

## Reading the Jubilee Theme of SVD, “Witnessing to the Light: From Every- where for Everyone” in the Light of *Evangelii Gaudium*

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Rooted in the charism of St. Arnold Janssen, the Society of the Divine Word known as SVD has always emphasized bringing the Word of God with joy to those who have not yet heard it, especially among the poor and marginalized. In today’s rapidly changing world, the mission of evangelization faces both new challenges and new opportunities. Cultural shifts, religious indifference, and growing social inequalities call for a renewed approach to proclaiming the Gospel—one that is not only rooted in tradition but also responsive to the signs of the times. The SVD, with its intercultural and international character, is uniquely positioned to respond to this call.

As they celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their foundation, it is a meaningful time to revisit the call to be “witnesses to the Light from everywhere for everyone”—a call to become renewed missionaries that deeply resonates with Pope Francis’ vision of a renewed joyful and outward-looking Church. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Pope urges the faithful to become missionary disciples who are not afraid to go to the peripheries, bringing the light of Christ to those most in need. This spirit of joyful outreach is at the heart of the SVD’s missionary identity, making the jubilee not just a celebration of the past, but a renewed commitment to the future of mission in a wounded yet hopeful world.

My reflection, therefore, explores how the SVD’s jubilee theme aligns with the key principles of *EG*, which will be divided into three parts. The first part is the overview of *EG* to provide a clear foundation for understanding the connections I will later draw with the SVD’s jubilee theme. The second part

presents the discussion on the jubilee theme of SVD as missionary option in the Spirit of *EG*; and in last part, I will address the call of Pope Francis to all missionaries to a transformative evangelization.

### ***Evangelii Gaudium: An Overview***

*Evangelii Gaudium* (*EG*) is the first Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis on The Proclamation of The Gospel in Today's World, released in 2013, six months after his election. Pope Francis begins with these words: "The Joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness, and loneliness. With Christ, joy is constantly born anew" (*EG* 1). This is a powerful statement and at the same time challenging especially for the missionaries who witness to the Light. At the heart of *EG* is a call to begin a new era of evangelization, which characterized by the joy that flourishes from a relationship with Christ. Gerard Mannion views this document as "an energizing vision toward a new way of being Church."<sup>1</sup> Being new means openness to being renewed by the Light of the Word.

This document is divided into five interrelated sections where Pope Francis offers deep points to be reflected and acted upon by the whole Church. In the first chapter, he calls for a missionary transformation of the Church, emphasizing that evangelization must be at the heart of its identity (*EG* 19). The Church is not just an institution for its members but a missionary community sent to share the Gospel with the entire world, thus, being "the Church that goes forth from its comfort zones to all the peripheries in need of the light of the Gospel" (*EG* 20). This call for transformation is not just about external outreach; it demands an internal renewal within the Church to focus on its core mission. "Mere administration" can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be "permanently in a state of mission" (*EG* 25). This missionary endeavor "seeks to communicate more effectively the truth of the Gospel in a specific context" and that "goes beyond a set of intellectual ideas."<sup>2</sup> This is what the SVDs call witnessing from everywhere for everyone. It goes beyond time and context, beyond borders and ideas.

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<sup>1</sup> Gerard Mannion, ed., *Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism Evangelii Gaudium and Papal Agenda* (Cambridge: University Press, 2017), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Dennis M. Doyle, "Pope Francis's New Vision for the Church as Expressed in *Evangelii gaudium*," in *Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism Evangelii Gaudium and Papal Agenda*, ed. Gerard Mannion (Cambridge: University Press, 2017), 25.

In the second chapter, Francis acknowledges the crisis of communal commitment in the Church today and invites all missionaries to engage in “an evangelical discernment, which is an approach nourished by the light and strength of the Holy Spirit” (EG 50). Secularism, individualism, and a weakening of community have led to a lack of shared responsibility among Christians. This crisis must be addressed for evangelization to be successful, as a fragmented Church cannot effectively proclaim the Gospel. He stresses here the importance of belonging to a community and working together.

The challenges are not only seen in the world but also faced by pastoral workers, clergy, and laity alike. There is “an inordinate concern for their personal freedom and relaxation, which leads them to see their work as a mere appendage to their life, as if it were not part of their very identity” (EG 78). Pastoral workers might begin to prioritize comfort, leisure, or autonomy over service, sacrifice, and presence, which are core to their vocation. In a culture that often champions self-care, personal space, and flexible work-life balance, it is easy for even those in ministry to internalize the idea that their primary identity is as individuals seeking fulfillment, rather than as servants called to give of themselves for others.

He even mentions “three evils which fuel one another namely: a heightened individualism, a crisis of identity and a cooling of fervour” (EG 78). These three interconnected evils pose a serious threat to the life and mission of pastoral workers. When individuals become overly focused on personal freedom and comfort, they risk losing sight of their deeper calling, leading to a weakened sense of identity as servants of the Gospel. This confusion about their role and purpose then results in a loss of spiritual zeal and passion for ministry. As fervour fades, ministry becomes routine or burdensome, reinforcing self-centeredness and deepening the crisis. Together, these forces create a cycle that slowly erodes the vitality of pastoral service. To break this cycle, there must be a renewed commitment to community, a clear understanding of one’s vocation, and a deepening relationship with Christ, the source of true joy and purpose in ministry.

The third chapter then focuses on the proclamation of the Gospel, which, according to Pope Francis, is the central mission of the Church. The Church, according to him is “agent of evangelization, more than an organic and hierarchical institution; a people advancing on its pilgrim way towards God” (EG 111). The Church is “a people for everyone, a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel” (EG 114). The Church is also “a people of many faces, peoples of the earth, each of which has its own culture” (EG 115). The members of the Church are all “missionary disciples called to mature their

work as evangelizer” (EG 121). Evangelization is not just about teaching doctrines but sharing the joy, hope and freedom of the Gospel in a way that resonates with contemporary people, especially the poor and marginalized (EG 114). A profound being as missionary according to him is “bringing the love of God in daily responsibility, to the neighbors or complete strangers” (EG 127). Witnessing to the Light from everywhere for everyone indicates this everyday encounter with others.

Preaching within the liturgy is also touched by Pope Francis in this chapter. The homily, says the Pope, needs to be seen as “part of the offering made to the Father and a mediation of the grace which Christ pours out during the celebration” (EG 138). In the homily, “truth goes hand in hand with beauty and goodness. Far from dealing with abstract truths or cold syllogisms, it communicates the beauty of the images used by the Lord to encourage the practice of good” (EG 142). This echoes an ancient insight from classical philosophy and Christian theology that truth, beauty, and goodness are inseparable attributes of God. They are often referred to as the transcendental, qualities that point us toward the divine. So when the people encounter something truly beautiful or deeply good, it can lead them into truth and vice versa. In preaching, this means that truth is not just about facts or doctrines. It is about something that touches the whole person: intellect, heart, and soul. The homily, then, becomes a moment where truth is incarnated—not just argued but *shown, felt, and experienced*. Hence it needs to be prepared. When the homily is seen as a way to witness to the Light, the preacher is called to reflect deeply and help the congregation encounter God’s beauty and goodness in meaningful ways.

Pope Francis in the fourth chapter expands the scope of evangelization to include its social dimension. He begins this chapter by saying “to evangelize is to make the kingdom of God present in our world” (EG 176). Evangelization is about transforming reality. It is not enough to proclaim Jesus with words. The Gospel must be embodied in action, in policies, in social structures, in how we treat one another, especially the marginalized. In a very powerful voice he stresses that “the kerygma has a clear social content: at the very heart of the Gospel is life in community and engagement with others” (EG 177). Evangelization, he argues, must address social justice issues, promote peace, and defend the dignity of the human person, particularly through action on behalf of the poor (EG 187). These ties the Church’s spiritual mission to real-world concerns, showing that evangelization cannot be detached from the material realities of human life. Witnessing to the Light from everywhere for everyone has its dimension, affirming that SVDs are formed within and belong to a religious community, and together they strive to make a positive impact on the world.

Evangelizers, Pope Francis insists, must be guided and strengthened by the Spirit, as their mission would be incomplete without this divine assistance (EG 259). Chapter five ties together the entire vision of evangelization presented in *EG*, underscoring that the Spirit is the source and driving force behind every step of the Church's missionary activity. The final chapter reminds the people that all of these efforts must be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Pope Francis calls the Church to go out into the world with enthusiasm and compassion, especially toward the poor and marginalized. He encourages a more inclusive and missionary Church that listens, adapts, and engages with the modern world. Central to the message is the idea that true joy comes from sharing the Gospel and living a life of service rooted in Jesus' teachings. This is the missionary option he wants the Church to embrace and embark on.

### ***Witnessing to the Light: From Everywhere for Everyone— A Missionary Option***

The world today, as Pope Francis notes in *EG*, is increasingly marked by “desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience” (EG 2). People prioritize material or surface-level desires over moral or emotional growth. This situation leads to fragmentation in oneself, in culture, religion, or ideology. Pope Francis names this “a very real danger” (EG 2). Amid this fragmentation, many individuals find themselves searching for meaning and direction, leading to spiritual emptiness and a crisis of hope. In this context, the light of Christ becomes a powerful beacon, offering clarity, healing, and warmth. The mission of spreading this Light is not confined to a specific time or place but transcends all boundaries, offering hope and truth to a world in need.

Pope Francis in *EG* wishes to “encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy (the joy of the Gospel), while pointing out new paths for the Church's journey in years to come” (EG 1, *italics mine*). One may ask: What is this new chapter? Francis gives the answer: “I dream of a ‘missionary option’, that is, a missionary impulse capable of trans-forming 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” (EG 27). Pope Francis stresses in an interview with Antonio Spadaro SJ, that “the Church today needs the ability to heal wounds and to warm the heart of the faithful.” This is a tremendous statement.

The Society of the Divine Word (SVD), a witnessing community has been a global missionary presence for 150 years, dedicated to spreading the Gospel to all corners of the world. The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary theme, “*Witnessing to the Light: From Everywhere for Everyone*,” encapsulates the SVD’s commitment to universal evangelization, especially in witnessing to the Light anew. This is a missionary option of the SVDs at this time. They opt to share the warmth of the Light and heal the world.

This is time for every missionary disciple to reveal, reflect, and embody the presence of Christ, who is the true Light of the world (cf. John 8:12). In John 1:8, the evangelist speaks of John the Baptist, saying: “He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.” This verse emphasizes humility and purpose: the witness is not the source, but the one who points others toward the Light, Jesus Christ. It is a reminder that authentic evangelization means leading others to Christ, not to oneself. Jesus declares in *John 8:12*, “I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” Light, in Scripture, often symbolizes truth, hope, guidance, and life. To say that Jesus is the Light of the world is to affirm that He is the source of all that illuminates the human condition, truth amidst confusion, hope in despair, and life amid spiritual death.

When a Christian bears witness to this Light, they are not the light itself, just as John the Baptist was not, but they become a kind of *lamp* or *mirror*. This reflects beautifully in *John 1:8*, where the evangelist clearly asserts that “he was not the light, but came to testify to the light.” This testifying is at the heart of the Christian mission. It is not self-promotion or personal glory; it is an act of humble pointing, a life that says, “Look, not at me, but at Him.”

To evangelize authentically is to live in such a way that people experience the presence of Christ through the missionaries, not because of eloquence or theological depth, but because of a heart conformed to His. It is about embodied testimony, a life marked by mercy, forgiveness, joy, and peace that cannot be manufactured but only produced by grace. This is what Pope Francis often means when he speaks of missionary discipleship: being so inwardly transformed by an encounter with Christ that one cannot help but go out and share Him with others, not by force or fear, but through the magnetic beauty of a life lived in communion with God.

This is perhaps the most challenging and freeing part of the missionary call: missionaries are not the answer, Christ is. True humility in evangelization recognizes this. It shifts the focus away from personality, charisma, or even strategy, and centers it on witness and love. The image is almost that of a signpost: no one stops to admire the sign itself; the purpose of the sign is to direct attention to the destination. In the same way, the Christian’s life, when lived

in love and truth, becomes a signpost to Christ. And this is what gives evangelization its beauty, it is not about convincing but about *revealing*. Pope Francis repeatedly emphasizes that true evangelization is not about ego, performance, or persuasion, but about being a humble, joyful witness to Christ.

Isaiah 60:1 captures this call in the very interesting words: “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.” It is a command that implies change and a renewed spirit. Isaiah invites the people of Israel to get up and be a light to others, because Yahweh, an Everlasting Light<sup>3</sup> is making his home among them. Being a light to other nation is a response to God’s own glory. In the midst of darkness, the people are called to see and believe that God is the fountain of lights and in His Light the people shall see light. In his Light there is a true understanding and purpose and all are called to become a light to others, carrying hope, truth, and salvation into a darkened world.

Isaiah’s call toward the Israelites to rise and shine “is not deliverance from Babylon or from the guilt of sin, but the deliverance into a life empowered by the Spirit of God in which the Light of God is reflected by the people of God.”<sup>4</sup> Isaiah is talking about a transformation into something new, a life that is not merely free *from* something, but free *for* something. And that *something* is a life fully empowered by the presence and radiance of God. He is envisioning what the people might call a Spirit-filled community, a people whose hearts and lives are illuminated and animated by the *Ruach* (the Spirit) of God. It is about participation—participating in the ongoing mission of God to fill the world with His glory. The people of God are called to rise because the glory of the Lord has risen upon them. Their job is not to manufacture light, but to reflect it, to let it shine through their lives, their worship, their service, and their love.

The vision expressed in Isaiah, of a Spirit-filled community called to *rise and shine* not by producing light, but by reflecting the light and glory of God is echoed powerfully in Pope Francis’ *EG*. The Pope reminds the Church that evangelization is not about imposing but about radiating: “The Church does not grow by proselytism but by attraction” (*EG* 14). Just as Isaiah calls the people to live into their Spirit-empowered identity, Pope Francis calls Christians to live joyfully and missionally, as witnesses who shine with the presence of Christ.

This profound reflection on the theme, “*Witnessing to the Light, from Everywhere for Everyone*,” serves as both a vision and a missionary option

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<sup>3</sup> Hyun Chul Paul Kim, *Reading Isaiah A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, Georgia: Smyth and Helwys, 2016), 275.

<sup>4</sup> John N. Oswald, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66* (Michigan, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 536.

for the SVDs. Rooted deeply in Scripture and echoed in the call of Pope Francis' *EG*, this theme challenges them to embrace their identity not as sources of light, but as joyful, Spirit-empowered reflections of Christ, the true Light of the world. It is an invitation to live out their missionary vocation with humility and purpose—like John the Baptist—not drawing attention to themselves but pointing all people to Jesus. It affirms that evangelization is not about performance or persuasion, but about transformation and testimony. As Isaiah proclaims, the people of God are to rise and shine, not with their own brilliance, but with the radiance of God's glory shining through them.

A missionary option dreamt by Pope Francis is "a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything." It is not a static way of doing mission or in usual sense but rather about a new, more dynamic and transformative. It requires actions. It is, as he says, "an effort to make it more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open" (*EG* 27). A missionary seeking to reach out to others—especially the poor, the marginalized, and those who feel distant from God—participates in what Pope Francis calls 'encounter.' This renewal is about rediscovering the essence of the Gospel and living it in ways that transform individuals, communities, and society. It is called "missionary conversion, capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity" (*EG* 29).

Missionaries need to renew their missionary impulse. Pope Francis offers the reasons why this is needed in today's task of evangelization. "Spirit-filled evangelizers are evangelizers who pray and work" (*EG* 262). The missionaries need to be grounded in God's love as their spiritual foundation in doing mission, focusing especially on the contemplative and spirit-filled dimension of evangelization. He emphasizes that "the primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received" (*EG* 262). The missionary impulse is rooted in love and the desire to share the Gospel stems from a personal experience of Christ's love. This loving encounter renews their passion to reach others. Prayer is not an escape but a source of strength and passion for mission. Missionaries must be contemplatives, in dialogue with God to remain rooted in God's will.

Openness to the Holy Spirit is the most essential attitude needed for a missionary disciple. The grace of the Holy Spirit will transform the missionaries into "the heralds of God's wondrous deeds, capable of speaking to each person in his or her own language" (*EG* 259). Mary is the model of this openness to the Holy Spirit. She prays with the disciples for the coming of the Holy Spirit and always present in the midst of the people (*EG* 284), and "let herself be guided by the Holy Spirit on a journey of faith towards a destiny of service and fruitfulness" (*EG* 287). The missionaries are invited to follow "a Marian

style of the work of evangelization,” especially focusing on “the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness, humility, able to recognize the traces of God’s Spirit in events great and small, and contemplates the mystery of God in the world, in human history and in daily lives” (EG 288).

In light of Pope Francis’s call for a “missionary option,” a transformative impulse that reorients the Church toward dynamic evangelization rooted in love, openness, and encounter, it becomes clear that this vision resonates deeply with the spirit of missionary renewal being celebrated in the SVDs community. The call to be “Spirit-filled evangelizers” who are grounded in contemplative prayer and radical service reflects not only the essence of the Gospel but also the enduring charism of missionary congregations like the Society of the Divine Word. As the SVDs mark its 150<sup>th</sup> jubilee, this moment is more than a commemoration of past achievements—it is a profound invitation to embrace anew the missionary option Pope Francis envisions. It is a *kairos* moment, a grace-filled opportunity to discern how the jubilee theme becomes a concrete expression of this renewed missionary spirit, one that seeks to heal, include, and transform in the image of Christ.

The missionary option of the SVDs at this time as persons who come from everywhere is “*Witnessing to the Light: From Everywhere for Everyone*.” This theme indicates that they have seen and lived in this light and in turn joyfully share it to everyone to warm a cold world. They, once again, remind themselves and the people they serve to leave behind their own comfort zones and move beyond boundaries of self-preservation.

‘*Witnessing to the Light*’ points to the fact that there is a Higher Truth or Higher Presence. All actions of witnessing are directed toward something: “the Light.” This Higher Truth is a profound Light that gives enlightenment, knowledge, true joy and hope, and possesses the grace of transforming individuals and communities.

‘*Witnessing to the Light*’ calls to be the light for others, ‘you are the light of the world,’ (Cf Matt 5:13-16). The people they serve should see the light shines on them first for they are called to be “the light of the world.” When Jesus says this, He is not referring to a physical light but to His presence, truth, and love shining through us. The missionaries are called and meant to radiate His light into a world often marked by darkness, confusion, and suffering. For the Church to truly be light, the light of Christ must first be visible in the lives of its members.

To be the light of the world means to stand as a visible witness of God’s grace, love, and truth in a world that desperately needs it. “In this basic core, what shines forth is the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead” (EG 33). It involves showing

love to the unlovable, offering hope to the hopeless, and guiding others to Christ. This kind of witness is not merely about moral superiority or individual acts of charity; it is about living in a way that others can see the transformative power of Christ in their lives. It is about helping others experience the beauty of His light in ways that draw them closer to Him.

The call to witness to the Light is not passive because it calls the SVDs to engage actively and continuously with the Light and the world around them, whether in their families, communities, or the broader society. This means spending time with God and His Word, and then, in His Light, going out to confront the darkness—whether it be sin, injustice, or despair—with the light of Christ’s truth and love. It calls them to build bridges where there are divides, to offer compassion where there is suffering, to stand firm in their faith where there is opposition and to become light where there is darkness.

### **A Call to Transformative Evangelization**

Pope Francis calls the Church “at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day” (EG 3). The central task of the Church, here is to know Jesus, not as an abstract concept but as living, loving Divine Person, as Light, who goes out and offers Himself to all. The first and most important step toward transformation is remaining faithful to Jesus, listening to Him, and allowing Him to encounter humanity. When the missionaries encounter Jesus, their first proclamation must be “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” (EG 27). By echoing this in their witnessing, they bring the Light into the world torn by loneliness and darkness.

Transformation leads to something new, something different. It requires “courage, skill, empathy, character, vision and willingness to sacrifice self for the good of the community.”<sup>5</sup> It is not for the faint hearted missionaries who prefer to self-preservation and defending status quo but for the one who “start examining the source of their resistance, allowing, encouraging, wrestling with and responding to the confronting questions.”<sup>6</sup> Transformative evangelization is an active process that challenges missionaries to step beyond their comfort zones.

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Bate, *Strategies for Cultural Change* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1994), 218.

<sup>6</sup> Graham Hill, *Salt, Light, and a City Introducing Missional Ecclesiology* (Eugene, Oregon: WIPF and STOCK, 2012), 264.

Evangelization, at its core, is about transforming hearts and minds, calling people to a new way of life, often counter to the cultural norms or existing worldviews. The SVDs are asked again and again to step into unfamiliar territories, sometimes even hostile ones, to bring people into one family, and as Pope Francis says, to announce “the Lord, with great respect and love, is also calling you to be a part of his people” (EG 113). This requires courage to face the unknown and sacrifice of their own comforts, safety, or status quo to serve a higher purpose. Evangelization is not for those who prefer to remain in their familiar, comfortable spaces but it is for those willing to risk their own well-being for the greater good of spreading the Gospel. “Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others” (EG 10). Surely, the SVDs have experienced this joy of leaving their comfort zones behind.

In doing so, they are to live “in fidelity to the example of the Master to preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear. The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded” (EG 23) or in their own word: *for everyone*. Pope Francis stresses that the Gospel must be shared with all people, irrespective of their backgrounds or circumstances. “*Witnessing to the Light: From Everywhere for Everyone*” speaks to this inclusivity, as it underlines that the message of Christ is universal and meant for all, regardless of race, culture, or religion. The SVD’s dedication to crossing cultural and geographical boundaries and engaging with diverse communities reflects this spirit of inclusive evangelization. It is a call for unity and respect, ensuring that the light of Christ reaches every person, no matter where they are in the world.

“*Witnessing to the Light: From Everywhere for Everyone*” calls to witness as a community not as a person doing project by himself. “The important thing is to not walk alone, but to rely on each other” (EG 33). According to Pope Francis, this is one of the many challenges in evangelization today. He therefore calls Christians to witness to the Light by offering a radiant and attractive example of fraternal communion: “I especially ask Christians in communities throughout the world to offer a radiant and attractive witness of fraternal communion. Let everyone admire how you care for one another, and how you encourage and accompany one another” (EG 99). He stresses the important of living in the community and caring for each other. This is the key aspect of evangelization; living out the message of Christ in a way that draws others to the faith, not through words but through a caring relationship.

Throughout this year and beyond, the SVDs commit to being the kind of community Pope Francis describes—one that “goes forth, who take the first

step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice” (EG 24). This journey forward indicates an open door where everyone; SVDs and the people they serve, “going out to others in order to reach the fringes of humanity” (EG 46). They are called again and again to the place where the people are far from the center, struggling to be seen and heard by the broader society, to those who are often forgotten or left behind to offer support, empowerment, and sense of belonging.

Pope Francis invites the SVDs to center their proclamation of the Gospel on its core message: “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” (EG 164). It is a deeply personal truth, not just general love for humanity, but a specific, intimate love for each person as an individual. It is an invitation to receive a personal relationship with Jesus — one that is grounded in love, made possible through his sacrifice, and sustained by his living presence in your daily life.

From this basic news of evangelization, Pope Francis gives two sources of Evangelization when he says, “If we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?” (EG 9). First is the personal experience of God, one’s own encounter with God’s love. Evangelization starts with a personal experience—when someone truly receives and feels the transforming love of Jesus. That love brings healing, purpose, and meaning. It is not about rules or ideas first but it is about a relationship that changes everything. Second is the desire to share this love—sharing what one has received. When something beautiful and life-giving happens to a person, they do not want to keep it to themselves, they want others to experience it too. That is the heart of evangelization: it flows from gratitude and joy, not from duty or guilt.

Hence, every Christian, by their baptism, is a missionary disciple because each one has experienced and received the abundant love of God. “In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization” (EG 120). He echoes the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes* “the Church, in its very nature, is missionary.”<sup>7</sup> The mission is not just something the Church *does*, but it is who she *is*. Every member of the Church shares in this missionary identity.

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<sup>7</sup> Vatican Council II, *Ad Gentes*, no. 2. See also *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 30-33, and *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nos. 70 and 75.

In *EG*, Pope Francis encourages everyone to reach out to the peripheries, those who are on the margins of society. This mirrors the SVD's mission, as the theme "*Witnessing to the Light: From Everywhere for Everyone*" emphasizes that no one is excluded from the light of Christ. The SVD's work in often remote, underdeveloped, or marginalized regions exemplifies this outreach. Whether in poverty-stricken communities or areas suffering from conflict, the SVD's mission follows Pope Francis' call to go beyond comfort zones and serve those who are most in need.

## Conclusion

The theme of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the SVDs is aligned with the message Pope Francis wishes to convey in *EG*. "*Witnessing to the Light: From Everywhere for Everyone*" requires listening to God the Father, to the Divine Word, and to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. "*Witnessing to the Light: From Everywhere for Everyone*" requires transformation and making an option of missionary service. And it requires consistency.

For the SVDs, this means continuing to be a global, witnessing community that radiates Christ's presence across cultures, nations, and contexts. It means being present among the marginalized, the desolate, and those dwelling in spiritual darkness—not to impose, but to accompany; not to dominate, but to serve; not to shine for themselves, but to reflect the Light of Christ in love, truth, mercy, and hope. This missionary option compels the SVDs to be signs and instruments of God's transforming grace—mirrors of Christ's light in a world yearning for meaning, healing, and peace. It is not a strategy or a project, but a way of being: a missionary discipleship that flows from a deep encounter with the light of Christ and that goes forth joyfully to the ends of the earth, *from everywhere for everyone*.

By embracing this theme, the SVDs seek to witness the Word of God in a renewed way. At the same time, they reflect on their history—how they have encountered the Word, how Jesus fills their hearts with joy, and how they can set new paths for their future journey. This is a "new chapter" for the SVDs. They are called once again to renew their missionary option and to journey together in witnessing to the transformative power of the Light.

I would like to conclude my reflection with the powerful words of Stephen B. Bevans, who offers a new definition of what it means to be a community of missionary disciples—a definition that deeply captures the connection between the jubilee theme and Pope Francis' teaching in *Evangelii Gaudium*. "The church, *the SVD* is a community of missionary disciples. Its

existence deepens on its service to the already-but-not-yet realization of God's dream, working within to better embody and demonstrate it, working to be a credible, united community, working to rekindle faith in those who have strayed, and working among the nations to be the sacrament of God's promised salvation to all of creation. It is a work of witness and proclamation, of celebration and prayer, of justice and peace, of openness and dialogue, of relevant communication, and of loving reconciliation. It is a work inspired by a process that is dialogical and prophetic, respectful and listening, participative and synodal"<sup>8</sup> (*emphasis added*).

This is what it means to be "*Witnessing to the Light: From Everywhere for Everyone*." Rooted in their identity as a missionary community, the SVDs are called at this time to witness to the Light everywhere and for everyone—by being a prophetic, dialogical, and united presence in the world, embodying God's dream through faithful service, credible witness, and loving accompaniment of all creation toward healing and hope.

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<sup>8</sup> Stephen B. Bevens, *Community of Missionary Disciples The Continuing Creation of the Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 2024), 438.