

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO



JOY OF THE GOSPEL

**A Parish Guide Based on *Evangelii Gaudium*
for its 10th Anniversary**

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“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.”

– Pope Francis
Evangelii Gaudium 28





BRINGING OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS TO JESUS: A PARISH STUDY GUIDE FOR POPE FRANCIS' EXHORTATION *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*

Why should you join other parishioners to read and study Pope Francis' exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* [*The Joy of the Gospel: On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*]?

Evangelii gaudium [EG] dates back to 2013, the first year of Pope Francis' pontificate. It is a remarkable programmatic document that sets out the vision of the newly elected pope. He took into account the discussions of the Synod of Bishops (October, 2012) that considered the challenge of evangelization in today's world.

Before the conclave that elected him, Pope Francis had addressed the assembled Cardinals. He spoke of the need for the Church to go out in mission. The Church, he explained, cannot be introverted or absorbed in her own internal life. The Church must be ever ready to bring Jesus to all people, but especially those who live on the margins of society.

As he explains the meaning and direction of evangelization in EG, Pope Francis identifies many themes that he has subsequently developed, including the centrality of God's mercy, the inclusive reach of the Gospel, concerns for an integral ecology as we care for the earth, the pressing questions of economic justice especially for those deprived of basic necessities, and relations with those who are not part of the Catholic Church including other Christians, Jews, Muslims and other people of good will. To know EG is to know the exciting vision of this remarkable Pope, a vision for the Church and the world today and tomorrow.

Is EG then just about Pope Francis' and his opinions about the Church, the world and evangelization?

It would be a serious mistake to say that EG is just about Pope Francis. The direction and the spirit embodied in EG are really and truly rooted in the renewal of the Church launched by the Second Vatican Council. Pope Saint John XXIII convoked the Council and summoned the Church to engage the world with the Christian faith and to do so with hope and conviction. His successor, Pope Saint Paul VI said that evangelization was the very identity of the Church. Pope Saint John Paul II gave the Church a decisively Christ-centered approach to her mission and urged everyone to “put out into the deep” with daring and evangelical boldness. Pope Benedict XVI also insisted on the Christocentrism of the Church that is charged with proclaiming the integral and enduring truth of Jesus Christ. Clearly, Pope Francis stands in a line of renewal that goes back to the Second Vatican Council. In that Spirit-led Council, the Church came to reckon anew with her identity, who she is in relationship to Jesus Christ and who she is in relationship to the world. The Church's reclaimed sense of identity converges in the mission of evangelization that Pope Francis explains and encourages.

How exactly does EG challenge the Church at large, and — more particularly — parishes and individual believers?

In fact, EG presents many challenges to the Church, parishes and believers. In the first place, EG challenges all of us to take a critical look at what we are doing to determine whether we are being faithful to the mandate that Jesus has entrusted to us. This mandate means bringing the good news of the coming of the Reign of God to the whole world, calling all people to conversion of heart and inviting everyone to new life in Jesus Christ. Are we being faithful to this joyful and demanding mandate? We can only respond to this question with a thorough and honest examination of conscience.

EG also challenges us to embrace change. That is never an easy process. Frequently, in the face of change, our default mode is to allow inertia to take hold of us. Still, if we truly want to be faithful to what the Lord wants of us, if we want to share him and the life to which he summons all of us, we need to make changes. We need to re-do our priorities, re-order how we manage our time, talent and treasure. We need to deepen and expand our faith commitment. There is no room for a lukewarm attitude or a halting pace. A favorite word of Pope Francis (and of the New Testament as well) is *parrhesia*, a Greek word that means making bold proclamation.

EG offers us yet another challenge, and that is to link evangelization to the real world with all its blessings, challenges and problems. When I first read EG, I was puzzled by all the references that Pope Francis made to the world economy, the plight of migrants and refugees and the degradation of our environment. Then I realized that he was attaching the task of bringing Jesus to the world by identifying that real world to which we are called to bring the Lord. Religious faith is never an escape from the world or an evasion of real human concerns. Rather, our faith must engage the world just as the Incarnation teaches us, when the Word became flesh and dwelled among us — as we are for better or worse.

Although EG offers us these and many other challenges, permit me to conclude with one final challenge. It is the shape of the document itself — its style, its point of view and its unfolding development. We may be more accustomed to church documents that follow a very logical sequence of development in a narrow field of thought. EG moves differently. This document has a shifting style and point of view. At times, it is instructional. In other moments, it is primarily inspirational and aspirational. Sometimes, it is meditative and prayerful. EG draws from a wide

range of our Catholic spiritual tradition and contemporary experience — the Bible, the Church's Magisterium, the wisdom of pastoral experience and the voiced needs of people today. Of course, all this has implications for reading and studying EG, something we will now consider.

What is the best way to read, study and consider EG?

The guide that you have in hand begins by proposing an overall view of EG. That is a good starting point. I suggest that you look at this guide and then scan the primary text. Get a sense of the whole. Be aware that all the pieces may not make immediate sense to you. You will begin to have a general feel for the document, and that is an apt way to launch your further reflection.

A next step is to move through EG slowly. Break down your reading of the different parts of the document. Note what resonates with your experience, what seems to fit with what you know and feel. Also identify what puzzles you about the document, the questions you have and perhaps the difficulties that it poses for you.

The very best way to approach EG is to study it and talk about it with other people. The parish setting is ideal for this kind of study. The perspectives and insights of other believers will be invaluable.

Finally, allow your reading, study, reflection and discussion to lead you to practical implications and decisions. Let EG make a difference in your life and in your sense of faith as a gift to be shared with others.

With these approaches, you will have a good and fruitful experience of the great theme that Pope Francis has proposed for the Church in EG — the joy of the Gospel, a joy that is received from God and a joy that is shared with others.

"I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization..." (n.33)





THE CHAPTERS OF *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*

In the following section, you will find a very brief summary of each chapter of *Evangelii Gaudium*. A selection of passages from the exhortation follows the summaries. Finally, there are reflection questions for each chapter.

CHAPTER ONE

The Church's Missionary Transformation

Only a Church that goes out and takes initiative stays faithful to the Lord's missionary mandate. This missionary style of the Church stands in sharp contrast to a Church that can be introverted, reactionary and preoccupied about her own structures and institutional life. In fact, the Church must be "a mother with an open heart." This means that the Church moves deeply, personally and even intimately into the entire world and with great concern and solicitude.

From n. 15: ...missionary outreach is *paradigmatic for all the Church's activity*. Along these lines the Latin American bishops stated that we "cannot passively and calmly wait in our church buildings," we need to move "from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry."

Question: What changes would our local community need to make, so that it could better embody this outward movement?

CHAPTER TWO

Amid the Crisis of Communal Commitment

Topic A

Some challenges of today's world: in a sense, the great backdrop of the world's crisis is economic. It involves the drive to acquire and consume, which, in turn, leads to inequity, isolation and a lack of respect for human dignity.

From n. 74: Cities are multicultural; in the larger cities, a connective network is found in which groups of people share a common imagination and dreams about life, and new human interactions arise, new cultures, invisible cities. Various subcultures exist side by side and often practice segregation and violence. The Church is called to be at the service of a difficult dialogue. On the one hand, there are people who have the means needed to develop their personal family lives, but there are also many “non-citizens,” “half citizens” and “urban remnants.” Cities create a sort of permanent ambivalence because, while they offer their residents countless possibilities, they also present many people with any number of obstacles to the full development of their lives.

Question: Identify how we can be “at the service of a difficult dialogue,” so that the faith and humanity of all those in our city can flourish? What makes the dialogue or conversation difficult in our diverse and often disconnected world? What kind of personal courage does it take to connect with others who are different?

Topic B

Temptations faced by pastoral workers: there is a sense of being overwhelmed by the difficulties and counter-forces. This leads to discouragement. Sometimes, we are tempted to become co-opted by the dominant cultural models. And we become what we should be resisting, for example, in a kind of worldliness and pre-occupation with structures, status and accomplishment.

From n. 85: 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, keeping in mind what the Lord said to St. Paul: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Question: Do we sustain confidence and optimism as we go forward on our mission to bring Jesus, his message, and his life to the world? When our confidence and joy wanes, how can we “recharge” it?

CHAPTER THREE

The Proclamation of the Gospel

Topic A

The entire people of God proclaim the Gospel: the proclamation of the Gospel is a responsibility that belongs to everyone in the Church. We are in this together. It means a personal commitment to a personal encounter with the Lord and fostering that in others. A great formational challenge is how to raise this kind of shared consciousness in a highly individualistic culture.

From n. 120: The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love.

Question: How have we left the sharing and proclaiming of God's love to "religious professionals" and not claimed our own responsibility? How can we foster a confident spirit of mission among all people in our faith community?

Topic B

The homily: the homily is the privileged place of word and sacrament coming together in the Eucharist which sustains the evangelizing energy of the Church.

Question: How can the whole community and individuals within it help those who have responsibility for preaching, so that they can carry out their task more and more effectively?

"Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization" (n.120)



Topic C

Preparing to preach: we must have two ears that listen to God's word and to the experience of the people.

Question: Are there opportunities for you to share your experiences with those who preach? If not, how could that happen?

Topic D

Evangelization and the deeper understanding of the kerygma: it is essential to get to the heart of the matter, the essential center of faith which is our relationship with Jesus Christ in his Body, the Church.

From n. 164: On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over: "Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you." This first proclamation is called "first" not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the *principal* proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment.

Question: What the Holy Father says in n. 164 is so important, but, in fact, how many Catholics actually know this principal proclamation? How must we shift our efforts to get at this center? What would this look like in our local faith community?

CHAPTER FOUR

The Social Dimension of Evangelization

The detailed reflections in this chapter identify important social corollaries of evangelization. Firstly, that the Gospel and evangelization must have an impact on shaping the world and human relationships, because of the Kingdom or Reign of God realigns our world and changes us. Secondly, that the poor have a privileged place in our evangelization efforts and must be included, because we are all connected. Thirdly, if we move to a society of people equal in dignity who live out justice, peace will come to us. And lastly, that dialogue is essential, and it means a process of deep listening and generous exchange.

From n. 194: When St. Paul approached the apostles in Jerusalem to discern whether he was "running or had run in vain" (Gal. 2:2), the key criterion of authenticity which they presented was that he should not forget the poor (cf. Gal. 2:10). This important principle, namely that the Pauline communities should not succumb to the self-centered lifestyle of the pagans, remains timely today, when a new self-centered paganism is growing. We may not always be able to reflect adequately the beauty of the Gospel, but there is one sign which we should never lack: the option for those who are least, those whom society discards.

Question: How can we make sure that the social dimension accompanies our evangelization efforts? In presenting Jesus and his life to people, how can we avoid the trap of making religious faith a purely personal and perhaps even private experience?



CHAPTER FIVE

Spirit-Filled Evangelizers

Topic A

Only those who have personally encountered the saving love of Jesus and are empowered by the Spirit can bring him to others.

Topic B

Mary, in her faith, witness and proclamation, is the star of the new evangelization.

From n. 268: To be evangelizers of souls, we need to develop a spiritual taste for being close to people's lives and to discover that this is itself a source of greater joy. Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people. When we stand before Jesus crucified, we see the depth of his love which exalts and sustains us, but, at the same time, unless we are blind, we begin to realize that Jesus' gaze, burning with love, expands to embrace all his people.

Question: This passage brings together the vertical (to God) dimension and the horizontal (to others) dimension of our evangelization efforts. How can we stay true to this double path as we try to bring others to Jesus? How can we both stay close to Lord and also stay close to his people as we move forward in mission?



CONTINUING TO STUDY, REFLECT AND DISCUSS *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*

Evangelii gaudium is a very rich document. It deserves a careful reading and continuous reflection. Disciples who want to bring other disciples to Jesus need to probe its wisdom and direction. In addition to the questions that are identified above in the synopsis of each chapter, here are some other questions that may be helpful for personal or group study.

Questions

What was new or surprising for you as you read *Evangelii gaudium*?

Did a reading of *Evangelii gaudium* stir up a new sense of responsibility or purpose for you? A new way of envisioning your life as a disciple of Jesus?

How would you identify the challenges for the larger Church and for your local faith community as they seek to bring Jesus Christ to others in today's world?

If someone wants to be a genuine and effective evangelizer, what sustaining resources do they need?

How do the Word of Scripture, the Sacraments of the Church and the devotions of people fit into the task and process of evangelization?



A PRAYER SERVICE FOR THOSE WHO GATHER TO STUDY AND REFLECT ON *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Psalm 67: A prayer that all people and nations would come to the Lord

O God, be gracious and bless us
and let your face shed its light upon us.
So will your ways be known upon earth
and all nations learn your saving help.

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.

Let the nations be glad and exult
for you rule the world with justice.
With fairness you rule the peoples,
you guide the nations on earth.

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.

The earth has yielded its fruit
for God, our God, has blessed us.
May God still give us blessing
till the ends of the earth stand in awe.

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.

Glory to the Father...

At this time, participants can quietly sit with the Psalm and then share aloud a word, a phrase or a verse that spoke in a special way to them.

Alternately, after a short time of quiet, participants can offer petitions that they bring to the meeting. After each petition, they can say, "Let us pray to the Lord."

When this time of prayer and sharing is concluded, all can join in praying the Lord's Prayer.

Concluding prayer for evangelization:

O God, whose will it is that all should be saved
and come to the knowledge of the truth,
look upon your abundant harvest
and be pleased to send workers to gather it,
that the Gospel may be preached to all creation
and that your people, gathered by the word of life
and sustained by the power of the Sacraments,
may advance in the path of salvation and love.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

For additional copies of this guide or other resources contact the Office for Evangelization and Missionary Discipleship.

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