

Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*
On The Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World
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The delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 9-13)

What is all this partying about?!

I found the livestock... the money... the child I had lost!

Overjoyed – is what Jesus relates in the magnificent yet not fully appreciated nor appropriated parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son ([Luke 15](#)). Jesus preached these Parables of Divine Mercy to evangelize his listeners who accused Him of being a “friend of sinners.” The sinless *Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world* spoke these parables of love to show us what His mission is all about. Jesus, the evangelizer par excellence and the Gospel in person ([Evangelii Gaudium](#), 209), Himself, the Good News of God and the very first and the greatest evangelizer ([Evangelii Nuntiandi](#), 7), wished to clearly show us what real joy is all about – *the joy of salvation* (cf. *Psalm 51:14; 1 Peter 1:6-9*.)

At the end of each of the three parables, Jesus makes a truly astonishing statement we have all but forgotten and would do well to ponder as we enter into [The Joy of the Gospel, Evangelii Gaudium](#) with Pope Francis: Jesus Christ assures us that this *lost-and-found business* is so central to the Gospel message and proclamation that “there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance”, closing with a truly hope-filled assurance for all who know they need divine and human mercy: “we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.” (*Luke 15:7, 10, 32*) The father like the other two individuals were “jubilant” and invite all to “*Rejoice with me!*” because they had found what was lost, the dead had come back to life, and what was saved was now safe.

What is all this joy about?

It is *the joy of the Gospel* spread through and by the Body of Christ in the footsteps of her Head, *Christ our joy*. It is *the proclamation of the Gospel of joy* from the very beginning for “the first word of the New Testament is an invitation to joy. The New Testament is truly ‘Gospel,’ the ‘Good News’ that brings us joy.” (Pope Benedict XVI: [Homily, December 18, 2005](#)) Joy is such an important and constitutive element of the Christian life and of the proclamation of the Gospel that Pope Paul VI wrote an entire Apostolic Exhortation *On Christian Joy, Gaudete in Domino* to which Pope Francis refers in his first Apostolic Exhortation [Evangelii Gaudium](#), *On The Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World* (also known as *The Joy of the Gospel*.)

The delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing

Pope Francis is calling the Church to carry out [The Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World](#) with a renewed appreciation for and commitment to *the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing* so that we and others may experience the joy that fills heaven and must fill earth when what is lost is found and what is dead is brought back to life.

Is it worth the effort – and can we evangelize any other way?

Yes... and no... to use the same expository style used by Pope Francis in this Apostolic Exhortation on *a love that evangelizes* or *an evangelizing love*, terms I am fond of using when speaking, writing, and training others for the new evangelization.

Yes: it is worth it!

- Few joys this side of heaven surpass *the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing!*
- Few things compare to the joy of making Christ and His plan of salvation known.
- Few things demonstrate greater love for our neighbor and for God who wishes everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth ([1 Tim 4:2](#)).

No: we should not evangelize in any other way.

- We evangelize with joy because “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus.” Both the evangelizer and the evangelized “who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ, joy is constantly born anew.” ([Evangelii Gaudium](#), No. 1)
- We cannot effectively evangelize if we are “Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter.” (No. 6)
- We can experience daily *the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing* because we have first encountered Love Incarnate: Jesus Christ: “Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God’s love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?” (No. 8; cf. [Evangelii Nuntiandi](#), 24)
- We, the evangelizer, “must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!” Rather, “Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm, that ‘delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow... And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the good news not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ.’” (No. 10; cf. [Evangelii Nuntiandi](#), 80)

We can. We must. Evangelize with joy!

Love compels us in our work of evangelization ([Evangelii Gaudium](#), 9)

Pope Francis touches on a truth in [Evangelii Gaudium](#), 9 that I have experienced in my own life as an evangelizer since the moment I first encountered and gave my life to Christ at the age of 15 upon reading the entire New Testament in search for the evidence Christ presented for His unheard of claims to divinity: your heart enlarges when you receive Christ into it, and *heart-enlarged disciples* become *loving missionaries – missionary disciples!* (cf. [Evangelii Gaudium](#), 24, 119, 120, 173) “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 regard, several sayings of Saint Paul will not surprise us: ‘The love of Christ urges us on’ (2 Cor 5:14); ‘Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel’ (1 Cor 9:16).” The Apostolic Exhortation is filled with references to the undeniable and very necessary call to love. It brought tears to my eyes to see the Holy Father using, almost *verbatim*, phrases and emphases I use in my latest multilingual, multimedia New Evangelization Love Outreach Project called *Remember You Are Loved/Eres Amado/Você E Amado*, as we educate, enthuse, and equip Catholics to exercise *a love that evangelizes* and help all people to “love more and love better” and to “love someone new each day.”

Live the good – evangelistic – life! (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 10)

The Pope assures us that each one of us can and must embrace the call to “life on a higher plane” as we become convinced that “Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort.” It is good to evangelize! It is fulfilling to be an evangelizer! It is exhilarating to go out and into the existential peripheries where we can *be and bring Good News!* Christ through His Vicar is summoning us to “leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others”. Why? Because, Pope Francis states, “When the Church summons Christians to take up the task of evangelization, she is simply pointing to the source of authentic personal fulfilment. For ‘here we discover a profound law of reality: that life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give life to others. This is certainly what mission means’.” Grow up to become an effectively joyful and loving evangelizer!

Do it for love of God and neighbor whose good we seek. (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 11)

We have something truly awesome to offer the world! The world needs the truly awesome Message and Plan of God! Would Christ have become Man were God’s loving plan of salvation a mere *take it or leave it, no big deal* proposition, or were His atoning death and resurrection not the God-chosen means to save us and secure for us life that never ends? The world needs the fascinating and awe-inspiring Person of Christ! Indeed, the pope says, “The heart of its message will always be the same: the God who revealed his immense love in the crucified and risen Christ.” Yes, though “the Christian message has known periods of darkness and ecclesial weakness, it will never grow old.” We can implement a [new evangelization](#) that is [new in fervor, new in methods and new in expressions](#) as called for over three decades ago because “Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world. Every form of authentic evangelization is always ‘new’.”

“Evangelizer Beware” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 12)

God is calling. God wants us to work for Him. God works through us. But God alone can and will be praised – from start to finish! Pope Francis puts it plainly: “Though it is true that this mission demands great generosity on our part, it would be wrong to see it as a heroic individual undertaking, for it is first and foremost the Lord’s work, surpassing anything which we can see and understand. Jesus is ‘the first and greatest evangelizer’ ... In every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God, who has called us to cooperate with him and who leads us on by the power of his Spirit... The life of the Church should always reveal clearly that God takes the initiative, that ‘he has loved us first’ (*1 Jn 4:19*) and that he alone ‘gives the growth’ (*1 Cor 3:7*). This conviction enables us to maintain a spirit of joy in the midst of a task so demanding and challenging that it engages our entire life. God asks everything of us, yet at the same time he offers everything to us.” Thus does Pope Francis address early on a three-fold and foundational truth that no *missionary disciple* – lay or clerical – can afford to forget!

- First, evangelization is an ecclesial act that cannot be undertaken apart from and less still against the Church (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 16, 60.)
- Secondly, evangelization efforts do not spring forth from a person’s own initiative, as if we were the author of any good ideas or any good work the Lord accomplishes through us. (*John 15:5*)
- Thirdly, all the glory goes to the Lord! “*Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory*” (*Psalms 115:1*) – an attitude of humble recognition we need in our modern *celebrity cult* culture which has penetrated even religious circles. What then is in it for me, some “evangelization newbies” may ask? Pure joy – that comes from seeking always to be put in our place, ensuring that, like [John the Baptist](#), we may decrease so that Christ may increase as we [prepare the way of the Lord](#).

Ever Ancient, Ever New (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 13)

In this work of evangelization, we humbly proclaim the Gospel with joy in *continuity of faith* with and *grateful remembrance* of others who have gone before us: “this remembrance makes present to us ‘a great cloud of witnesses’ (Heb 12:1), some of whom, as believers, we recall with great joy: ‘Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God’ (Heb 13:7).” We shall not forget from whence we come and where we are going! And as Pope Francis challenges us to “embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy” and to adopt “new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come” (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 1, 11, 31, 288), there is to hope rather than fear or envision “the newness of this mission as entailing a kind of displacement or forgetfulness of the living history which surrounds us and carries us forward.”

We’ve come far in the Church’s new evangelization and mission of love – and there is more to come!

May you, I, and every Catholic run to embrace *the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing!*

May we do so as if our lives depended on it!

May we do so as if the lives of others depended on it.

May we do so in such a way that others may experience the joy of salvation with us.

May we do so in such a way that people begin to ask: *What is all this joy about?*

May we happily respond: *Rejoice with me! What was lost has been found, what was dead has come back to life! Welcome to the Father’s feast!*

For further encouragement regarding the necessity and urgency of a joyful evangelization, read below the heartfelt words of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*, and Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.

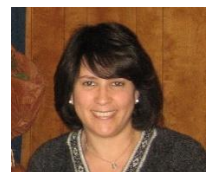
About the Author

Martha Fernández-Sardina is the Director of Prepare The Way Enterprises and an international, bilingual speaker, and consultant touching thousands through radio, TV, articles, training seminars, talks, and new evangelization outreach projects, including Remember You Are Loved™, N.E.T.S.-New Evangelization Training School™, Prepare The Way™, the Hispanic Festival of Faith and the Month of Hispanic Evangelization. Her presentations and programs educate, enthuse, and equip Catholics for a new evangelization.

Martha feels she was “born to evangelize” and is committed to serving the Lord wherever, whenever, however, and with whomever He wishes.

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The Pope on the necessity and urgency of a joyful evangelization

Pope Francis:

"If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life. 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 and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: 'Give them something to eat' (Mk 6:37)." ([Evangelii Gaudium, 49](#))

Pope Benedict XVI:

"Love of neighbor is thus shown to be possible ... in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God, an encounter which has become a communion of will, even affecting my feelings. Then I learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ. His friend is my friend. Going beyond exterior appearances, I perceive in others an interior desire for a sign of love, of concern... Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities; I can give them the look of love which they crave... If I have no contact whatsoever with God in my life, then I cannot see in the other anything more than the other, and I am incapable of seeing in him the image of God. But if in my life I fail completely to heed others, solely out of a desire to be "devout" and to perform my "religious duties", then my relationship with God will also grow arid. It becomes merely "proper", but loveless. Only my readiness to encounter my neighbor and to show him love makes me sensitive to God as well. Only if I serve my neighbor can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me... Love of God and love of neighbor are thus inseparable, they form a single commandment. But both live from the love of God who has loved us first. No longer is it a question, then, of a "commandment" imposed from without and calling for the impossible, but rather of a freely-bestowed experience of love from within, a love which by its very nature must then be shared with others. Love grows through love... The entire activity of the Church is an expression of a love that seeks the integral good of man: it seeks his evangelization through Word and Sacrament, an undertaking that is often heroic in the way it is acted out in history; and it seeks to promote man in the various arenas of life and human activity. Love is therefore the service that the Church carries out in order to attend constantly to man's sufferings and his needs, including material needs..." ([Deus Caritas Est, 18, 20](#))

Pope John Paul II:

"The number of those awaiting Christ is still immense: the human and cultural groups not yet reached by the Gospel, or for whom the Church is scarcely present, are so widespread as to require the uniting of all the Church's resources. As she prepares to celebrate the jubilee of the year 2000, the whole Church is even more committed to a new missionary advent. We must increase our apostolic zeal to pass on to others the light and joy of the faith, and to this high ideal the whole People of God must be educated. We cannot be content when we consider the millions of our brothers sisters, who like us have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, but who live in ignorance of the love of God. For each believer, as for the entire Church, the missionary task must remain foremost, for it concerns the eternal destiny of humanity and corresponds to God's mysterious and merciful plan." ([Redemptoris Missio, 86](#))

Pope Paul VI:

"It would be useful if every Christian and every evangelizer were to pray about the following thought: men can gain salvation also in other ways, by God's mercy, even though we do not preach the Gospel to them; but as for us, can we gain salvation if through negligence or fear or shame- what St. Paul called "blushing for the Gospel" [134] - or as a result of false ideas we fail to preach it? For that would be to betray the call of God, who wishes the seed to bear fruit through the voice of the ministers of the Gospel; and it will depend on us whether this grows into trees and produces its full fruit. Let us therefore preserve our fervor of spirit. Let us preserve the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow. May it mean for us- as it did for John the Baptist, for Peter and Paul, for the other apostles and for a multitude of splendid evangelizers all through the Church's history- an interior enthusiasm that nobody and nothing can quench. May it be the great joy of our consecrated lives. And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world." ([Evangelii Nuntiandi, 79](#))