

Depending on God for vision and direction

Helping a group live “in the Spirit”

by Virginia King

Consider the image of the Christian as an athlete in training. Jesus is our coach and we are on an athletic field, running around a track, following him. Under his guidance, we are learning the necessary skills and building up our strength and endurance. Eventually, when we are ready, Jesus no longer has us running around the track. He asks us to follow him out into the world, to do the things that he has done and even greater things (Jn. 14:12). After Jesus leads us off the track and out into the world, the muscles continue to be exercised and often are tested in ways that they never were when we were simply in training.

Living “life in the Spirit” day-by-day is an exercise in trust. It really is an *exercise*; that is, it is something that you work at repetitively in order to strengthen the “trust-muscles.” And the more you do it, the easier it becomes. But it never ceases to require that we put forth reasonable and consistent effort.

If this is true for our lives as individuals, I believe it is even more so in the case of any group or community. For us to be a group or community which functions “in the Spirit” we need to exercise trust. We need to



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There are many different settings in which we might find ourselves leading a group or community which is striving to live “in the Spirit.” There are prayer meetings, various parish or community fellowships, study or work groups, conference or retreat planning committees, diocesan service teams, and the gatherings of people at special events. There are times when we come together to discern God’s vision and direction for our group and other times that we come together to implement something that had been previously discerned.

What does it look like for a group to live “in the Spirit”? I think it looks like Phil. 2:2-5: “Make my joy complete by your unanimity, possessing the one love, united in spirit and ideals. Never act out of rivalry or conceit; rather, let all parties think humbly of others as superior to themselves, each of you looking to others’ interests rather than to his own. Your attitude must be that of Christ...”

When I am leading a group, my first priority is to develop that sense of trust which leads to true unity. My role as leader is primarily to serve the group in building this unity.

By way of example, when I bring together a group of people to discern the pastoral plan for our annual conference, we begin by acknowledging that our first priority is to seek the Lord’s plan for this event. It is not our plan but God’s plan.

We begin each meeting with a significant time of prayer, perhaps even as much as half the time of the entire agenda. This assures that we are not just giving “lip service” to prayer. We expect the Lord to change our hearts during prayer, to inspire us, to join us together in unity of mind and heart. This time of prayer includes worshipping the Lord, interceding for the graces we need to discern his will for this meeting, and listening to any “word gifts” that might come forth during this time.

The next step is to establish the framework for discussion and brainstorming so that we

are all focused in the same direction. Then we take time to do the brainstorming. Initially many ideas come forth. Sometimes we seem to get bogged down and we take a few minutes of quiet to allow us to hear ourselves think and to hear the Lord speak to our hearts. We try to honor the different personalities of those present by giving specific windows of opportunity for the quieter people to collect their thoughts and to present their ideas. And we trust that the Holy Spirit is present and active at every stage of the prayer and discussion.

When we come to a point of decision making, our goal is to find consensus. In this context, I always take this to mean that the decision is one that everyone in the room is comfortable putting their support behind. It may not be everyone's favorite choice, but no one has a strong objection to the decision.

We specifically ask for any dissenting opinions. I firmly believe that if one person feels very uncomfortable with an option, we need to revisit the decision. Sometimes it is a lone voice that is speaking the Lord's mind to us. We need to listen to each person's concerns.

If we are unable to reach consensus on an important issue, we go again into a time of prayer. We avoid taking a vote as such. We might tally up people's preferences to see where the dominant opinion lies. But if someone says they really can't live with a part of the plan that everyone else agrees to, we don't include it. Or, conversely, if only one person feels very strongly about a particular thing and no one else has an objection, we will include it.

On an important issue, like the pastoral plan for a conference, we might spend several meetings doing brainstorming and discussing. Once the consensus is reached, we commit ourselves to following through on this decision. Our confidence isn't in ourselves or our great wisdom but it is in the ability of the Holy Spirit to make his will known to us through the use of the minds, hearts and charisms that he has given to us.

Now, I am the first to admit that even in this very prayerful process it is possible for us to make a mistake. We are not infallible. But even in this I trust that the Lord is able to turn our mistakes into good (Rom. 8:28) and to direct

our paths if we are about to turn in error to the right or to the left (Is. 30:21).

This trusting in the Lord is something that we need to develop. Even more difficult is trusting in one another. Ultimately, to trust in another human being requires an even greater act of faith in God—acknowledging God's ability to work through "earthen vessels." Our fellow human beings will surely disappoint us at some point—just as we will surely disappoint them. We simply are not trustworthy in the way in which the Lord is trustworthy. But it is essential, if we are going to live "in the Spirit", that we "think humbly of others as superior to ourselves, each looking to others' interests rather than to our own." Again we need to remember that ultimately our trust is in the Lord and in the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ. ♦

Virginia King is a member of the National Service Committee and Director of Western Washington Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the renewal center serving the Archdiocese of Seattle.

Aggie Neck elected National Service Committee Chairman



At its meeting in San Antonio in January, the National Service Committee elected Aggie Neck as its new Chairman. She replaces Fr. Patsy Iaquina, whose terms as NSC

member and as Chairman ended with the January meeting.

A member of the NSC since 1999, Aggie and her husband, Clyde, live in Marksville, Louisiana. They have three adult children and three grandchildren, with a fourth expected soon. For the past thirteen years Aggie has served as Co-director of Servant House, a Catholic Charismatic House of Prayer, where she ministers in spiritual direction, prayer for healing and inner healing, and conducts Bible studies. She has also served as Chairman for the Diocesan Service Committee for the Dio-

cese of Alexandria, and was a member of the Advisory Committee from 1994 until her election to the NSC.

During her tenure as a member of the National Service Committee, Aggie has served on subcommittees for Regional Leaders Gatherings, Finance, Leadership Formation and National Conferences. For the past two-and-a-half years she has written the Ministry Update column for *Pentecost Today*. She served as a host for the NSC-sponsored pilgrimage to Catholic Italy and has spoken at countless conferences across the country and internationally.

In reflecting on her election as Chairman, Aggie writes:

God does indeed have a vision for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in America and all over the world. This grace of Pentecost was given for a plan and a purpose and it will not return to God uncompleted. If we, the people graced with baptism in the Holy Spirit, do not bring to comple-

tion this vision and plan, someone or something else will. We must lead, we must proclaim truth, we must not hesitate. This task is for the body of Christ, not just a few leaders. This task is for me and for you. It is with a heart full of gratitude that I stand before God praying and asking that we his people will know, see and understand the vision, and together bring it to fulfillment. Will you join with me and the members of the National Service Committee to pray for this intention? Would you please pray for me and the members of the NSC? May God anoint and empower us to fulfill his perfect will.

Aggie is the tenth Chairman of the National Service Committee. She is the fifth lay person and the first woman to be elected to the position. While her primary responsibilities as NSC Chairman center on the mission and ministry of the Committee, she will also work closely with other national Catholic Charismatic Renewal leadership groups. The term of Chairman is for three years. ♦