



Prayer and Hope: How to handle prayer group struggles

by Deacon Chuck Matzker

If you are involved in a prayer group, or are a leader of a group, you know this: Trouble will eventually knock on the door, and will walk in, invited or not. It is going to happen. There are some things certain, and one of them is that leaders and groups **WILL** experience difficulties. When that happens, we can feel many things—frustration, fear, inadequacy, depression, anger, exhaustion and even a desire to “scrap it all.”

How can we handle these difficult circumstances? There are many organizational problem-solving processes: interpersonal relations courses, mediation, communication improvement methodologies that can be implemented, but I would like to look at this from another perspective. I would like to share a simple process our Pastoral Team has found to be effective in dealing with difficulties, and strengthening hope. It is identified by five simple words, the first letters of which spell “POWER”: Past, Organize, Word, Enact and Rejoice.

PAST: First, we look back, and remember. This gives us perspective and shows that we are not alone, but are in good company.

◆ **Jesus and his disciples experienced difficulties.** Remember the mother of James and John asking Jesus

to let her sons sit one at his right and one at his left in the Kingdom, and the reaction of the other apostles to this: anger and resentment (Matthew 20:21-28). And then there were the apostles on the road to Capernaum, arguing about which of them is the greatest (Mark 9:33-35).

◆ **St. Paul did too.** Just reading Paul’s letters to the communities he founded and pastored gives us a window into his world. While the letters are full of instruction and commendation, there is also correction and advice. How discouraged he must have become at times, but he did not let anything deter him from his mission!

◆ **All leaders and groups experience them**—We are not unique. “In this world you will have trouble...” (John 16:23). A great spiritual director to our Pastoral Team, Fr. Jerry Borer S.J., would help me keep perspective when I tended to take upon myself too much responsibility for success; his question to me in those times always was “Chuck, are you the Savior?”

ORGANIZE: Next, we call a meeting of our group leaders to address the problem. In an atmosphere of prayer, unity and honesty, we discuss the issue, each sharing his or her perspective... “Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray...” (James 5:13). As a group, we try to make sure our hearts are docile to the Holy Spirit, and open

to correction, and that pride and anger are not at work in our decisions. A spirit of love and humility must prevail. “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mark 9:37).

WORD: We then spend time in prayer and praise, open to the charismatic gifts, seeking God’s word and the Spirit’s guidance for us in inspired Scripture, prophecy, word of wisdom, etc. The Spirit is always faithful. “Ask and you shall receive” (Luke 11:9). It is after this time of prayer that we achieve clarity and a good sense of the right way to deal with the difficulty. We look at the issue again, and then decide on the proper actions to take.

ENACT: It is now that we implement and perform the actions decided upon. However, to do this, we identify which of us is the most loving toward the person(s) we must meet with to address the problem. Those that care for the person(s) most are the ones we send. A wise saying that has always stuck with me is, “The stronger the bond of love, the heavier the burden that can be carried across it.”

REJOICE: No matter what the situation or the outcome, we take time to praise God.

◆ “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:4-7).

◆ He is present in the difficulty, and works all things to good. “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who

Photo: Tammie Stevens

have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

◆ In the conclusion of Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians, he says, “Finally, brothers, rejoice. Mend your ways, encourage one another, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you” (2 Corinthians 13:11).

Past, Organize, Word, Enact, Rejoice = **POWER**, the Power to deal with difficulties and continue on in hope. Jesus last words to us before ascending to the Father were, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This is our mission still. To do it, we need the Holy Spirit. For leaders and groups, a great way to start the

day would be to pray the prayer of Cardinal Mercier.

“O Holy Spirit, Soul of my soul, I adore you. Enlighten, guide, strengthen and console me. Tell me what I ought to do and command me to do it. I promise to be submissive in everything that you permit to happen to me, only show me what is your will.” (Cardinal Mercier)

In doing God’s will, there is no reason to lose heart. ◆



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Day of Prayer & Fasting Friday, February 20, 2009

For the eighth year in a row the NSC is joining with other leadership groups to ask Renewal participants to fast and pray on the Friday before Ash Wednesday for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the United States and that the Church in our country might be renewed in the grace of Pentecost.



Archbishop
Edwin O'Brien



Bishop Oscar Solis



Jim Murphy



Bob Canton



Patti Gallagher
Mansfield

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.” Isaiah 61:1

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