



*Witness to the New World of Faith:
A Pastoral Letter to the Family of God in Los Angeles
on the New Evangelization and our Missionary Call*

*The Most Rev. José H. Gomez
Archbishop of Los Angeles*

*Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels
Los Angeles, California
October 2, 2012*

My dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

1. The world needs a new evangelization! The people of our city, our nation and our continent are waiting for the encounter with Jesus Christ who makes all things new.

In every age, Jesus draws near to offer his salvation to all people. He calls: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock!”

Jesus invites men and women to follow him and seek the Kingdom of God. He calls them to live as God’s children in his family, the Catholic Church.

But in our time, it seems to be getting harder for people to hear the voice of Jesus and his promise of salvation. There are many other voices and many other customs of living. Our society is growing more secularized.

People are losing their awareness of God’s presence in the world and in their lives. And as the sense of God fades, we see around us the sad effects in lost lives and broken families.

The men and women of our time need someone to show them the way to Jesus, who alone can show them the face of God. They need someone to help open up the door of faith for them.ⁱ

They are waiting for us, my dear brothers and sisters!

In this New Moment of Grace

2. These thoughts come to my mind at this new moment of grace in the life of our great Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

As I write this letter to you, we have just celebrated the tenth anniversary of the consecration of our Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels.

Our Cathedral is a living sign of the Church's mission to *evangelize* — to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ and his Kingdom — in the heart of our city and our world.ⁱⁱ

The Church exists to evangelize. The Church belongs to Jesus and he gave her only one mission, the salvation of souls: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The Church's mission is ever ancient and ever new. And all of us in the Church — bishops, priests and deacons; religious and consecrated men and women; seminarians and lay people in every walk of life — we all have responsibility for this mission.

3. That is why I am writing this pastoral letter to you in this moment of grace. You have become dear to my heart — as my beloved brothers and sisters in Christ and my co-workers in the mission of evangelization that he calls us to.

I have spent much of these last two and a half years trying to get to know as many of you as I can. What a blessing it has been to travel this vast and beautiful territory of the Archdiocese to visit your families and parishes. These moments when I have had the chance to offer the Eucharist for you or the chance to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation for your children — these have been a joy in my life and ministry.

My brothers and sisters, I am humbled by your beautiful witness to our Catholic faith in your ministries and in your daily lives. Your generous love for God and our neighbors inspires me and gives me hope.

The family that God has gathered here in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles is special.

Our Church is alive — youthful, vibrant and growing. The Gospel has borne much fruit here. Today we are our nation's largest and most diverse local Church. God continues to give us growth, as we are baptizing tens of thousands of children each year.

We are a living picture of what our Father created his Church to be — *una familia de Dios*, one family of God with sons and daughters drawn from every nation, race, people and language.^{iv}

Our Church is the heart and soul of our secular city, pointing our neighbors to God and protecting the sanctity of the human person through all our works of education and advocacy and caring for those in need.

A Year of Faith

4. I have come to see that our local Church has a unique role to play in leading the new evangelization of our country and our continent. And because we have this special responsibility, we must make the most of this new moment of grace that is being given to us.

We are about to begin a “Year of Faith” proclaimed by our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI.

The Year of Faith will start on October 11, 2012, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. It will continue until November 24, 2013, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.

I see this Year of Faith as a beautiful opportunity for our family of God in Los Angeles to deepen our conversion in faith to Jesus Christ and to rediscover our missionary call as his disciples.

As our Holy Father has written: “Today as in the past, [Christ] sends us through the highways of the world to proclaim his Gospel to all the peoples of the earth. ... Today too, there is a need for *stronger ecclesial commitment* to new evangelization in order to rediscover the joy of believing and the enthusiasm for communicating the faith.”^v

5. My brothers and sisters, we must make this Year of Faith a time to renew the love we had at first for Jesus Christ!^{vi} Now is the time for us to strive to attain full maturity in our Catholic identity and our vocation as children of God. Now is the time for us to grow in our love for the Church and in our loyalty to her mission.^{vii}

And now is the time for this local Church to find fresh passion for our spiritual and pastoral mission. The *stronger ecclesial commitment* that our Holy Father is calling us to means that all of us must assume new responsibility for the Christian mission to our nation and our continent.

Our local Church was born out of the Church’s mission to the nations and the first evangelization of the Americas. We need to reclaim our missionary history! And we need to recognize that this missionary heritage comes to us today as both a gift and a duty.

Reclaiming our Missionary History

6. For the first evangelists of the Americas, these continents were *the New World* that Jesus had taught his followers to hope for.^{viii} So with a zeal for souls, they came from Spain to Mexico and from there they traveled all over this beautiful new world, proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.

America's first missionaries named this land's rivers, mountains, forests and cities for the saints and mysteries of the Catholic Church. They learned local languages and customs and they sowed the seeds of the Gospel to create a rich Christian civilization — expressed in poems and plays, paintings and statues, songs, prayers, devotions, architecture and even laws and policies.

The Church's mission to California, led by the great Franciscan priest Blessed Junípero Serra, built churches up and down the long coastal road they called the King's Highway, *El Camino Real*.

Along this road, our great city was established. It was first called *El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora de Los Angeles* — named for the angels of God and the Blessed Mother of Jesus Christ, who is the Queen of all the angels in heaven.

7. Los Angeles — like all of California and the Americas — is built on a Christian foundation. And today we are called to build on that missionary foundation to make a new evangelization of the Americas.

The original *El Camino Real* passed by not far from where our Cathedral is located, running alongside what nowadays we know as U.S. Route 101 or “The Hollywood Freeway.”

The cross on the top of our Cathedral, which tens of thousands see every day as they ride this freeway, is a sign that the Christian mission to Los Angeles and the Americas continues in our day — even as the City of the Angels has become a highly diversified and secularized metropolis that drives technological innovations and shapes opinions, fashions and culture for the whole world.

Our Vocation as the Archdiocese of Los Angeles

8. *Our vocation as the Archdiocese of Los Angeles is to continue and fulfill Christ's mission to the New World.*

We need to embrace this Year of Faith as a time of interior renewal and spiritual preparation for a new Christian witness to our city and our continent.

In this spirit, our Archdiocesan Pastoral Council has proposed a series of practical goals and objectives to help us to grow in our faith and knowledge of the Gospel. The Council's proposals, which will be published in the weeks to come, coincide with its final reports and recommendations on implementing the Archdiocesan Synod of 2003.

The Synod has been a source of grace for our Archdiocese. And its vision has helped me as I have been praying and reflecting on what our pastoral priorities should be in the years ahead.

Thanks to the Synod's vision and the Pastoral Council's continued dedication, we are able to see more clearly that our local Church has this special vocation to the new evangelization.

So this Year of Faith should be a time for growing in our knowledge of the gift of God we have been given. It should be a time for us to become better equipped to live the calling we have received and to bear witness to the hope we have in Jesus.^{ix} And this Year of Faith must be a moment of renewal of faith for each one of us and for our Archdiocese — for our parishes and schools; for our catechesis and religious education programs; for our social ministries!

My brothers and sisters, I firmly believe that our Archdiocesan family has entered a new moment of grace.

In addition to our Cathedral's tenth anniversary, we have also just celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of Blessed Pope John Paul II's pastoral visit to Los Angeles, on September 15–16, 1987.

This visit was a beautiful blessing and continues to be a font of grace for this Archdiocese. So I invoke Blessed John Paul's intercession for our local Church and for each one of us in this Year of Faith.

Priorities for the New Evangelization

Blessed John Paul called the Church to a “new evangelization — new in its ardor, methods and expression.”^x Our task is to take up his call. We must find new ways and new enthusiasm to evangelize — in our families, our work, and in every ministry of our Church.

In that spirit, I want to suggest some basic directions and initiatives so that we can make the most of this year of renewal. I want to do that by recalling the *five pastoral priorities* that I set out at the beginning of my ministry.

These priorities reflect our communion — with the bishops of California and the United States, with our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI, and with the whole universal Church. They also reflect our Archdiocesan Synod's goals of promoting faith education, sacramental life, social justice, evangelization, collegial leadership, and a greater sense of responsibility in ministry.

In this Year of Faith, I believe these five priorities can serve as a useful framework for focusing our efforts at renewal.

9. My first pastoral priority is *education in the faith*.

No matter who we are or what point we are at in our faith journey, all of us need to grow in our knowledge of the faith. So let us make this Year of Faith a time for really learning *what we believe* as Catholics and *why we believe* these things. Let us also learn *what difference these beliefs should make* in our lives and in our world.

In concrete terms, let us make this a year for learning how to pray better and read the Gospels with more lively faith and deeper understanding. I highly recommend that we commit ourselves to learning the ancient Catholic practice of *lectio divina*, in which our reading of the sacred text becomes a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, who challenges and guides our lives.^{xi}

I also hope that we will all make this the year when we begin the habit of life-long learning in our faith.

A good place to begin is to study the teachings of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), especially as they are expressed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. We need to listen to what the Spirit is still saying to the Church today through the Council.^{xii}

For me, Vatican II's most important insight was to recover the Gospel teaching of the universal call to holiness — that we are all called *to be saints*.^{xiii} The Council taught a vision of faith that embraces all of life. The Council reminded us that we are all called to be transformed by grace into the image of Jesus Christ and that we are all called to work with his grace to transform our world in the image of the Kingdom of God.

This is the vision of faith that is necessary if we are to be credible witnesses for the new evangelization in our globalized society. So in this Year of Faith, we need to deepen our understanding of the Council's vision. We need to make that vision the foundation for our witness to our city, our country and our world.

The Lay Vocation To Be Eucharistic People

I pray that this Year of Faith will be the year when lay people rediscover their vocation to proclaim the Gospel in the middle of the world — in their homes, in the economy, in the places where they work, and in all their political and civic duties.

Dear lay people: the faith you profess on Sundays must be lived out in the world during the rest of the week! You are called to *sanctify* your work. That means you need to see your daily activities as the place where you meet and walk with Jesus, seeking holiness and the Father's will.

Each of you has a part to play in building up this earthly city in light of the Kingdom of God. Together we have to fill our society with the values of the Gospel — the values of truth, justice, solidarity and freedom.

Education in the faith must lead to a more intense practice of the faith. We should want to know our faith better so that we can live it more fully, with greater love and devotion.

That is why education in the faith — like everything else in the Church — must be rooted in the mystery of the Eucharist. *We have to live the Mass!* That is the goal of education in the faith — that we become *Eucharistic people*, living with the awareness that we all have a *priestly soul*.^{xiv}

As Jesus Christ offered his Body and Blood for us on the cross, and as he renews his sacrifice in every Eucharist, we are called to live in imitation of him.

We are called to work with the graces we receive in the Eucharist and to make our lives something beautiful that we offer to God. We are called to make our lives a prayer — a gift that we offer in love for the glory of God's name and for the salvation of our brothers and sisters.^{xv}

Building the Family of God

10. My second priority is to *promote vocations to the priesthood and to religious and consecrated life*.

Our Church always needs more men and women who can testify to the radical beauty of a life given totally to Jesus Christ. In this Year of Faith, I believe we need to focus especially on vocations to the priesthood.

The priesthood is a gift and a mystery in God's plan for the salvation of the world. The priest makes Christ present in the world. Through his priests, Christ speaks his words of forgiveness. Through his priests, he offers his Body and Blood as the bread of life for the life of the world.^{xvi}

Jesus said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father."^{xvii} Through the ministry of the priest, we have Jesus. And through the spiritual fatherhood of the priest, the men and women of the world today can see and love their heavenly Father.

Vocations are born of a Catholic culture. And this Year of Faith should be a time in which we find new energy to support our priests and seminarians and to build this culture of vocations. One practical step we can take is to intensify our prayer as the family of God.

What a difference it would make if every Catholic and every parish were dedicated to praying every day for our priests and for new vocations! Imagine the graces that would flow, if many of us would commit ourselves to regular adoration of the Eucharist and holy hours to pray for vocations!

11. My third priority is to *foster our universal Catholic identity and cultural diversity*.

The encounter with Jesus Christ and his Gospel in Los Angeles has led to a rich communion among diverse indigenous and immigrant cultures. We are uniquely placed at the crossroads of continents — uniting North and South America and opening the Americas to the Caribbean and to Asia and Oceania.

So our local Church will always be shaped by the energies and faith of new peoples from all over the world. In turn, we must make sure that our Church is always a sign of the family of God. The family of God in Los Angeles must always be a sign that God is with us, and that in his loving eyes no one is a stranger to him and we are all brothers and sisters.

In this Year of Faith, let us take a simple practical step to build our sense of communion as the family of God.

We are a family with brothers and sisters drawn from dozens of different ethnic traditions — each with our own particular prayers, devotions, customs and patron saints. Let us begin to try to learn from one another's traditions. And let us look for ways that we can celebrate and share this rich treasury of Catholic pieties and spiritualities with the people of our time.

Proclaiming the Culture of Life

12. My fourth priority is that we *proclaim the Gospel of life and promote a culture of life* in our society.

As a Church, we are entrusted with the good news of Jesus Christ — that the human person is sacred and created in the image of God. That is why we fight for the rights of the person from conception to natural death. That is why we strive for justice for the immigrant and the worker, for the imprisoned, the hungry, and the homeless. That is why we defend the rights of the old and the sick to be cared for with love and compassion.

In this Year of Faith, I want to give concrete expression to our witness by expanding the mission of our Archdiocesan Office of Justice and Peace. We will give the office a new name — the Office of Life, Justice and Peace — and we will include within its mission the work of defending innocent life against the threats of abortion and euthanasia.

This move will strengthen every aspect of our Archdiocese's vital social mission — from our many works of charity and service, to our efforts to seek justice for immigrants, workers, the imprisoned, and the poor. This change will also advance our efforts to build a culture of life — because it will demonstrate our belief that the right to life is the foundation of every other right and liberty and the true foundation of justice and peace in society.

In this Year of Faith, each of us must rediscover the importance of the Church's social doctrine and our personal duty as Christians to work for justice and the common good. Our love for Christ demands that we build a society that is more worthy of the dignity of the human person made in the image of God.^{xviii}

Again, I recommend that in this Year of Faith, we begin a practical study of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* in our parishes and in our homes.

In Jesus Christ, the love of neighbor and the love of God become one. The Christ who comes to us in the Eucharist is the Christ who comes to us always in his most distressing guise — in the poor, the stranger, the immigrant, the prisoner, the unborn. The One who says “This is my Body” also tells us, “As you did it to one of the least of my brethren, you did it to me.”^{xix}

This identification of Jesus with the poor and vulnerable is one of the beautiful truths revealed in our religion. In the least of our brothers and sisters, we find Jesus. And when we find Jesus, we find God.

The Church's works of charity and justice are an essential dimension of the new evangelization. Through our love for others, we bear witness to the reality of our God who is love. Through our work to make this a society of truth and love, we make God's love for all men and women a reality in our world.

13. My fifth priority is to *defend and strengthen marriage and the family* based on the permanent and exclusive union of one man and one woman.

Our Church must lead a cultural renewal so that our society will once more see that marriage is sacred and that the family is the true sanctuary of life and the heart of a civilization of love.

We need to do everything we can to restore a “family culture” in our society. That means defending marriage in the face of widespread cultural confusion. That means doing more in our parishes and ministries to support mothers and fathers and families. That means talking to our children, from a very young age, about the beauty and the meaning of marriage and family.

In this Year of Faith, let us deepen our understanding that the Gospel is the good news of God's “family plan” for history. That is why our Father sent his only Son to be born of his Spirit in a mother's womb and to be raised in a family with a mother and a father.

We need to deepen our awareness that we are children of God and that our Father calls us to live as brothers and sisters in his family, the Church.

Returning to God by Way of Witnesses

14. As a sign of our commitment to the new evangelization, in this Year of Faith, I want to establish a new Archdiocesan Office of the New Evangelization. This new office will be responsible for establishing and coordinating our initiatives to spread the Gospel and to increase Catholics' knowledge and love of their faith.

This Year of Faith should be a time in which we examine every area of pastoral life in our great Archdiocese — in our parishes and in all of our ministries. We need to ask ourselves: Is our work leading men and women to Jesus Christ and his Church? Is the Christian faith spreading and is knowledge of the faith deepening through our programs and ministries?

Everything we do must be measured by what it contributes to proclaiming Jesus Christ to the men and women of our day!

15. My dear brothers and sisters, it is time for us to become aware that in God's plan of salvation this local Church has a historic vocation. It is time for us to answer our calling to be co-workers with Jesus Christ — to play our part in the great story of salvation that God is writing in the history of the nations.^{xx}

Now is the time for each of us to get back to what really matters. The new evangelization must begin in your hearts and in mine. We all need a new conversion. Because only the converted heart can lead other hearts to conversion.

Conversion to Jesus Christ is not a single moment or event in our lives. The encounter with Jesus Christ is the beginning of a faith journey. Our relationship with Jesus Christ requires a daily decision to turn our hearts to him, to follow him and imitate him, to get to know him every day in a more intimate way. Conversion is the work of our lifetimes.

In every age and every place, believers have the duty to proclaim the Gospel. The faith we have received, we are called to pass on to others. The love of God we know, we are called to share with others. This is the most basic identity and responsibility of every Catholic. In our times, our Catholic calling to holiness and mission takes on new urgency.

Our world will return to God — but not by way of words and programs, no matter how eloquent or well conceived. Our world will return to God only by way of *witnesses* — by way of men and women who testify by the example of their lives that Jesus Christ is real and that his Gospel is the path to true happiness.

Jesus is calling us to be those witnesses, my brothers and sisters.

The Bright Star of the New Evangelization

16. Our world is waiting for a new evangelization!

That is why, in marking the tenth anniversary of our Cathedral, we also consecrated a beautiful new chapel to honor Our Lady of Guadalupe. This new chapel contains a precious relic from the miraculous *tilma* that bears the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

This relic has a special meaning for me. Already, at the base of the main altar in our Cathedral, there is a small marble box that contains the relics of twenty-six martyrs and saints from every continent and every period in the history of the Church's mission to the nations. This new relic in our new chapel is a sign to me — and I hope it will be a sign to all of us — that Our Lady of Guadalupe was sent by God to be the bright star at the dawn of the first evangelization of the New World.

When our Blessed Mother appeared to St. Juan Diego outside Mexico City in 1531, it was only a generation after Christopher Columbus and his voyages of discovery. Our Lady's coming inspired a generation of Catholic missionaries — priests, deacons, religious, and lay people. Within decades, they spread faith in Jesus Christ throughout South America and North America, the Caribbean, the Philippines, and deeper into the countries of Asia and Oceania.

So as I conclude this, my first pastoral letter to you, I am asking for Our Lady of Guadalupe's prayers and intercession. I pray that this new chapel will remind us that Mary our Blessed Mother is always with us as the bright star of the new evangelization. May she inspire us and guide us to fulfill our vocation — to be the new generation of missionaries to our city and our world.

In God's providence, the Year of Faith will conclude on the 300th anniversary of the birth of the great missionary to California, Blessed Junípero Serra, who was born November 24, 1713.

So let us embrace this new moment of grace for our Archdiocese with the zeal and courage of Padre Serra and the first evangelists of the Americas.

Through our witness, let us make this truly a City of the Angels — a city of love and truth, where all can know that God is near in his love, and where the horizons of every life are open to his promise of salvation.

Through the intercession of Our Lady of the Angels, patroness of this great and historic Archdiocese, let us commit ourselves to building on their missionary foundations. By the witness of our lives, let us make America once more a New World of faith!

*Given in Los Angeles,
at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels,
October 2, 2012
Memorial of the Guardian Angels,
in my second year as Archbishop of Los Angeles,*

*Most Rev. José H. Gomez
Archbishop of Los Angeles*

ⁱ Act 14:27.

ⁱⁱ 2 Cor. 10:16; Acts 8:4, 12, 25, 35, 40.

ⁱⁱⁱ Matt. 16:18; 28:19–20; see Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World (December 8, 1975), 14.

^{iv} Eph. 3:14; Rev. 5:9–10.

^v Pope Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, Apostolic Letter for the Indiction of the Year of Faith (October 11, 2011), 7.

^{vi} Rev. 2:4.

^{vii} Col. 4:13; Heb. 6:1; 3 John 1:6.

^{viii} Acts 1:8; Matt. 19:28; 1 Cor. 15:24; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 11:15; 19:16.

^{ix} John 4:10, 22; Acts 17:23; 1 Thess. 2:12; Col. 1:10; 1 Pet. 3:15.

^x Pope John Paul II, Address to the 19th Assembly of the Latin American Episcopal Council (March 9, 1983), 3.

^{xi} Pope Benedict XVI gives us very practical guidance on the practice of *lectio divina* in *Verbum Domini*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church (September 30, 2010), 86–87.

^{xii} Rev. 2:7.

^{xiii} Rom. 1:7; Phil. 1:1.

^{xiv} 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; Rom. 15:16.

^{xv} Matt. 16:24–25; 1 John 3:16–18; Rom. 12:1; Heb. 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:5.

^{xvi} John 6:35, 51.

^{xvii} John 14:9.

^{xviii} 2 Cor. 5:14.

^{xix} Matt. 26:26; 25:31–46.

^{xx} 1 Cor. 11:1; Acts 1:8; Mark 16:15, 20; 1 Cor. 3:9.