

PENTECOST *Today*

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Photo: Gary Yon

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Chairman's Corner

by Aggie Neck

Where two or more gather

Do you remember your first prayer meeting? I certainly do. I knew nothing of the Renewal, for it was only five years old at the time. I experienced a wide range of emotions, feeling uncomfortable, apprehensive, and uncertain that I should be there. Yet even as I left I knew I wanted to come back. I wasn't sure why, but I felt drawn to return.

That was thirty-one years ago. How I thank God that someone invited me. How I thank God that I responded. My life took on new meaning and I was changed. The prayer group that became my "family in the Lord" has supported me, uplifted me, prayed with me and prayed for me. The people in my prayer group allowed me to grow and to stumble in the process. I know they love me.

Prayer groups are truly a gift from God. I would not have known on my own that praising God was so uplifting and exciting. Now, I don't mean just saying, "Praise the Lord." I mean centering our lives around the God we have encountered in such a powerful way so that praising him becomes as natural as breathing in and breathing out. You become aware of God's goodness in everything, and gratitude and thankfulness are the natural results.

We find spiritual friends who believe—as we do—that God loves us, gifts us, and calls us to step out and be a witness for him. We learn to listen together knowing that God is speaking to us in varied ways. I never knew God spoke to us so personally as in prophecy, scripture passages, words of knowledge and words of wisdom until I was baptized in his Holy Spirit and experienced these things at prayer meetings.

Prayer groups are places of refuge where we are nurtured back to wholeness after being wounded. Personal prayer is ministered by caring people who really do love you and want to see you healed, and who believe that it will happen. Prayer groups are schools for growing in holiness. They are places to learn about and experience the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They are a preparation for learning to witness and to evangelize.

When we gather together the words of Jesus are truly realized: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst" (Matt. 18:20). It never ceases to amaze me that the God of all creation wants to be, chooses to be present when we come together as his people. Even the desire to praise him is his gift. Even the joy that bursts forth in our praise is his gift. And yes, even the desire to worship that fills a room with a holy silence is his gift.

Do we need this prayer group experience to grow, to progress in our journey, to keep the fire of the Holy Spirit burning brightly? St. Paul certainly thought so. "We must consider how to rouse each other to love and good deeds. We should not absent ourselves from the assembly, as some do, but encourage one another; and this all the more because you see that the day draws near" (Heb. 10:24-25). We also read in Hebrews 6:11, "Our desire is that each of you show the same zeal to the end, fully assured of that for which you hope." May God grant us such a zeal. Let us reach out and invite someone to share this gift we have received. ♦

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Seasons of change

by Josephine Cachia

The Lord has done great things for us and we are filled with joy! (Ps. 126:3)

In 1988 I was interviewed by a reporter from our diocesan newspaper, *The Tablet*. I was the first woman given the appointment to serve as the Bishop's Liaison for the English-speaking prayer groups in the Diocese of Brooklyn and it was deemed newsworthy. The reporter seemed to have some peripheral knowledge of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and appeared interested in exploring some of the dynamics of the Renewal.

One of her questions, if I remember correctly, was, "What are your hopes, expectations, visions and goals for the Charismatic Renewal in our Diocese?" I thought for a moment and discovered that my real hope was that the Renewal and baptism in the Holy Spirit would be totally integrated into Catholic parish life and that it would be reflected in the liturgy, sacraments, and in the pastoring of the faithful. She was as surprised as I was with my response, since the general population of the priesthood did not readily accept the concept or the experience.

Be exalted, O God above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth! (Ps. 57:5)

At that time we had vibrant prayer groups that were filled with enthusiastic Christians who were on fire with the Holy Spirit. We numbered around 110 English speaking groups, not to mention the growing number of Hispanic and

Haitian groups. Many of the leaders in the prayer groups discerned the vision and mission that would engage them in various areas of Renewal. Growing in prayer, recognizing and affirming charisms that were manifested in the community of believers, studying scripture, becoming more articulate in sharing faith with others and serving in the local church. Expectant faith was perceived as vital to any gathering that was formed to praise the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. Life in the Spirit Seminars were viewed as foundational to the growth of the prayer group since the heart of the group was to prepare others for baptism in the Holy Spirit. Did we as leaders in the Charismatic Renewal find support within our parish leadership? No, not in the beginning, but we did find support among the priests who were involved.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heaven. (Ecc. 3:1)

In this season of grace how are we doing? Well, many of the larger groups have become smaller, some have become extinct and there are new ones just starting to form. Within the groups that are still meeting some are not experiencing the charisms as they did in the past and for them new members are few and far between. It has been noted that when repentance and ongoing conversion is not expected, people fall away, as do those who are simply seeking repeated religious experiences. Leadership in some groups became self-absorbed and neglected coming together to pray and seek the Lord's leading outside the prayer meeting. ▶

Seasons of change

The prayer groups who have committed leadership remain vibrant and continue to attract new members. For those who remain faithful to the Spirit in discerning the vision and mission of their group there is life. The charismatic prayer meeting is the ideal place for birthing and nurturing the new life in the Spirit. It is the fertile ground where people are encouraged to experience Jesus alive in their midst, as well as joy in prayer, praise and song, loving and challenging fellowship, deeper understanding of the church, liturgy and sacraments. Here we are touched and moved by the power of scripture, grow in our understanding and knowledge of spiritual gifts and become bold to proclaim with confidence that God's love is real and awesome.

Across the globe, this Pentecost experience has propelled millions of people to exercise their gifts in service to the parish. In our diocese, at least 70-80 percent of those who serve in parish ministries have been members of prayer groups. This has made an impact on the local church. People are attracted to the Lord when they see faith in action, lives transformed, and people caring for one another. In our diocese the pastoral team of the Charismatic Renewal Office ministers to many who are not associated with a weekly prayer group. We offer days of renewal, youth conferences, retreats, parish Holy Spirit seminars, conferences, and monthly diocesan prayer meetings with a healing service.

He has made everything beautiful in its time. (Ecc. 3:11)

There are many challenges and distractions in the world of today. Yet seeking healing in physical, spiritual, psychological, and emotional levels and in relationships are needs most of us ex-

perience. In the past we did not have expectations that God would heal us of our infirmities, or that he would shower us with gifts that could transform the world of our hearts, minds and spirits. We expected little and as a result received little. Those who have been baptized in the Holy Spirit and continue to cooperate with the graces given, are like the light on the hilltop that Jesus refers to in Matt. 5:14-16, or the unleavened bread St. Paul refers to in 1 Cor. 5:7-8.

Will prayer groups survive into the future? Yes, if leadership is willing to listen, obey and depend on the Spirit for the fruit-bearing results.

It takes prayer, discernment, discipline, commitment and determined, guided energy to form community—as well as a community willing to be formed. “Listen to me devout children, and blossom like the rose that grows on the bank of a watercourse. Give off a sweet smell like incense, flower like the lily, spread your fragrance abroad, sing a song of praise blessing the Lord for all his works.” Ecc. 39:14

As long as we remain guided by the Holy Spirit in the power of Pentecost and remain connected to the church, the Charismatic Renewal in its various manifestations will continue to have a vital role to witness to the ever-present Lordship of Jesus Christ, in his life, in his death and in his resurrection. ♦



Josephine Cachia is a member of the National Service Committee. She serves as Liaison for the Charismatic Renewal in the Diocese of Brooklyn, New York.

Faith-sharing: A way to grow

by Sr. Justin Wirth, SSND

One evening during faith-sharing time at our prayer meeting, Dan related an experience of God teaching him that week.

The farmer on the farm next to Dan's was plowing his field all night. As his tractor went round and round, Dan found himself getting more and more upset. "Why doesn't he work during the day like everyone else?" he grumbled to himself. "He could have started two weeks ago."

The tractor stopped abruptly and was quiet. The next morning Dan saw the tractor broken in the field. "I'll just bring it to my shed and fix it." Dan thought. "I know he doesn't have the tools to do it."

Fixed and back, the tractor went round and round the field again that night. In the morning Dan looked out and saw the bean field plowed and beautiful in the sunshine.

God gently chided Dan. "I didn't ask you to judge your neighbor. I just asked you to be Christian."

This example of faith-sharing has come back to me often when I am about to judge my neighbor. I pray for the grace to just "be Christian."

Dan's sharing that night was a real witness to me of a way God teaches us through one another. Adults learn best by sharing their own experiences and by hearing the real life experiences of others. As we verbalize what God is doing in our lives, it becomes more real to us and suggests to others similar experiences they have had.

The ABCs of faith-sharing

Here are some tips
for effective faith-sharing:

- A.** Be audible. It doesn't help others if they cannot hear us.
- B.** Be brief. Just give the important facts and enough detail to make the sharing interesting and intelligible.
- C.** Be Christ-centered, or God-centered. The sharing should give God the glory, not ourselves.

Faith-sharing is not a problem-solving time, nor the time to ask for prayers for self or others. It is a time of encouragement and up-building for the community; a time to thank and praise God for blessings and miracles; a time to pass on to others the wonderful things God is teaching us in our prayer time or doing in our lives; a time to share how Scripture comes alive for us and the Word becomes meaningful or helpful in our own circumstances.

Not everyone needs to share at every session. Attentive listening is a gift to the group also. Feel free to pass. Wait until the Spirit nudges you to share, then be courageous in sharing.

Someone once asked Archbishop Ramsey how he knew a favorable incident was God's answer to prayer and not just a coincidence. He responded, "I don't know whether it was just a coincidence, but I do know this: I have many more coincidences when I pray." Sharing these "coincidences" or answers to prayer builds up our own faith and that of others.

Some impediments

There are also some things which can get in the way of effective faith-sharing:

◆ **Fear.** Sometimes we feel what we have to share isn't important enough. If God thinks a sparrow falling out of its nest is important enough for him to notice, how much more what happens in our lives!

◆ **Doubts.** Sometimes we're not sure it is really God speaking to us. God can use happenings in our lives, other persons, even our imagination to inspire us. Why limit him to Scripture or prayer? Be open to all the ways God wants to be present to us and to speak to us.

◆ **We might sound foolish.** Paul says in 1 Cor. 4:10, "We are fools for Christ's sake." Not bad company! Not a bad reason to share!

◆ **Human respect.** We may be afraid others will think we are trying to appear better than others. We are afraid to be open and honest, to take the risk of sharing who we really are, afraid we will be misunderstood. Read the advice Paul gave to Timothy: "God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord..." (1 Tim. 1:7-8).

See [Faith-sharing page 13](#)



Youth ministry

The fields are ripe for the harvest.

by *Cindy Erivez*

Joining youth ministry has certainly opened my eyes up to a whole new world of struggles and victories in and for the kingdom. I have been very blessed with my own children, and so prior to my involvement with teenagers, my awareness of most of the struggles of young people came from television news, and books, along with heartbreaking stories from the adults to whom I had ministered. Reflecting on my past, gave me the desire to help young people so that they could lead healthy happy lives. I have to say that the Lord himself has given me a heart for young people.

The group I work with is called Journey and the Tribe of Judah. Judah means “praise.” Each young member has a story that truly glorifies the Father, that speaks of our hope in Jesus Christ, and gives witness to the power of the Spirit to change lives. These young people flow in all the charismatic gifts. And yes, they know that they are charismatic Catholics. The fantastic part is that some of these have been alive in the Spirit since before they were old enough to be “official” teenagers. The Lord has led me to accept young people of any

age. He sends them to me—I keep them. The challenge for our church, then, is to put meat on our teenagers’ plates. They are hungry for the things of God. Adults tend to “water down” or “talk down” to them assuming that they are making it easier for young people to grasp. It actually bores them. Young people want to be challenged and have things told to them “straight up.”

No amount of knowledge or gifting prepares one for the pain that so many of our youth today experience. Oftentimes, they seek protection from the very ones who should be protecting them. So many are abused physically, mentally, and emotionally. Neglect is also a problem. It is such a blessing to see healing take place—to see the young person laugh and grow strong in the Lord.

Not all bad situations go away. A bad parent-child relationship may still be underway, but it is amazing what the Lord does to undergird and strengthen his child to live a wonderful and exciting life of love, forgiveness and acceptance in spite of it. The young community stands strong for each other. They pray and encourage one another. It is an incredible thing to see.

The young people do not stop there. Adults find their way to this group and actually receive ministry from them.

There are many snares of the enemy. Of prime concern to us is interest in occult. The rare teenager is the one who has never gotten involved in the occult. Hexes and curses do not surprise the young. It is not surprising that many parents are also involved, although they seem to prefer the personal touch, through witches. This is an area that is very neglected. Most of the Catholics that we have ministered to are not aware of occult and new age as sin.

We need to show God’s people how to apply the truth about his cross and his precious blood to our lives. Journey spends a lot of time bringing light and truth to these areas. Young people are coming out of bondage because they find out that Jesus saves! Just as important is that their parents are coming into order as well. The fields are ripe for the harvest! ♦



A leader in charismatic youth ministry in El Paso, Texas, Cindy Erivez is a member of the NSC Council.



The heart of God

If God is love, why are a lot of Catholics I know cowering before him and his pending wrath? I've pondered and puzzled this for some time now, and, as sincerely as that viewpoint is held, I feel it might be based partly on some biblical misunderstandings. Is there a coming reckoning? Surely. The day of final judgment will come to each of us. But if that is our focus, then our perception of reality—both of God and ourselves—is skewed and distorted.

We image God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as a community of persons, a community of love. God drew us into his very heart, his inner life of love, when we were baptized into his Son. In Jesus we have seen the Father. If we want to know what the heart of the Father is about, we would do well to reflect on this passage:

When Israel was a child, I loved him and called him out of Egypt as my son. But the more I called to him, the more he turned away from me...They refuse to return to me, and so they must return to Egypt. War will...destroy my people...They will cry out because of the yoke that is on them, but no one will lift it from them...How can I give you up, Israel? How can I abandon you? *Could I ever destroy you...? My heart will not let me do it! My love for you is too strong. I will not punish you in my anger.* I will not destroy Israel again. For I am God and not man. I, the Holy One, am with you. *I will not come to you in anger.* (Hosea 11:1-9)

In this fascinating text, God is really upset. He starts raging against the Israelites. "Back to Egypt with you! Be devoured by your enemies!" Then suddenly, almost mid-rant, God "changes" his mind. Even if Israel goes back on its liberation and election by God, God cannot. His "heart" recoils. As one translation words it, "my compassion

kindles vehemently!" Vehement compassion defines God. He will not execute his fierce anger because he is God, not man. Found guilty, Israel is, nonetheless, set free; is not sentenced. Yet the sentence is demanded and must be paid. Israel could not keep her end of the bargain. What was God to do? Wipe out Israel? Israel could not love God. Jesus, the new Israel, the son he had "called out of Egypt," did it for them. He fulfilled the covenant.

Every word of the gospel throbs with the boundless love of Christ for each human being.

The Hebrew word *hesed* means the unconditional, everlasting, loyal, covenant love of God. In the New Testament, we find that God himself, in his Son, suffers the rejection that Israel was spared. God takes upon himself the punishment Israel deserved from a just God. God's wrath is not greater than his love. He *is* his love.

Jesus is the incarnation of the love of God. The once popular devotion to the Sacred Heart has all but disappeared in the modern church. I don't necessarily recommend that we resurrect it. But with or without a specific form of devotion, we should try to enter more deeply into an understanding of the reality of the heart of God. It unlocks one of the secrets by which we are to act as Christ in the world today. Every word of the gospel throbs with the boundless love of Christ for each human being, particularly those who are lowly or distressed. His heart is so passionately in love with us that (as artists have tried to suggest to us) it can no longer withhold the flames of that burning desire for us. The closer we get to the heat waves of love coming from the flaming furnace which is the heart of Jesus, the more our hearts will burn within us. Stay long enough, and like current flowing through a wire, you begin to find yourself in contact with the current of love that flows from him. You burn and become one with his incandescent love. You begin to be filled with a love of what he loves and to want to love those things too.





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Outline

The more on fire we become as each of us catches on fire from drawing near to his blazing love, the more we will go out and throw off sparks everywhere until the whole world is ablaze. The love that casts out fear sends us out, not with a message of imminent doom, but with new words of hope and joy on our lips—with the "good news."

"A day is coming when people will sing, 'I praise you, Lord!' You were angry with me, but now you comfort me and are angry no longer. Tell the nations what he has done! Tell them how great he is!" (Is. 12:1,4).

We cannot afford to misunderstand the relationship between the mercy and anger of God. Jesus did not come to condemn us. He came to save us from our sin and from the Father's wrath. That wrath is spent. The sword is no longer hanging over our heads. It has already pierced the side of Christ.

A writer and retreat director, Dorothy Ranaghan and her husband, Kevin, live in South Bend, Indiana, and are members of People of Praise Community.

- A.** Our perception of God.
- B.** The Trinity: a community of love. We have been drawn into the life of God.
- C.** God's people fail him, but he does not exact punishment. He so loved us that he, himself, in his Son, suffers it.
- D.** God is unconditional love.
- E.** As the fire of his love enkindles us, we set the world on fire. Our mission is to tell good news. God in Christ has spent his wrath.

Discussion questions

- Is there a difference between a day of wrath and tribulation, and a day of judgment?
- How did God choose to balance his justice and mercy?
- What is the "view" from the heart of Christ? If Christ is in us, how does it affect the way in which we evangelize?

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By Bob Williams

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