God “be ever more fully at the heart of every ecclesial activity”. God’s word, listened to and celebrated, above all in the Eucharist, nourishes and inwardly strengthens Christians, enabling them to offer an authentic witness to the Gospel in daily life. We have long since moved beyond that old contraposition between word and sacrament. The preaching of the word, living and effective, prepares for the reception of the sacrament, and in the sacrament that word attains its maximum efficacy.

175. The study of the sacred Scriptures must be a door opened to every believer. It is essential that the revealed word radically enrich our catechesis and all our efforts to pass on the faith. Evangelization demands familiarity with God’s word, which calls for dioceses, parishes and Catholic associations to provide for a serious, ongoing study of the Bible, while encouraging its prayerful individual and communal reading. We do not blindly seek God, or wait for him to speak to us first, for “God has already spoken, and there is nothing further that we need to know, which has not been revealed to us”. Let us receive the sublime treasure of the revealed word.

1. Christ kept the disciples with Him for years. Over time, they grew in their relationship with Him and came to better understand His teachings. When the time was right, they received His Body and Blood at the Last Supper and the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Thus formed and fortified, they went out to evangelize.

a) The same is true for us. We come to know Christ and His teachings in Scripture. We are fortified with His grace in the Eucharist. This is the bedrock of both initial and ongoing formation. Talk about your own formation. What role has Scripture and the Eucharist played in your life? Have you ever neglected your ongoing formation? Why? How did it affect you?

b) We must always be careful not to read Scripture through the eyes of the world. If we do, we may twist Scripture or stand in judgment on it. Fortunately, Christ left us a sure guide out of this trap: the teaching office of the Church’s Magisterium. Have you ever fallen into this trap? Why? What might be the consequences of this trap for individuals? For the Church?

c) Proper formation is a path we walk for life, but there are important landmarks and milestones on that path. The Sacrament of Confirmation is one of these; Confirmation causes

the Holy Spirit to dwell in us, and makes us living witnesses to Christ. Living witnesses proclaim Christ, but they also evangelize through their presence alone. They naturally reflect Christ in their words and actions. Talk about a time when you met such a living witness. What did you find compelling about him or her? Have you ever seen others led to Christ by such a person?

2. Evangelization is the act of introducing someone to Christ. In process, evangelization is a series of relationships. First is our relationship to Christ. He forms, teaches, and strengthens us in Scripture and the Eucharist. Confirmed in the Holy Spirit, we become living witnesses to Christ. Others glimpse Christ through us. We form relationships with them, and then introduce them to Christ.

When evangelization is viewed in this way, the need to come up with a “plan” becomes less pressing. St. John Chrysostom explained all this centuries ago: “If you want to convert someone to Catholicism,” he told his flock, “ask them to stay with you in your home for a year.”



If circumstances permit, consider a prayerful reading of John 15:1-17. Should this not be possible, pray together for the grace to be God’s messengers in the world.

V. On Solidarity

188. The Church has realized that the need to heed this plea is itself born of the liberating action of grace within each of us, and thus it is not a question of a mission reserved only to a few: “The Church, guided by the Gospel of mercy and by love for mankind, hears the cry for justice and intends to respond to it with all her might”. In this context we can understand Jesus’ command to his disciples: “You yourselves give them something to eat!” (Mk 6:37): it means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter. The word “solidarity” is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few.

189. Solidarity is a spontaneous reaction by those who recognize that the social function of property and the universal destination of goods are realities which come before private property. The private ownership of goods is justified by the need to protect and increase them, so that they can better serve the common good; for this reason, solidarity must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them. These convictions and habits of solidarity, when they are put into practice, open the way to other structural transformations and make them possible. Changing structures without generating new convictions and attitudes will only ensure that those same structures will become, sooner or later, corrupt, oppressive and ineffectual.

1. Solidarity cannot be reduced to empathy. It is not enough to “feel” for the plight of others. We need a conversion of heart that moves us to act.

a) Much of this passage concerns the “convictions and habits of solidarity.” Do any of these make you uncomfortable? Why?

b) What has been your biggest roadblock or challenge to embracing solidarity? Why?

2. The expression of solidarity requires everyday acts of charity. It also requires a hard look at the structural causes of poverty and injustice. Taken together, these elements present a personal challenge to us all.

a) Pope Francis asks us to practice solidarity on national and global levels. In a democratic society, how might we address these issues? What current issues might we address?

b) The principle of solidarity is larger than a set of economic or financial practices. In what other, non-material ways might we practice solidarity with others?

3. The Church teaches that the human race is one family. Like all families, each member has responsibilities to each other and to the whole. Often, however, we are unaware of the needs and struggles of those right outside our own neighborhoods.

a) Talk about a time when such an awareness broke into your life or routine. How did this make you feel?

b) Pope Benedict XVI said that “Solidarity is first and foremost a sense of responsibility on the part of everyone with regard to everyone, and it cannot therefore be merely delegated to the State.” The practice of solidarity does not always involve government. On what levels and in what situations might solidarity be practiced by individuals and associations?



4. The poor were never far from Christ’s heart. His life and teaching make it clear that care for the needy is among the highest priorities of the Christian life. Christ was insistent that His disciples should help shoulder the burdens of the poor and oppressed.

If circumstances permit, consider a prayerful reading of Luke 12:42-48. Should this not be possible, pray together for solidarity among all God’s children.

VI. The Church & The Vulnerable In Society

210. It is essential to draw near to new forms of poverty and vulnerability, in which we are called to recognize the suffering Christ, even if this appears to bring us no tangible and immediate benefits. I think of the homeless, the addicted, refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly who are increasingly isolated and abandoned, and many others. Migrants present a particular challenge for me, since I am the pastor of a Church without frontiers, a Church which considers herself mother to all. For this reason, I exhort all countries to a generous openness which, rather than fearing the loss of local identity, will prove capable of creating new forms of cultural synthesis. How beautiful are those cities which overcome paralysing mistrust, integrate those who are different and make this very integration a new factor of development! How attractive are those cities which, even in their architectural design, are full of spaces which connect, relate and favour the recognition of others!

213. 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. Once this conviction disappears, so do solid and lasting foundations for the defence of human rights, which would always be subject to the passing whims of the powers that be. Reason alone is sufficient to recognize the inviolable value of each single human life, but if we also look at the issue from the standpoint of faith, "every violation of the personal dignity of the human being cries out in vengeance to God and is an offence against the creator of the individual".

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

1. The Church teaches that all people have equal dignity as children of God. The world sometimes disagrees. When this happens, the Church must speak out for those who cannot protect themselves.

a) Divisions based on race, creed, or class can cause one group to view another as lesser in importance or dignity. Some overcompensate for this tendency by pretending that the differences between groups don't matter. Have you ever fallen into one of these traps? Why?

b) Our culture often values people based on their productivity. Full dignity is awarded to those who "meaningfully contribute" to the economy. The homeless and/or unemployed



poor are marginalized by such a worldview. This "productivity bias" is deeply ingrained in our culture. Do you ever see it in yourself? Where does it come from?

c) Migrants and refugees seem to be a special case. They are sometimes discriminated against based on race or creed. They are

also disparaged as a drain on the country's resources or, conversely, because they usurp the economic value of the "natives." Yet the rapid integration of cultures is hard. Talk about your own experiences interacting with migrants or refugees. What cultural difficulties arose? What commonalities did you find?

d) Disturbingly, some today advocate for defining "humanity" by cognitive ability. This classification diminishes or negates the value of the very young, the elderly, and the mentally disabled. What might be the driving forces behind such a view? Have you ever encountered it?

2. The Church's position on human dignity manifests itself in specific concerns for a number of vulnerable groups. Among these are unborn children. These "most defenceless and innocent among us" are being aborted in staggering numbers worldwide. The Church

stands unyieldingly – and unchangeably – against this mass dehumanization and slaughter of the innocent.

a) The Church is consistent in her position on human dignity: societal problems cannot be solved by the elimination of the vulnerable – be they poor, alien, unborn, etc. Yet our culture keeps offering such solutions. Why might our society keep trying to push out the weak?

b) Conversations about abortion often focus on either the woman or the baby. What is the problem with this approach? Have you ever fallen into this trap? What is the way out?

3. Human beings were made in the image and likeness of God. We were further sanctified when God became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Our God-given dignity cannot be taken away by any human classification. Again and again the Bible is clear: sins against the vulnerable cry out to God for vengeance.

If circumstances permit, consider a prayerful reading of 1 John 3:10-18. Should this not be possible, pray together for the vulnerable of this world.

VII. Inter-Religious Dialogue

250. An attitude of openness in truth and in love must characterize the dialogue with the followers of non-Christian religions, in spite of various obstacles and difficulties, especially forms of fundamentalism on both sides. Inter-religious dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world, and so it is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities. This dialogue is in the first place a conversation about human existence or simply, as the bishops of India have put it, a matter of “being open to them, sharing their joys and sorrows”. In this way we learn to accept others and their different ways of living, thinking and speaking. We can then join one another in taking up the duty of serving justice and peace, which should become a basic principle of all our exchanges. A dialogue which seeks social peace and justice is in itself, beyond all merely practical considerations, an ethical commitment which brings about a new social situation. Efforts made in dealing with a specific theme can become a process in which, by mutual listening, both parts can be purified and enriched. These efforts, therefore, can also express love for truth.

251. In this dialogue, ever friendly and sincere, attention must always be paid to the essential bond between dialogue and proclamation, which leads the Church to maintain and intensify her relationship with non-Christians. A facile syncretism would ultimately be a totalitarian gesture on the part of those who would ignore greater values of which they are not the masters. True openness involves remaining steadfast in one’s deepest convictions, clear and joyful in one’s own identity, while at the same time being “open to understanding those of the other party” and “knowing that dialogue can enrich each side”. What is not helpful is a diplomatic openness which says “yes” to everything in order to avoid problems, for this would be a way of deceiving others and denying them the good which we have been given to share generously with others. Evangelization and inter-religious dialogue, far from being opposed, mutually support and nourish one another.

1. Inter-religious dialogue (IRD) is not about conceding truth to avoid conflict. Neither is it about blending the beliefs of two religions to make a new one. IRD is about shared humanity. IRD is about working together for the common good.

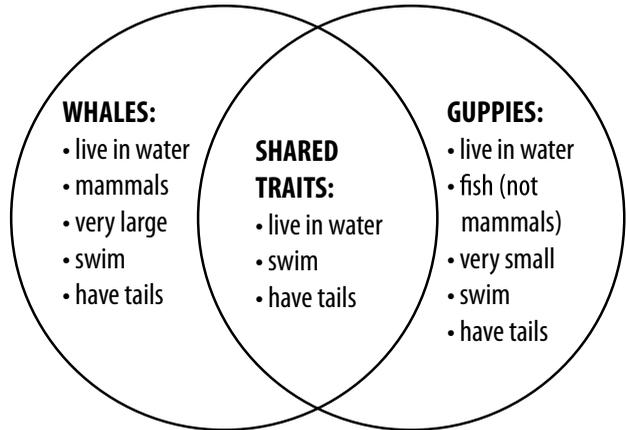
a) Picture the overlapping circles of a Venn diagram. The point of IRD is not to move one circle to match the other. The point is to discover where the circles overlap. Talk about a time when you witnessed such a dialogue. Was there such a discovery? How did the dialogue end?

b) We cannot find common ground if we don’t know where we stand. Formation in our own religion is a precursor to fruitful IRD. Talk about a time when you discussed your

faith with someone from another religion. How did it go? How might it have gone better? What challenges do you personally face in such situations?

c) IRD begins with a shared humanity. We begin finding commonalities by sharing our experiences joys, and sorrows. Talk about a time when a conversation changed your conception of the other person. What changed? Why?

2. As Catholics, we are called to love our neighbors, to work for the common good, and to help the poor and oppressed. We are also called to evangelize and lead others to Christ. IRD can help us to achieve all these goals.



An example of a Venn Diagram

a) Pope Francis teaches that IRD should move from a shared humanity to a dialogue about peace and justice. If common ground emerges, both sides might work together on a specific theme. Imagine such a conversation. How might a Catholic approach such a dialogue? What local issues might come up?

b) Evangelists proclaim Christ and help others to encounter Him. Yet to lead others to Christ, we must first meet them where they are. Furthermore, they must trust us to lead them. Consider what you've learned about IRD. What might Pope Francis have meant when he said that "Evangelization and [IRD]...support and nourish each other"?

3. The human need to categorize can be a great strength. It helps us to order our days, and to understand our world.

It can also be dangerous. False categories can divide people unnecessarily. Certainly there can be real divisions between peoples, but we must never allow preconceived notions to create avoidable ones.

IRD is a good way to break down false categories. Sometimes people can surprise us. Sometimes we can surprise them. Sometimes we can work together for the common good, and lead others to Christ.

If circumstances permit, consider a prayerful reading of Luke 10:25-37. Should this not be possible, pray together for increased patience and understanding in your encounters with others.

VIII. Enthusiasm For Evangelization

265. Jesus' whole life, his way of dealing with the poor, his actions, his integrity, his simple daily acts of generosity, and finally his complete self-giving, is precious and reveals the mystery of his divine life. Whenever we encounter this anew, we become convinced that it is exactly what others need, even though they may not recognize it: "What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you" (Acts 17:23). Sometimes we lose our enthusiasm for mission because we forget that the Gospel responds to our deepest needs, since we were created for what the Gospel offers us: friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters. If we succeed in expressing adequately and with beauty the essential content of the Gospel, surely this message will speak to the deepest yearnings of people's hearts: "The missionary is convinced that, through the working of the Spirit, there already exists in individuals and peoples an expectation, even if an unconscious one, of knowing the truth about God, about man, and about how we are to be set free from sin and death. The missionary's enthusiasm in proclaiming Christ comes from the conviction that he is responding to that expectation." Enthusiasm for evangelization is based on this conviction. We have a treasure of life and love which cannot deceive, and a message which cannot mislead or disappoint. It penetrates to the depths of our hearts, sustaining and ennobling us. It is a truth which is never out of date because it reaches that part of us which nothing else can reach. Our infinite sadness can only be cured by an infinite love.

1. Evangelization is a response to "the deepest yearnings of people's hearts." God created us to live in relationship with Him. Absent this relationship, we are set adrift from our true purpose and nature, and can fall prey to inner conflict and despair.

a) Saint Augustine said that our hearts are restless until they rest in God. He only realized this after trying to soothe his restless heart with earthly things. Have you ever done the same? Why do such attempts fail?

b) Pope Francis speaks of an "infinite sadness." Where does this sadness come from? How does it relate to Saint Augustine's "restless heart?"

c) Talk about a time when you felt this sadness. How did you respond to it?

2. Christ's light is the beacon that leads us out of the world's darkness. He is hope amid sadness, love amid loneliness, and peace amid conflict. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. More than just a source of consolation, Christ is the path to our fulfillment and purpose.

a) Encounter with Christ is the spark of the Christian life. Talk about your first encounter with Christ. How did you feel beforehand? During? Afterwards?

b) Having encountered Christ, the Christian is convinced that all people need this encounter. This conviction creates enthusiasm for evangelization. Talk about a time when you felt such enthusiasm. What did you do with it?

c) Ideally, encounter with Christ deepens into relationship with Him. Yet sometimes we fall away, and lose our conviction and enthusiasm. In this passage, Pope Francis reminds us that the solution is to encounter Christ anew. Talk about a time when you fell away from a relationship with Christ. How did you encounter Him anew?

3. The Apostles John and Andrew first encountered Jesus after John the Baptist bore witness to Him. Intrigued, they followed Christ, and asked Him where He was staying. He replied, “Come and see.” They stayed with Him the rest of the day. After forming a relationship with Christ, John and Andrew went out and began to bear witness to Christ themselves. In the story of John and Andrew, we find a snapshot of evangelization.

The first chapter of John’s Gospel is a key text for the evangelist. It begins with an explanation of why the world needs Christ, and goes on to describe the process of evangelization.

If circumstances permit, consider a prayerful reading of either John 1:1-18 or John 1:35-51. Should this not be possible, pray for those in your life who need to encounter Christ.



Conclusion

So where do we go from here?

Many years ago, Pope Leo XIII taught Catholics to see the modern world through the eyes of the Gospel. He called them to arms, and they responded beautifully. All the while, however, Pope Leo never gave the faithful a specific plan of attack.



Why not? Because Pope Leo was a man of far-reaching vision. He understood that there were serious issues underlying the societal ills of his time. He taught Catholics what those ills were, and how they ran counter to the Gospel. Yet he also understood that those ills cropped up in different ways in different places. They had to be addressed locally. That meant that the Pope couldn't give Catholics a battle-plan, because the situations on the ground varied so widely.

The Joy of the Gospel runs parallel to Pope Leo's *Rerum Novarum*. Like Pope Leo, Pope Francis is calling us to conversion. He is teaching us to see the world through the eyes of the Gospel. Like Pope Leo, he calling us to arms. Like Pope Leo, he is offering a few general possibilities for action. Like Pope Leo, however, he is not giving us a specific plan of attack.

So if Pope Francis isn't going to give us marching orders, what are we supposed to do?

First, we must be careful. We must not allow enthusiasm and good intentions to create rash action. If we rush in headlong, we will go awry. We must first be formed in the Gospel. We must first understand the underlying issues. These are the steps that Pope Francis is trying to guide us through.

Then what? Pope Francis has been very clear in saying that dialogue comes next. This is the forgotten step that took place after Pope Leo's call. Pope Leo had pointed to the world's major problems. Yet he also understood that local manifestations of those problems could be very different. Pope Francis understands this too, and so continually exhorts us to dialogue. With

whom does the Pope want us to dialogue? Everyone. Infused with the Gospel and formed by Catholic teaching, dialogue informs social justice and aids evangelization. Done properly, dialogue can lead to organic, local solutions to the ills of today's world.

So formation and dialogue come first. Formation deepens our love of God. Dialogue deepens our love of neighbor. These steps are not a prologue to action; they are integral to it. The wellspring of all these things, Pope Francis reminds us, has always been *The Joy of the Gospel*.



As a final exercise: if circumstances permit, consider a prayerful reading of Romans 12:1-21. Should this not be possible pray for the Church, that she may truly be Christ's hands in the world.