



# THE VISITATION

THE PUBLICATION OF THE NATIVITY HOUSE PROJECT

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## Reflections on 'The Joy of the Gospel'

by Kathy Fech

I was eager and excited when I was first asked to write a reflection on Pope Francis' first Apostolic Exhortation- The Joy of the Gospel. I quickly found it to be a more difficult task than anticipated. As I reread the letter, highlighting particularly noteworthy passages, I realized that with the exception of "the", "and", and "of", I wanted to share nearly every one of Pope Francis' words with you. I soon realized I would have to rethink my approach!

The first paragraphs of The Joy of the Gospel made me pause and rethink what joy meant. If you look it up in the dictionary it says "a feeling of great pleasure and happiness." This undermines true, Christian joy, in my opinion. Why? After a 5-course meal with yummy dessert and a tasty wine, I have felt "great pleasure and happiness". While on a relaxing vacation I have felt "great pleasure and happiness". I'm sure you could name dozens of similar instances. Unfortunately, I tend to distance God's goodness from these events, which I shouldn't.

As I reflected on Pope Francis' writing, an image from the Easter Vigil service kept coming to mind. One of my favorite moments in my home parish of St. Vincent de Paul in Fort Wayne, Indiana is during the Gloria. As the lights are turned on and the choir leads us in those beautiful words, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to people of good will." As this happens, the church bells are rung but people also whip out bells from their purses and pockets. The church is filled with the

sound of exuberant ringing as we celebrate with pure joy the miracle of that night- that Christ rose from the dead to save us, the most unworthy, from our sins. My heart bursts with joy and excitement. I could run a marathon (and I'm hardly a runner!) with all the Christian energy bursting in me. And, yet, in the days to follow Easter I tend to return to my mundane life instead of living as I am called.

Pope Francis writes, "There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter." This line really struck home with regard to joy. Whether it was going through my divorce or job hunting during times of under or unemployment, I have been all-too-inclined to fall into this way of thinking and forget to remain in Easter. I imagine my Lenten despair is similar to that of mothers who have no idea how they will find the money, means, and health care needed to bring a child into this world. But we shouldn't be so despairing as Christians. Pope Francis reflects on the early Christians and how they were filled with a "missionary joy." Christians were being jailed, murdered, and persecuted in dozens of ways yet the joy for all Christ had done for them fueled them to go forth in the face of adversity. Surely these are greater persecutions than those I have faced or any single mother has faced? In parts of the world, it is still a danger to be a Christian. (How many of you followed the recent news story of Meriam Ibrahim?) How can we leave

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## the JOY of the GOSPEL

I prefer a Church which is bruised and hurting and dirty because it has been on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security ...

... 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 feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us:  
Give them something to eat!

PAPA FRANCESCO

## Life with the WV Chemical Spill

by Molly Linehan

When traveling from my home, there is an odd phenomenon that takes place after telling someone I live in Charleston, West Virginia. I usually have to pay attention to the response. Frequently, I'm misunderstood to live either in western Virginia or in Charleston, South Carolina. No offense is intended. It's only that West Virginia, which celebrated its sesquicentennial last year, doesn't seem to quite be recognized as a state.

I'm not sure many native West Virginians were surprised when the national media didn't pick up on our chemical spill. On January 9th an unknown quantity of 4-

methylcyclohexane methanol (Crude MCHM), a chemical used to clean coal, leaked into the Elk River just a mile above the region's only water plant. Initially, 300,000 people were completely unable to use the water; no drinking, cooking, bathing or cleaning. After 5 days we were initially told we could use the water for cleaning, bathing and the like, however, less than a week later the CDC stepped in to say there is a great deal unknown about the chemical and we should use our tap water sparingly, keeping it away from our small children and pregnant women. It took 5 months before most

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## Reflections

that despair?

Many, like me, have become lazy Christians in recent centuries. We keep our faith insular, within our homes and parish communities. We are all too eager to write a check for a social problem in hopes it will go away, offer a prayer for the cause, or use social media to bring greater awareness. These are necessary and all fine and good, but are they truly what Jesus had in mind when he left us to care for his Church? One of the most oft quoted lines in this letter is, "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 combined and clinging to its own security." What are we doing to get down in the trenches and work with those in need? To truly be Christ to others? Especially when we are in our own times of a seemingly perpetual Lent, aren't we most called to come outside of ourselves and be Christ to others? To bring His joy with such intensity that others cannot help but recognize it as Christ's and not our own?

We are not called to be passive Christians, praying and throwing money at social concerns while doing little practical work to solve these issues. To me, this is what The Nativity House is about. We can pray outside abortion clinics until we're blue in the face and only vote for politicians who are anti-abortion. These things can be helpful to the cause but they do little to help women who don't have the resources, help, and support to have a child. Nativity House is about making "missionary disciples". Pope Francis says we can no longer separate the two words mission and disciples. We must eagerly serve as

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both. "In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples."

Not only are those involved with operating Nativity House called to be missionary disciples but, hopefully, each guest who stays will become a missionary disciple in her own right. It is my fervent prayer that each woman who stays there experiences the gospel on such a deep, intimate level that she leaves bursting with joy for Christ, much like the Samaritan woman who "became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans came to believe in him... so what are we waiting for?" I want their hearts to fill with joy and their eyes with tears, much as mine do when singing that Easter Gloria.

My challenge to each of you is to read The Joy of the Gospel (it can be found online for free) and, while doing so, pray on how it calls you to be a part of The Nativity House family and/or how it calls you to more actively help with other social causes near and dear to you. Certainly money and prayers are necessary parts of this mission, but is there more you can do? Justin and Venus Wozniak recently extended an invitation to me which would lead to my own greater participation in their mission (I now live nearly 4 hours away and have little to offer but prayer and sharing of their FB page). I, too, will do the same in the weeks to come as I best discern how God wants me to use my gifts to support this mission.



*Kathy is a religious educator presently working at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic School in Fort Wayne, IN*

## Chemical spill

Charlestonians trusted the water enough to drink it.

What happens here in Appalachia might be pitiable, but it holds little national impact and therefore little national attention. We all – Charlestonians included – understood why a 4 month old story that tied Chris Christie to a one day bridge closure (a story that broke on the same day at the WV chemical spill) was bigger news than 300,000 citizens with hazardous tap water. Appalachians are meek people. It seems that to the rest of the country, this region is an embarrassment, the part of the body that is a bit less honorable, its infrastructure is weak and, though we hate to admit it, if Appalachia doesn't get its act together, this is a part of the nation that is dispensable.

There is a subtle assumption here that the issues of Appalachia are rooted in local communities and therefore the national community does best to leave it alone. However, Appalachia is not an isolated community removed from the rest of the country. As the political rallying organization "Friends of Coal" consistently reminds us - with their logo on every bottle of water given schools, every trophy dispensed at the YMCA and about half the bumpers in this region- "Coal Keeps the Lights On". Those lights aren't only local. Depending on your region, 30-70% of your electrical power is coal-generated. Appalachians are under incredible pressure from the rest of the country to keep energy cheap.

The pressure is profound. The market is replacing coal with natural gas found through hydraulic fracturing (fracking). The EPA's threatened limits on coal mines

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reflect right intentions but negatively impact the most vulnerable households in Appalachia. Ninety percent of coal jobs have been replaced by machines; additionally, coal money does not stay in the region. Hesitant to tax the (intentionally) lone industry, schools are underfinanced. The lack of education and opportunity is reflected in an overwhelming rate of addiction particularly to prescription drugs which crosses generational lines. There seems to be a local understanding that this is a national sacrifice zone. Swaths of rural mountains have been leveled by Mountain Top Removal, a mining practice that dumps the tops of the mountains into the valleys below, changing the contours of this land.

The seemingly disposable lives here in West Virginia are directly related to cheap energy for our country. I hesitate to describe Appalachia as a "less honorable" part of The Body (1 Corinthians 12:23) but only that it is treated as such by the larger American community. These mountains are beautiful, some of the oldest in the world. The small communities here struggle for the good of the larger national community. It time we recognize that "if one part suffers, every part suffers with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26).



*Molly Linehan is the Director of Campus Ministry at Charleston Catholic High School in Charleston, WV.*

## Nativity House Mass

**Nativity House is open!** We will have our **monthly Mass** and open house on **Sept. 27 at 6:30pm** at: **17141 W. 143rd St. Lockport, IL.** A potluck will follow. Upcoming Masses will be October 25 and November 22 at the same time. All are welcome.

Check Facebook for the latest information.

### About The Visitation

This newspaper, The Visitation, is a publication on topics of social justice, spirituality and theology. It is published four times a year by the Nativity House Project. Submissions are accepted from readers everywhere.

To contact us, email us at:

[newspaper@nativity-house.org](mailto:newspaper@nativity-house.org)

Past issues are online at:

<http://www.nativity-house.org>

### About Nativity House

Nativity House will serve as a shelter for first-time mothers in need of residence in the southwest Chicago suburbs. The project will also foster a mothering community offering education and support for all mothers. As of 2014, the program operates an on-site community supported farm (CSA) that will provide nourishment for the mothering community and the greater community. Overall we envision a healing environment focused on the dignity of each person, the dignity of work, and stewardship of the earth.

The project is administered by a board of directors and an advisory committee of individuals with a broad range of experience. Nativity House has formed positive relationships with relevant local organizations that will be extremely helpful in carrying out the mission of the house. Nativity House was recognized as a public charity in August, 2011.

To connect with us regarding this project, please email Venus at:

[venusad@nativity-house.org](mailto:venusad@nativity-house.org)

Postal mail should be addressed to:

Nativity House  
17141 W. 143rd St.  
Lockport, IL  
60441

We extend the sincerest thanks to all.

## Easy Essay

### Up To Catholics

by Peter Maurin (1877-1949)



1. Ralph Adams Cram says:

What I propose is that

Catholics should take up

this back-to-the-land problem

and put it into operation.

2. Why Catholics?

Because they realize

more clearly than any others

the shortcomings of the

old capitalist industrial system.

3. They, better than others,

see the threat

that impends.

4. They alone understand

that while the family

is the primary social unit,

the community comes next.

5. And there is no sound

and righteous

and enduring community

where all its members

are not substantially

of one mind.



*There is a foundational pattern of giving and receiving in every aspect of the universe modeled on the very shape of God as Trinity. Once you have a dynamic water-wheel of love... the flow only flows in one direction, always positive, always giving, always outpouring, where there is no possibility of anger, unlove, wrath, or hatred in God.*

— RICHARD ROHR

## Our Trio of Heavenly Helpers

by Dave Spesia

Wouldn't it be comforting to know that someone's literally "got your back"—both physically and spiritually? And wouldn't it be nice to receive signs about God's plan for your life—as well as additional healing and wholeness as needed?!

Almighty God is God, of course, and is so infinitely grand that billions of stars move and have their being within him. God is also pure spirit such that he is closer than our inmost selves. So we can always go "straight to the top," with any and all of our needs.

However, thanks to God's loving plan since the dawn of time, his Archangels stand ready to help us on a moment's notice. In his infinite wisdom, God has surrounded himself with spiritual beings who are always available to intercede for us. Among these "helpers," the most powerful and most revered are the three whom the Church celebrates on September 29th: Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael.

"Arch" angels they are, because of their leadership role among the countless heavenly hosts of spiritual beings. Though they come and go largely unseen, we catch glimpses their respective missions:

Michael: The Warrior, who leads the

battle against Satan and his minions. Have you ever seen the face of the Evil One in the contorted look of someone intent on doing you harm—or in the pained look of someone enslaved in their addiction to evil? If so, the mere mention of Michael's name is enough to terrify this enemy. Indeed, the St. Michael Prayer is one of the Church's most powerful in its arsenal of resources. It reminds us that our life is a matter of spiritual warfare: "St. Michael, the Archangel, defend us in battle"!

Gabriel: The Messenger, who praises the Blessed Virgin Mary with the words, "Hail, full of grace..." Gabriel reminds us that God has created each of us with a specific mission in this life. We are sent into our weary world in order to touch the lives of some specific people, people who may never encounter the Gospel of Jesus Christ unless it is through us. Gabriel is the one who helps nudge us along the right paths, who sheds light upon decisions big and small, and who helps us answer God's silent promptings with the same simple "Yes" of our Lady.

Raphael: The healer, who strengthens us both physically and spiritually on our journey Home. During my father's long struggle with cancer, a beautiful statue of St. Raphael stood

comfortingly beside his bed. Even though I didn't know that the fish with which Raphael is often depicted serves as an ancient symbol of healing, I always knew it was a good sign since my paternal grandfather was a masterful fisherman. I also sensed that Raphael's fish pointed toward the one which Jesus would cook beside the sea after the Resurrection. Raphael helps each of us pass from this life into eternal life, assuring us that there will be a most memorable fish fry when we reach the other shore!

We all know people who are battling illnesses of some sort or another. But maybe you need more protection than healing right now. Or perhaps you're

waiting on a message—a sign—about a new beginning. Regardless of where we are on the journey of life, these three Archangels stand poised to draw us into the Mystery of Mysteries—the Communion of Persons which is the Blessed Trinity—overflowing, self-emptying, and transforming Love.

In the words of Gabriel himself, the Archangels stand as an assurance that "nothing will be impossible for God"!



*Dave serves the Diocese of Joliet in Evangelization and Catechesis. He is a husband and father of five and may be found online at: [everydayevangelization.blogspot.com](http://everydayevangelization.blogspot.com)*



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