

YEAR OF UNITY 2015

Document issued by the 5-Year Committee of the National Leadership Groups of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the U.S.

In the 5-year Journey to the 50th celebration of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit we call Catholic Charismatic Renewal, 2015 is designated the Year of Unity. It has four emphases:

- Reach out to all groups influenced by charismatic renewal
- Endeavor to lay down our lives for each other
- Foster unity in the Renewal, unity with the Church, and ecumenism
- Focus on the importance of community.

For several years now the National Leadership Groups of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal have been working on “Fostering Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Covenant of Understanding” as a means to increase “unity among those who are called to promote ‘baptism in the Holy Spirit,’ the use of charisms, and the full role of the Holy Spirit in the Catholic Church.” We have already approached many of the communities and ministries about the “Covenant of Understanding” which will begin to be signed officially at the Gathering of National Leadership Groups: Catholic Charismatic Renewal in January. We hope that throughout the year many groups, including those of an ecumenical nature, will sign the “Covenant of Understanding” and we will continue to “reach out to all groups influenced by the charismatic renewal” so that together we can celebrate the grace of baptism in the Holy Spirit poured out so powerfully in our day.

ENDEAVOR TO LAY DOWN OUR LIVES FOR EACH OTHER

“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friend” (Jn. 15:13). In this Year of Unity we are challenged anew to find ways to foster unity with our brothers and sisters. We often read John 15:13 with the idea of being willing to die for our friends, but in a more practical way we are being asked to ‘lay down our life’ for our friends. That may mean that we have to give up our visions of how things should be and our way of doing things. We do this for Jesus, for the higher calling to live for Jesus, not ourselves and our understandings. We must be constantly open to the Holy Spirit directing and teaching us. If we are willing to ‘lay down our life’ as we see it now and are open to listening to, responding to and cooperating with others, we can build unity between all groups and peoples with whom we work. We strive for this because

in Romans we are told, “so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Rom. 12:5).

What does that look like for us? Here are some simple things you can do.

- Pray together – find ways and opportunities for community and group prayer with other expressions of the Renewal in your area.
- Be clear in your vision for a unified body of believers celebrating the commonality of all.
- Be open and vocal about the gift each group brings to the renewal of the Church.
- Commit to ongoing communication and cooperation with the different groups.

FOSTERING UNITY

When Jesus prayed in John 17 that we all be one, it was and is a comprehensive call to unity. It is not simply a call for a superficial mixture of elements into a tenuous combination; it is a call to a union that is as complete as the union between the three persons of the Trinity.

As we look in Scripture we see some of the areas where unity must be sought. God has called us to an almost inconceivable task that is only possible because of the grace that He bestows and the methods like dedication to the Father’s will, humility, service, sacrifice, and forgiveness that Jesus models in His life on earth. Here we will look at working on unity within the Renewal, with the Roman Catholic Church, and within the Body of Christ.

Within the Renewal we can do several things that will help foster unity.

- Try hard to repair broken relationships where differences on issues or perhaps even the sin of pride have separated us from others.
- Reestablish relationships that have simply gone fallow from neglect.
- While respecting the diversity in the Renewal, use the “Covenant of Understanding” to affirm our roots in baptism in the Holy Spirit and the Lordship of Jesus.

With the Roman Catholic Church:

- Repent of two equally unacceptable and seemingly opposite ways of doing business. We can stop trying so hard to “fit in” that we abandon the prophetic role that the Holy Spirit and ecclesial leaders in the Church have called us to live, and we can work hard to avoid

pride and exclusivity in how we see ourselves in relationship to Church structures and other Church members.

- We can also work hard to be an integral part of the Church's mission including the current focus on the new evangelization.
- We also seem suited as a Renewal to bring healing to the wounded within the Church's ranks. As we become active team members in mission, unity with others will improve.

Ecumenism: Finally, we can work with other communions and denominations to foster unity. Baptism in the Holy Spirit has always had an ecumenical impulse. We in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal owe a real debt of gratitude to the both the Pentecostal and mainline denominational renewals that helped form us. There seems to be a new grace to work together, partially energized by Pope Francis. We may be at a watershed moment in history. Perhaps we will see the walls of division between Christians dissolve during our lifetime.

- Have a humble and teachable heart
- Work and pray together with our brothers and sisters in Christ.
- Evangelization, works of mercy, and areas of social justice are all potential common grounds where we can grow in unity.

FOCUS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY

God manifests the Holy Spirit's presence, not only through individual charisms and ministries, but through the witness of committed, united communities. Acts 2:42-47 describes the disciples after Pentecost: "They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles, and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers...to meeting together in the temple area and breaking bread in their homes...and every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." This account emphasizes that it was their life together that drew others to the Lord. The community itself was a manifestation of the Spirit. Paul regularly describes charisms in the context of being a committed, united community, the "body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12; Eph. 4:1-16).

What does this mean for Renewal groups? We must "strive eagerly" (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1, 12) for the charism of "community building." Visitors should witness a "unity in the Spirit" that manifests God's presence. Here are some suggestions:

- Pray together for the desire to be a community like Acts 2 that witnesses the presence of the Spirit, bringing others to Jesus Christ.
- Pray for the community building charisms of pastoring, administration, wisdom, encouragement, hospitality, communal vision, practical teaching on relationships.

- Pray for the grace to “think collectively” and “see connections,” so that people do not think only of their own desires and gifts, but learn to interrelate with others and complement each other. Teach and practice these in your groups.
- Have a yearly group plan that includes regular community building activities: one-to-one sharing where people can share their background and testimony; teachings on communication skills and group dynamics; socializing together. Spend time getting to know each other and grow in spiritual bonds of friendship.
- Every year, teach about the importance of faith-sharing community and invite those in the Renewal who only attend events to make a greater commitment to community life.

Maturity grows when we are in committed relationships where “living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body’s growth and builds itself up in love” (Eph. 4:15-16).

Finally, **we recommend** that at your conferences and major events during 2015 that the theme of “unity” appear in your title as part of our 5-year Journey together to the Jubilee in 2017.

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