

The pope's challenge to all of us

By [Jonathan Grieser](#)

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I've had a chance to read the pope's apostolic exhortation *Gaudium Evangelii*, and I've also been following much of the media and blogoverse response. Much of that has focused on his statements about capitalism or his affirmation of traditional church teaching on the ordination of women, abortion, etc.

I had a conversation the other night with a first-time volunteer at my church's First Monday meals for the homeless community. He's an active and committed Catholic, and he said to me in the course of our conversation, "What you're doing here, that's what the pope is talking about." Then I read about the unconfirmed and officially denied rumors that Pope Francis is going out at night dressed as a priest to be among the homeless of Rome. Whether or not the rumors are true, a church that is active in the community—active among the poorest, the outcast, the suffering—this is what Pope Francis is talking about, and it's what Jesus talked about.

But that's not all that Pope Francis is talking about. What so much of the media, secular and religious, seems to have overlooked is the title and overall theme of the document, "The Joy of the Gospel." His discussion of the economy comes in the context of his discussion of what hinders evangelization. The document is about sharing the gospel, but more deeply, it is about the joy of the gospel, the joy of life in Christ. Some of the most profound and challenging sections of the document come early on:

22. God's word is unpredictable in its power. The Gospel speaks of a seed which, once sown, grows by itself, even as the farmer sleeps (Mk 4:26-29). The Church has to accept this unruly freedom of the word, which accomplishes what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking.

[24] 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.

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 him.

This document is not only a challenge to Roman Catholics; it is also a challenge to all Christians, and especially to clergy. It is a challenge to us to examine our priorities, to remember and embrace the joy of the gospel, and to proclaim the gospel’s joy in a world full of suffering, and to people who are struggling to find meaning and hope. It is a challenge to all of us to keep our eyes focused on the gospel, on the joy of life in Christ, and on the importance of sharing that joy—and the redemptive love of God in Christ—with the world around us.

*Originally posted at [Grieser's blog](#)*