REFLECTIONS ON THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL FOR THOSE SERVING IN MINISTRY
REFLECTIONS ON THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL FOR THOSE SERVING IN MINISTRY

Copyright © 2014 by Catholic Charities USA All Rights Reserved.

Working to Reduce Poverty in America.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is an apostolic exhortation and why did Francis write <em>The Joy of the Gospel?</em></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You had me at hello…”</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others.”</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm.”</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…We are all in the same boat headed to the same port….</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“No one can say that they cannot be close to the poor because their own lifestyle demands more attention to other areas…”</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional resources on <em>The Joy of the Gospel</em></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reflections on The Joy of the Gospel for Those Serving in Ministry

Introduction

Pope Francis might have written *The Joy of the Gospel* specifically for the Catholic Charities network. No other papal exhortation in recent memory speaks so clearly and directly to those of us who work to reduce poverty in all its many forms. *The Joy of the Gospel* affirms that we see the face of God in those who are poor, but above all we are to serve them with love and joy.

As we know, our mission is hard, often discouraging work. To meet individual needs on a case-by-case basis is one thing; to tackle the systemic causes of poverty can seem overwhelming. Yet it is precisely through these efforts that we discover our common ground in solidarity with those who are poor. In service we work toward the common good and dignity for each human person.

I am delighted to offer you these reflections on *The Joy of the Gospel*, written by Catholic Charities USA staff and other members of our network. Use them to study the document with your ministry team or prayer group. Or simply ponder the Pope’s message with the aid of the reflection questions. May God continue to bless you with renewed joy in your ministry of service to the poor.

Cynthia Dobrzynski
Sr. Vice President Mission & Ministry, Catholic Charities USA
Email: cdobrzynski@CatholicCharitiesUSA.org
What is an apostolic exhortation, and why did Francis write *The Joy of the Gospel*?

An apostolic exhortation is a papal document that exhorts people to embrace and implement a particular aspect of the Church’s life and teaching. To “exhort” means to try to influence others by persuasive words or well-worded advice, to strongly urge someone to do something that the “exhorter” believes is the right thing to do. It can sometimes take the form of a warning about some danger to be avoided, or an urgent appeal to take up a course of action with renewed vigor or energy. That last point is important, because exhortations are generally not meant to teach new doctrine, but to renew and deepen people’s understanding of existing teaching, and to invite them to consider how to respond, apply, and integrate Church teachings and practices into their priorities, decisions, and daily actions.

An apostolic exhortation carries more significance than the message of the Holy Father in a papal audience or a homily. But since it is pastoral rather than a doctrinal or legal document, it is ranked lower than an encyclical or an apostolic constitution in terms of expressing magisterial teaching. As with everything official that a pope writes, it is to be taken very seriously. Recent apostolic exhortations by previous popes have focused on evangelization, the role of the laity, the Eucharist, and the Word of God. Frequently, apostolic exhortations are written by popes after a meeting of the worldwide Synod of Bishops, an occasional gathering of selected bishops from various countries to discuss a particular subject. At the synod, the bishops offer recommendations for the pope’s reflection, and he may then choose to write an apostolic exhortation based on those recommendations.

*The Joy of the Gospel* is one of these so-called “post-synodal exhortations” written in response to the most recent meeting of the Synod of Bishops in October 2012. That meeting focused on the “new evangelization” which Pope John Paul II first proclaimed, so *The Joy of the Gospel* adopted that theme, with Pope Francis placing a particular emphasis on the role of joy in effectively evangelizing the world with the transforming message of the Gospel of Jesus. Usually, the pope does not write the document himself; rather it is drafted based on his decisions,
and he approves the final version. It is well known, however, that in this case Pope Francis contributed much to both the content and style of this document, emphasizing his distinctive thought and themes as a map and guide to the Church's pastoral mission in the near future.

It is the hope of the writers of this resource, Ed Lis (Director of Mission Integration, Catholic Human Services, Philadelphia), Fr. Ragan Schriver (Programs and Services Consultant, Catholic Charities USA), Mary Permoda (Director of Pastoral Activities, St. Patrick Catholic Community, Scottsdale, Arizona), and Br. Steve Herro, O. Praem. (Manager of Mission Resources and Data, Catholic Charities USA) that staff from ministry teams in Catholic Charities agencies, parishes, diocesan offices, Catholic schools, and other Catholic entities will read and reflect on *The Joy of the Gospel* and this accompanying resource.

*How does Pope Francis’ message resonate with your team’s experience in your ministry today?*
“You had me at hello....”

Is it not true that in most love stories, there comes a time when the couple grows apart for whatever reason and they eventually find their way back to each others’ loving arms?

For those of you who have not seen the movie Jerry Maguire, it is that kind of love story. There is a line in the movie in which Tom Cruise shows up at his wife’s talking group to try to win her back and Renee Zellweger listens to his plea and finally says, “Stop….You had me at hello.” The couple realizes their deep love for each other and reunites ready to rediscover and redefine their love and life together.

In a strange way, funny as it may seem, it is the way I feel about my relationship to my faith. March 19, 2013 began a love story for me as well. Jorge Mario Bergoglio stood in the open doorway in his first public appearance as Pope Francis and before he addressed the thousands gathered, he asked them and us to pray for him. I began to realize at that point that I had drifted from the joy I once had for my faith. For a brief moment I felt reunited with that joy and I was at a loss for words; but what came to my mind was, “You had me at hello.”

That began for me, and for many, a journey back to rediscover and redefine our love for one another through our faith. The journey is far from over. Since his election, Pope Francis has been witnessing God’s unconditional love for us even when we may have distanced ourselves from God. There seems to be a freshness and joy rediscovered at every turn he makes.

I think it is fair to say that our parish social ministry core team is also on the journey of rediscovering and redefining how we are called to live out God’s love. It has been a roller coaster year. We are a very dedicated and service minded group. However, in the last five years perhaps we were simply “going through the motions” of parish social ministry. As many can relate in our parishes, schools, diocesan offices, and Catholic Charities agencies, we seemed stuck in the rut of the same people doing the same thing, and to be honest, with not a lot of joy. Though we call ourselves the Social Justice and Outreach Core Team with a mission to help guide our parish to walk with the two feet of love, charity and justice, our leading walkers were running on empty.
We discussed at our meetings what we were seeing Pope Francis do; we would try to emulate that joy and love in our own ministry in our own way. But we struggled at times, needing help strengthening our vision and resolve to live out God’s call. We were hungry to better capture the words and actions of Pope Francis.

Then, like a gift at Christmas, Pope Francis put his thoughts and invitation into something very tangible and accessible, his first apostolic exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*.

*The Joy of the Gospel* has been our long-awaited compilation of Pope Francis’s teaching in the proclamation of the Gospel, or, as my social justice and outreach core team would say, how to live a life of faith. Pope Francis is encouragingly calling us, the Church and the entire world, to begin a new chapter in how we spread the good news.

As a core team, we embraced this document and read it together. We found it affirming AND challenging. We continue to examine how we are guiding our parish in social ministry in the light of this gift. We continue to reflect on the passages that I share below; I invite you and your ministry team to process these and other passages of *The Joy of the Gospel* in order to avail yourselves to similar graces of which our team has been blessed:

…Let us try a little harder to take the first step and to become involved. Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. The Lord gets involved and he involves his own, as he kneels to wash their feet. He tells his disciples: ‘You will be blessed if you do this’ (John 13:17) ….Evangelizers thus take on the ‘smell of the sheep’ and the sheep are willing to hear their voice…. (#24)

…Our church doors should always be open, so that if someone, moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she will not find a closed door…. (#47)

…I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the center and then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures…. More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within
rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving…. (#49)

…Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey…. (#127)

…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 that 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.” (#183)

…One of the more serious temptations which stifles boldness and zeal is a defeatism which turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, ‘sourpusses.’ Nobody can go off to battle unless he is fully convinced of victory beforehand. If we start without confidence, we have already lost half the battle and we bury our talents. While painfully aware of our own frailties, we have to march on without giving in…. (#85)

…An evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral! Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm, that ‘delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow…. (#10)

Mary Permoda
Member of the CCUSA Parish Social Ministry Section and Director of Pastoral Activities, St. Patrick Catholic Community (Scottsdale, Arizona)
Email: mpermoda@stpatcc.org
“…those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others.”  *The Joy of the Gospel*, #10

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (b. 1774, foundress of the Sisters of Charity, and first U.S. born saint) is credited with the saying, “Live simply that others may simply live.”

For a number of years, I lived with Father Angelo, a Norbertine priest who epitomized, and witnessed to all of the fraters, brothers, and priests with whom he lived, a lifestyle that was less of a strain on the material world. We saw it in his use of electricity, water, and paper and a wardrobe that was limited but clean. He once told me that his family found ways to reuse everything on its farm; the family practiced organic farming and reused/recycled/reduced decades before Gaylord Nelson paved the way for Earth Day.

A few months after Pope Francis was inaugurated, but before the November 2013 release of *The Joy of the Gospel*, my friend and Catholic Charities agency staff member Therese asked, “What would Pope Francis say if he came to Catholic Charities?”

So what do an 18th century saint, contemporary Norbertine priest, and current Catholic Charities employee have in common with Pope Francis? Even before Pope Francis released *The Joy of the Gospel*, we learned that he took a crowded Buenos Aires bus to work every day as Archbishop, made a conscious choice to forgo the more luxurious papal residence for a simple apartment, and adopted a 1984 Renault with 180,000 miles as his local mode of transportation. Furthermore, months before and after release of *The Joy of the Gospel*, he made it quite clear in various addresses to seminarians, priests, and male religious superiors that they should witness a simple style of life and standard of living in their ministry.

In the introduction to *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis sets the stage by speaking out against materialism:

> 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 room for others, no place for the poor. (#2)
Sometimes we are tempted to find excuses and complain, acting as if we could only be happy if a thousand conditions were met. To some extent this is because our ‘technological society has succeeded in multiplying occasions of pleasure, yet has found it very difficult to engender joy.’ I can say that the most beautiful and natural expressions of joy which I have seen in my life were in poor people who had little to hold on to. I also think of the real joy shown by others who, even amid pressing professional obligations, were able to preserve, in detachment and simplicity, a heart full of faith. In their own way, all these instances of joy flow from the infinite love of God, who has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ…. (#7)

The Gospel offers us the chance to live life on a higher plane, but with no less intensity: ‘Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others’…. (#10)

These introductory remarks remind me of a homily a pastor delivered to a rather comfortable college community. He had just returned from an alternative break trip to Cuernavaca, Mexico, with students from his college. He shared how the students were so amazed that the rather poor people, without being burdened by superfluous material possessions, were a lot happier class of people. I am also reminded of the 2011 video The Economics of Happiness; it illustrates how populations which are less enslaved to economic “growth” are happier and living more environmentally sustainable lives.

Pope Francis’ message about consumerism and materialism has not only gained the attention of theologians, students, and lay ministers; these concepts have received a lot of traction in popular culture and social science research. Annie Leonard produced the 21 minute video Story of Stuff¹ in 2007; it quickly went viral. The clever video reminds us that too often personal relationships fall prey to our overconsumption AND that our life style threatens our current environment and the natural world for our children. One half million people worldwide have joined the movement to examine how overconsumption and over collection

¹ http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/
threatens present and future communities. Jason Marsh and Rob Willer (“Why Lent Makes People Happy [and Netflix Doesn’t]” Yes! Magazine, posted March 27, 2013 quote Jordi Quoidbach and Elizabeth W. Dunn, “Give It Up: A Strategy for Combating Hedonic Adaptation,” Social Psychological and Personality Science, 2013 4: 563. Quoidbach and Dunn write, “In modern Western society, many people enjoy a level of material abundance that would have been unimaginable throughout most of human history. But such material wealth often fails to provide as much happiness as people expect (Aknin, Norton, &Dunn, 2009). A recent study of almost half a million Americans found that people with higher household incomes experienced more positive moods on a day-to-day basis, but these emotional benefits tapered off entirely for annual incomes over about $75,000 (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010)”.

So what is the spiritual gain by living with and consuming less?

Patrick Brown, a fellow Catholic Charities USA staff member, shared the following in a April 3, 2014 Lenten reflection:

What does this invitation to poverty, a life of evangelical poverty, mean for us today? In the catechism, we hear the same call: “All Christ’s faithful are to ‘direct their affections rightly, lest they be hindered in their pursuit of perfect charity by the use of worldly things and by an adherence to riches which is contrary to the spirit of evangelical poverty’” (CCC 2545).

This notion of “evangelical poverty” may sound jarring. How many of us truly look forward to the small disciplines of Lent? But through small acts of poverty, be it sacrificing creature comforts like caffeine, alcohol, or television, we can train ourselves to live more simply and create space for God in our daily lives. Living in a spirit of “evangelical poverty” means accepting the invitation to live out our call, whatever it may be, with simplicity and humility.

In his blog post looking at the Pope’s [Lenten] message, Fr. Larry Snyder summarized this concept by calling us to “learn to let go,” writing: “By emptying ourselves of our attachment to the things of this world, we are able to meet others in their

http://spp.sagepub.com/content/4/5/563.full.pdf+html
need with open hearts and understanding. A spirit of evangelical poverty enables us to go into the world and see the dignity and worth of everyone we come in contact with, especially those with no one else to turn to.”

For consideration by your ministry team:

1. Allot thirty minutes for your team to view and discuss Story of Stuff at an upcoming staff or committee meeting. What are the implications of this message for your and your team’s ministry?

2. What would Pope Francis say if he came to your team’s next Christmas party (or gala fund raiser)? If appropriate, make a conscious effort when planning your team’s next party to move the emphasis from what food and drink will be served and which gifts will be exchanged to a celebration of God’s presence among us (and the “us” includes God’s preferential option for the marginalized) in human flesh.

3. In #57 of The Joy of the Gospel, Pope Francis quotes St. John Chrysostom, “Not to share one’s wealth with the poor is to steal from them and to take away their livelihood. It is not our own goods which we hold, but theirs.” Does your Catholic Charities agency, parish, or diocese appropriate a portion of every unrestricted gift for programs that directly help reduce poverty in your local community, the United States, and the world?

4. Ask yourselves if your agencies, dioceses, and parishes invest in corporations whose profit margin depends on product sales that contribute to consumerism that can hamper personal relationship building and harm our own natural environment. If the answer is yes, consider changing your corporate patterns.

5. Consider how your agency, parish, or diocese uses technology to accomplish its mission. What are the financial and personal costs for such use? Is the mechanization of our ministry helping or hindering personal relationship building with our teammates and clients?

6. Does your team make a conscious effort to learn from those who model greater joy by being less dependent on material objects? Who constitute Catholic Charities, diocesan, and parish staffs, councils and boards?

Br. Steve Herro, O. Praem.
Manager of Mission Resources and Data, Catholic Charities USA
Email: sherro@CatholicCharitiesUSA.org

4http://storyofstuff.org/
“Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm,” *The Joy of the Gospel, #10*

…If we think that things are not going to change, we need to recall that Jesus Christ has triumphed over sin and death and is now almighty. Jesus Christ truly lives…. Christ, risen and glorified, is the wellspring of our hope, and he will not deprive us of the help we need to carry out the mission which he has entrusted to us. Christ’s resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated the world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up…. *The Joy of the Gospel, #275-276.*

It is no wonder that Pope Francis, a model of joy in the resurrected Lord, chose *The Joy of the Gospel* as the title for his first major address to us. Whether we serve in a Catholic Charities agency, parish, diocesan office, or school, are we recognized for serving with joy?

I stood in the kitchen at our program serving homeless seniors one day and noticed that a new resident, Jack, was pouring himself some coffee and taking time to meticulously spice it up just right for himself. Simultaneously, I noticed one of our excellent staff making sure the residents were satisfied with their breakfasts and knew the schedules for the day. There was a sense of anticipation as the day began to unfold.

I noticed that Jack had not yet bathed since his admission two nights before, and who really knows how many nights before that. His long white beard was discolored from the food and drink that had not made it to his mouth but ended up in the beard. These factors added up to a distinct odor around him that could not be denied. As I began to head back to my office, I noticed the staff person smiling and walking toward Jack to see how his day was to unfold. Jack greeted him with a gleeful smile and stuck out his arm, offering the staff person a sip of his coffee.

“I’d really love to share some of this good coffee with you today!”

Without skipping a beat, the staff person accepted the cup and took a rather large gulp. I was stunned! I knew this person to be a bit germaphobic, sort of a neat freak, and he drank from the same cup that a person who had not bathed in several days was drinking from! As I watched this interaction, I observed their banter about the overly sweet flavor of the coffee. I
later asked Jack about sharing his coffee that he had spent so much time preparing. Jack stated that it was just too good to keep to himself and he knew that if he did not share it he could not really enjoy it.

That interaction revealed something to me that day, an insight about what joy really is. Here was a homeless man who basically had no earthly possessions to his name and yet he rejoiced in sharing with another. My thought was that if I had been in Jack's shoes I would have been plotting how I could have gotten even more for myself since I had so little. Jack revealed to me that true joy is in giving, sharing the cup, both literally and figuratively.

This aspect of joy embodied in this offer to share the cup is addressed in Pope Francis' exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*. I am deeply moved by Pope Francis' words:

…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. In this sense, several sayings of St. Paul will not surprise us: “The love of Christ urges us on” (2 Corinthians 5:14); “Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel” (I Corinthians 9:16).

The Gospel offers us the chance to live life on a higher plane, but with no less intensity: Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to other (#9-10)….  

As I reflect on the true gift of self, I can not help but think of the staff person at Catholic Charities that day who overcame his angst about germs and shared a cup with a gentleman that many would have declined. I later acknowledged him about his choice. He replied to me that he “…did not want to deny that man the opportunity to know the satisfaction of giving.” Pope Francis would have embraced this guy because he embodied what experiencing joy is all about! Indeed, on this day, I venture to say that the staff person moved beyond his professional occupation as “Catholic Charities professional” to “missionary.” This is a man who overcame his own anxieties to help another know of his dignity through the simple act of sharing a cup. As Pope Francis states, he did not see his position as a mere appendage to his life but as a missionary activity, a ministry.
Pope Francis not only expounds on the joy that we find in sharing, but the joy that we have as recipients of the mercy of God:

…How good it feels to come back to him whenever we are lost! Let me say this once more: God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy. Christ, who told us to forgive one another ‘seventy times seven’ (Matthew 18:22) has given us his example: he has forgiven us seventy times seven. Time and time again he bears us on his shoulders. No one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by this boundless and unfailing love. With a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew. Let us not flee from the resurrection of Jesus, let us never give up, come what will. May nothing inspire more than his life, which impels us onwards! (#3)

For reflection by your ministry team:

1. How would a fly on the wall in your department gage the tenor of the office environment in your Catholic Charities agency, parish, school, or diocesan office? Are co-workers happy to come to work each day?

2. Without necessarily sharing coffee cups with our clients, how can we express our joy in being able to share ministry with them? How can we express our belief in the dignity of every client, patient, parishioner, student, or customer?

3. Consider engaging your co-workers with this question, “If we cannot demonstrate joy in serving with each other, how can we help bring joy to those we encounter outside of our staff?”

4. Do we demonstrate a joy in ministry that inspires others to want to join us in service to the Lord and each other?

Fr. Ragan Schriver
Programs and Services Consultant, Catholic Charities USA and Assistant Professor of Practice, College of Social Work, University of Tennessee
Email: rschriver@CatholicCharitiesUSA.org
“…We are all in the same boat headed to the same port…” The Joy of the Gospel, #99

Within the first few days after being named Pope, Francis had already caught our attention with his simplicity of lifestyle and genuine humility. Within the first few months, he had endeared the world with his warm and personable nature and profound gestures of hospitality and tenderness. Yet while still in that honeymoon period, Francis began to shake things up a bit.

In an informal press conference on his plane while returning to Rome after the World Youth Day, he commented “who am I to judge” in regards to homosexual persons. The comment was welcomed by some but questioned by others. When he chastised global market forces that continue to widen the gap between rich and poor, some applauded his boldness and others claimed he was wandering outside his area of expertise. Some even accused him of abandoning Church doctrine and morals when he said that the Church “cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage and the use of contraceptive methods… when we speak about these issues, we have to talk about them in a context… I am a son of the church, but it is not necessary to talk about these issues all the time (see Spadaro, Antonio “A Big Heart Open to God: A Conversation with Pope Francis,” America Press, 2013).” So what is that larger context? I think it can be summarized briefly:

• The mission of the Church is to proclaim in word and deed the saving and reconciling love of God in Jesus Christ, and so Christians must be ministers of mercy first and above all.
• Proclamation of the Gospel must focus on the essentials, the necessary things, what fascinates and attracts, what makes “our hearts burn within us” as the disciples on the road to Emmaus.
• We have to find a new balance to retain the freshness and fragrance of the Gospel, which is at its heart is more simple, profound, and radiant, and from which moral consequences then flow.
• The path forward involves genuine encounter with others, effective engagement with the world, and a deep passion for evangelization.
• We need to relate what we say to mercy, the very heart of the Gospel, which gives it meaning, beauty and attractiveness.

In The Joy of the Gospel, #35, Francis exhorts us to not be obsessed with transmitting “disjointed doctrines insistently imposed but rather to embrace “a missionary style which would
actually reach everyone without exception or exclusion” by concentrating on “the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary. The message is simplified, while losing none of its depth and truth, and thus becomes all the more forceful and convincing.”

So the agenda of Francis is simple in design and sweeping in its implications: “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-preserv-action (The Joy of the Gospel, #27).”

Regardless of the particular works of the Church in which we are engaged, we must all be concerned about the bigger picture, essentially taking on the perspective of God’s plan for all of humanity. For Francis, this means being clearly focused on the central truth that “the salvation which God offers us is the work of his mercy (The Joy of the Gospel, #112)” and that “the salvation which God has wrought, and the Church joyfully proclaims, is for everyone (The Joy of the Gospel, #113).” A core theme for Francis is that we are “all in” – that no one is to be left out or forgotten, whether the unborn child in the womb, the person with disabilities, the hungry and homeless, the stranger in a foreign land, or the frail and vulnerable elderly. All are welcome in God’s house, so all must find a place in our hearts and move us to compassionate action on their behalf.

Reminiscent of Cardinal Bernardin’s “Seamless Garment”

Some commentators observe that various statements of Pope Francis naturally evoke the “Seamless Garment” – the biblical image that now deceased Cardinal Joseph Bernardin employed in his teachings on the “consistent ethic of life.” Bernardin stressed that the Church is called to defend the rights and cause of the poor and vulnerable from womb to tomb – and is thus equally obliged to active concern for moral issues such as abortion and euthanasia, as well as the social problems of poverty, war and injustice. Speaking at St. Louis University on March 11, 1984, Bernardin sounded very much in line with what we have heard and read in the words of Pope Francis more recently:
The case for a consistent ethic of life—one which stands for the protection of the right to life and the promotion of the rights which enhance life from womb to tomb—manifests the positive potential of the Catholic moral and social tradition. It is both a complex and a demanding tradition; it joins the humanity of the unborn infant and the humanity of the hungry; it calls for positive legal action to prevent the killing of the unborn or the aged and positive societal action to provide shelter for the homeless and education for the illiterate. The potential of the moral and social vision is appreciated in a new way when the systemic vision of Catholic ethics is seen as the background for the specific positions we take on a range of issues.

Bernardin championed consultation and reconciliation, and in 1996, as he approached the end of his public battle with pancreatic cancer, launched the “Common Ground Initiative” in an effort to end the growing polarization and heal divisions between so-called liberal and conservative factions in the church. This polarization often hinged on what issue a person or group was actively engaged in – the fight to end legalized abortion and stem efforts to legalize euthanasia on one side, or the support of anti-poverty and peace-making policies on the other.

In the years since his death, some pro-life advocates have expressed concern that the “consistent ethic of life” can sometimes be employed to trivialize or dismiss the clear and compelling moral case against legal abortion. In a 1988 interview, Bernardin responded: “I know that some people … have used the consistent ethic to give the impression that the abortion issue is not all that important anymore … That’s a misuse of the consistent ethic, and I deplore it…. I’ve made it very clear that at any given time, one issue may have to be given higher priority than others. I’ve never said they were all equal or required equal attention.”

Pope Francis addresses this same theme in The Joy of the Gospel, in a section entitled “No to warring among ourselves (#98-101).” Decrying conflicts that take place within the people of God, often caused by envy and jealousy, he warns against what he calls “spiritual worldliness” and “a spirit of exclusivity” that prevents Christians from seeing ourselves as part of the greater Church community:

Instead of belonging to the whole Church in all its rich variety, they belong to this or that group which thinks itself different or special. … I especially ask Christians in communities throughout the world to offer a radiant and attractive witness of
fraternal communion … We are all in the same boat and headed to the same port! Let us ask for the grace to rejoice in the gifts of each, which belong to all… Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the ideal of fraternal love!

A Personal Reflection: Pro-Life and Peace & Justice Together at the Lord’s Table

I am reminded of an experience at Villanova University in the spring of 1984, my final semester of my senior year. I was attending Sunday night mass, and amid an always packed house were a fairly large contingent of students from both the Villanovan for Life group and the Peace and Justice Center. Both groups had sponsored major events and advocacy activities in the previous weeks, and it so happened that some folks on campus had openly expressed their disappointment that students were being diverted from involvement in “pro-life activities” by their preoccupation with other “less important issues.” In point of fact, although there were some students involved in both efforts (myself included), most had little interchange with each other, and some devalued the importance of the work of “those other guys.”

Yet here we all were, gathered around the table of the Lord, one community of faith gathered in Eucharistic worship. Augustinian Fr. Owen “Ray” Jackson, co-founder of the University’s Center for Peace and Justice Education, was the presider. In that day’s Gospel, Mark 9: 38-41, John complained to Jesus about someone acting in the name of Jesus but who “does not follow us.” Jesus replied, “Do not prevent him. There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us.”

Never one to duck a tough situation (he was a former Marine), Fr. Ray addressed the message to our campus community, reminding us that while we may have different callings and priorities as far as where we invest our time and effort, we are all on the same team, God’s team, doing as Christ did in protecting life and dignity, promoting justice and charity for ALL. He also drew upon Paul’s teaching on the Body of Christ with many parts, and that we all have our particular role to play, but need the other parts to fulfill their role as well. Since Fr. Ray went to his eternal reward in 1997 and there is no transcript of that homily, I will ask his help to accurately recount the gist of his words, which still resonate deep within me: “Each of you is a part and not the whole, and none of us, nor any one group among us, could do all that the Gospel requires to build up the Kingdom. We must each do what we can, to the full extent of our ability with passionate hearts, hearts aflame with the love of God for others. But we must
also appreciate all the other works of the Gospel that we cannot be personally involved in – we should pray for those works and ask God’s blessing on those engaged in those ministries. We need each other, and God truly needs all of us to be about the work he has personally entrusted to each of us. That is what it means to be the Body of Christ alive and well in the world today. That’s why Jesus could utter those remarkable words, ‘Whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these (John 14: 12).’ That is only possible if we work together for the common good of all God’s people.”

At that time I had not heard of the Seamless Garment analogy of Cardinal Bernardin in his efforts to articulate what he called “A Consistent Ethic of Life” but in retrospect I am sure that Fr. Ray had. In fact, this is what Bernardin said just a few weeks before Father Ray’s homily:

A consistent ethic does not say everyone in the Church must do all things, but it does say that as individuals and groups pursue one issue, whether it is opposing abortion or capital punishment, the way we oppose one threat should be related to support for a systemic vision of life. It is not necessary or possible for every person to engage in each issue, but it is both possible and necessary for the Church as a whole to cultivate a conscious explicit connection among the several issues. And it is very necessary for preserving a systemic vision that individuals and groups who seek to witness to life at one point of the spectrum of life not be seen as insensitive to or even opposed to other moral claims on the overall spectrum of life…. No one is called to do everything, but each of us can do something. And we can strive not to stand against each other when the protection and the promotion of life are at stake.
Postscript: Pope Francis and the Church as Sacrament

In theologically grounding his call to be joyful evangelizers in the world, Francis turns to an image of the Church that is very prominent in the documents of Vatican II: The Church as the Sacrament of Jesus, existing as both a visible sign and an effective instrument of God's mercy, and operating as “God’s leaven in the midst of humanity (The Joy of the Gospel, #114).” The implication of this vision of Church is that we must always and everywhere be “on the front lines” and in close quarters with the society and the world. As Francis said in a Lenten talk to the priests of Rome (see “Address of Pope Francis to the Parish Priests of the Diocese of Rome”),5 Jesus was most often found “on the road” or out and about and close to the needs of people, touching their wounds with God’s mercy. He reflects on the parable of the Good Samaritan, saying “In the end, we will be judged on our ability to draw close to ‘all flesh’ … making ourselves close: closeness, nearness, being close to the flesh of one’s brother….at the end of time, only those who have not been ashamed of the flesh of their injured and excluded brother will be permitted to contemplate the glorified flesh of Christ.”

The Holy Father challenges us to get beyond our fears and habits of self-preservation and “ecclesial introversion” and take the risk of going out to be among those in need as true companions on the common journey toward holiness – this is what he means when he said in his first weeks as pope that he longs for a Church that is “poor and for the poor.” In The Joy of the Gospel, #24, he connects this with the Church being that sacramental leaven inextricably mixed into the dough of the world:

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

And so, in summary, to live the joy of the Gospel, “the Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel (The Joy of the Gospel, #114).”

Questions for your team's reflection:

1. In *The Joy of the Gospel*, #35, Pope Francis speaks of the message of evangelization being simplified and thus becoming more forceful and convincing. Consider the planning process of your ministry team. Are your goals and objectives agreeable to all, clear, concrete, and attainable?

2. *The Joy of the Gospel*, #98-101 can offer some practical advice for greatest harmony at our ministry sites. How does your ministry team intentionally work to avoid compartmentalism and or silos in your Catholic Charities agency, parish, diocesan office, or school while helping all staff to feel understood, valued, appreciated, and cared for?

3. On a related note, how does *The Joy of the Gospel*, #98-101, encourage all of us in our Catholic Charities agencies, parishes, diocesan offices, and Catholic schools to seek partnerships and collaboration with others in order to help multiple organizations achieve their mission on matters in which they agree?

Ed Lis
Director of Mission Integration, Catholic Human Services, Philadelphia
Email: elis@chs-adphila.org
“No one can say that they cannot be close to the poor because their own lifestyle demands more attention to other areas…” *The Joy of the Gospel, #201*

It was Christmas break, 2008. I traveled from northeast Wisconsin to Martinsville, Indiana with a married couple, mother, and her college aged daughter to volunteer under the auspices of Catholic Charities Indianapolis. The region was in a multi-year rebuilding program after severe flooding in June 2008. Our group had met the coordinator during a previous service trip to Mississippi; Jane was now focusing her efforts in her home region of central Indiana. Our party spent the better part of a week assisting John, a young adult homeowner, and his family reconstruct their home in the “foothills” of central Indiana. Besides working on the construction site, several from our party spent hours in the administrative office of the local foundation updating client records.

This was not my first service trip. I credit my mom for introducing community service and outreach to all of the kids in our family. She always made sure that we brought “a little extra” for the drives held at our school or church and brought us with her when her social organization was assisting at the local Salvation Army. As an adult, before working for Catholic Charities, I helped organize volunteers at a new food pantry in my town, recruited sorters for semi-annual food drives to benefit my region’s pantries, and helped organize service trip for my alma mater, but it was Christmas in Martinsville with John and his family that still sticks out in my mind.

To this day, I am moved by the actions of relationship building by the volunteers from our party. Mary had the wonderful idea to invite John, his wife, and their toddler to our lodging one night for dinner. Is not the New Testament filled with stories of Jesus building relationships with friends and strangers in the presence of one’s home (Jesus and Zaccheus; Jesus and Mary, Martha, and Lazarus; Jesus instructing his disciples to be servant leaders at the last meal that they shared together). Here we were, a bunch of middle to upper class Yankees, well educated, highly connected Catholic Church folk, descending on a region and people that I might best describe as “hillbilly.” The locals did not move far from where they were raised and really loved their guns. Many did not have the opportunity for further education or well paying jobs that we did. And Catholics were few and far between.
That night, I learned that it is one thing to volunteer on a service site (helping to build or rebuild a home, sort food or stock pantry shelves, cleanup an abandoned lot in the central city) but the advocate moves to a higher realm when seeking to build personal relationships with those who are poor. It was more than shopping, cooking, setting the table, and cleaning the dishes. Our time together included transporting our guests to and from our lodging, dining and conversing (about matters besides the rebuilding of the house) with them, playing hide and seek with the toddler; I think that you get the picture. I have reminded Mary several times how her initiative for us to break bread with John and his family helped me move to the next level of charity.

Fast forward to 2014. Michel Roy, Secretary General of Caritas Internationalis, addressed hundreds of Catholic social action types at the Catholic Social Ministry Gathering in Washington, D.C. The Frenchman had a profound impact on our Catholic U.S. crowd as he interpreted Pope Francis’ *The Joy of the Gospel* to include being in personal relationship with those who are poor. He reminded me of the home cooked taco dinner that we had with John and his family years ago when he suggested table fellowship to help begin such personal relationships. Later that semester, at a Georgetown University Symposium entitled “A New Vision for the Church: Pope Francis’ Agenda for the Church, World, and Social Justice, Dr. Mary Doak, Associate Professor of Theology, University of San Diego, drew strong connections between charity/justice and evangelization.

Pope Francis writes in *The Joy of the Gospel*, #198:

…This is why I want to Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the sensus fidei, but in their difficulties, they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the center of the Church’s pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voices to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them.
Perhaps the real zinger is a few pages later, *The Joy of the Gospel*, #201:

No one must say that they cannot be close to the poor because their own lifestyle demands more attention to other areas. This is an excuse commonly heard in academic, business or professional, and even ecclesial circles. While it is quite true that the essential vocation and mission of the lay faithful is to strive that earthly realities and all human activity may be transformed by the Gospel, none of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice: “Spiritual conversion, the intensity of the love of God and neighbor, zeal for justice and peace, the Gospel meaning of the poor and of poverty, are required of everyone.” I fear that these words too may give rise to commentary or discussion with no real practical effect. That being said, I trust in the openness and readiness of all Christians, and I ask you to seek, as a community, creative ways of accepting this renewed call.

I cannot close a passage on *The Joy of the Gospel* and inclusion without one last story of life at Catholic Charities USA. Our office is located in a business district surrounded by a federal government office, a federal court house, and a fine hotel that caters to higher income clients. One week, I noticed a homeless person bundled up and with a shopping cart on the corner of our block. He or she was there, in broad daylight, for several days. The irony was nearly too much for me, as I reflected on the presence of this child of God, in great material and perhaps psychological need, camping out a stone’s throw from Catholic Charities USA and a Federal District Courthouse. As I shared my discovery with my friend and co-worker Matthew, he said, “Let’s connect him or her with services.” I walked PAST the man or woman several times but Matthew was ready to leave our office and befriend the person NOW! I made a point to see if the potential client was still parked on the corner, but he or she was gone.

For reflection by your ministry team:

1. If you agree with Pope Francis regarding the necessity of being in personal relationship with those who are poor, how intentional is your ministry team in helping to make this happen?
2. What are practical steps that can be taken to help staff in our Catholic Charities agencies, diocesan offices, Catholic schools, and churches who are not poor become better able to “be with” those people who are poor?

3. Can your ministry team become more effective by including the wisdom and experience of those who are poor as you plan and strategize for your future?

**Br. Steve Herro, O. Praem.**
Manager of Mission Resources and Data, Catholic Charities USA
Email: sherro@CatholicCharitiesUSA.org
Additional resources on *The Joy of the Gospel*


