

PENTECOST *Today*

January/February/March/April 2004

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Chairman's Corner

by Aggie Neck

Building a foundation for the culture of Pentecost

Find hope in the phrase “building a culture of Pentecost.” The idea of working toward the fulfillment of this goal gives me hope. What a glorious day that will be!

However, I do believe that in order for that to happen there needs to be an environment of Pentecost on which to build. Who will provide this environment? Who will lay the foundation on which the culture of Pentecost will emerge and flourish? It is you and I. It is the people who have experienced baptism in the Holy Spirit and are walking the walk, as well as talking the talk.

“Nothing is more apt to confirm our faith and hope than holding it fixed in our minds that nothing is impossible with God” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 274). Our faith can and will take a giant leap when we believe that what the Pope has asked is not an impossible task. St. Augustine said, “God would not urge us to ask unless he were willing to give.”

How do we go about providing the environment necessary for this to happen? We begin to live and to speak about what we believe. We pray, pray and pray some more. Then the environment takes on this atmosphere of vibrant faith where people, businesses, governments and nations are transformed and we are surrounded with an all-encompassing presence of the living God and everything is made new.

Does this sound like pious platitudes? Well, it isn't! It is a dream inspired by the Holy Spirit. It came first into the heart and mind of John Paul II. It comes to us as we allow the Holy Spirit to awaken in us the reality that the culture we find ourselves in is not God's plan for the world. The kingdom of

God isn't just a lot of words. It is to be lived. It is power! (See 1 Cor. 4:20). This experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit is not an event that is for a season; it is an experience that is life-changing. It causes us to see the plan of God as it applies to our individual and collective lives.

The various leadership groups of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal have set aside the Friday before Ash Wednesday as an annual day of prayer and fasting. Prayer groups everywhere are invited and encouraged to join in this united intercession for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church and the face of the earth. The date is Friday, February 20. This type of united prayer is one way to bring about the transformation of the culture.

As we build this environment for the culture of Pentecost here are some suggestions:

1. Proclaim the Gospel in power and truth.
2. Bring down strongholds and destroy them by the power that comes to us through the Lordship of Jesus and the Holy Spirit within us.
3. Believe in the miraculous. Our faith should bear fruit.
4. Give comfort and consolation to those in pain and sorrow. We must not hesitate to be compassionate.
5. Be joyful people. We must rejoice with those who rejoice and spread joy wherever we are.
6. Fear must be replaced with trust in God.
7. We must bring the rule of God to our cities, states and nation. We should not let the rulers of the world take away our God-given order.

“There is a need for witnesses to ‘the things of above’ contemplated and lived out in everyday existence” (John Paul II). The Catholic Charismatic Renewal strives to be those witnesses. “This explains why we work and struggle as we do; our hopes are fixed on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, but especially of those who believe” (1 Tim. 4:10).

Aggie Neck is Chairman of the National Service Committee.

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Son first, sinner second

by Fr. Fio Mascarenhas, SJ

It was in this time, when the Lord had emptied me, that he chose to fill me again.

For the past thirty-one years, my life has been built on a “culture of Pentecost.” I experienced this in 1968 when, for the first time, I failed a university examination. I had joined the Society of Jesus in 1963, after graduating in chemistry. My superior sent me back to the university to specialize so that I could become a professor of chemistry in our Jesuit university in Bombay. I was very happy. I said to myself, “I’m going to be a famous professor of chemistry.” In my daydreams I even dreamt that one day I would get the Nobel Prize for chemistry.

So you can imagine my consternation, shock, confusion, and humiliation when I failed the exam. This was something quite extraordinary because I knew everything and I had gotten the gold medal at the university the previous year. Everybody was expecting me to top the class. But as I walked into the examination hall, my mind went blank. I couldn’t remember anything.

I appeared for the exam a second time some months later, again preparing myself very well. But again, as I walked into the examination hall, my mind went blank. And I failed the second time. Now, as you can imagine, it became a crisis of faith for me.

I appeared for that examination a third time. This time, as I walked into the hall, I whispered this prayer; “I know, Lord, that you don’t love me. So I’m not going to ask you anything for myself. But I hope you still love my poor mother.” Mummy had been making novena after novena and offering Masses that her poor Fio would pass the exam. But my mind went blank there in the hall. And I failed the third time.

This was a real crisis of faith from then on. I stopped praying to God. I could not believe that God loved me. When people said, “Pray more,” I said, “That’s all rubbish.” And slowly I began to rebel within myself. I became bitter, turned in upon myself. I was a wreck spiritually, emotionally and physically. Spiritually, I could not believe in God and I was rebellious. Emotionally, I could not face people any more because I thought they would be laughing at me because of my three failures. And physically, I had suffered from asthma all my life, and in these days I was hospitalized many times. I could not walk much. I could not play games. I was gasping for breath most of the time. I had all kinds of dietary restrictions.

It was in this time, when the Lord had emptied me, that he chose to fill me again.

One day I was moved to kneel before my crucifix. As I knelt before that crucifix I could sense a prayer coming from deep within. This is what Romans tells us, when we do not know how to pray, the Spirit comes to our aid. I felt myself saying, “Lord, I am useless. I have no future. But if you have a plan for my life, here I am.”

This was my real surrender to the Lordship of Jesus. All along before that, I was telling the Lord what he had to do for me. Now I was saying, “Lord, if you have a plan for me, here I am.” And that completely transformed my life.

Immediately, even as I was kneeling there, the response of God became so clear to me. It was a voice that spoke to me interiorly, “Fio, you are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.” At once, my mind started working. “Well pleased? How can

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he be well pleased with me?” And yet, though I could not understand it intellectually, from deep within my heart a joy began to bubble up. I leapt to my feet, threw my hands up in the air and shouted, “Jesus, you’re alive!”

That was my baptism in the Holy Spirit. I was completely healed in all three ways. Since then I’ve never had a problem with asthma. It was completely healed and I’m able to be vigorous for the Lord. I told you I had dietary problems. Until then, I couldn’t eat ice cream. Now I can! A whole bucket if you give it to me!

Emotionally I was healed. I told you I could not face people. But once God said to me, “Fio, you are my beloved son,” that gave me a new sense of my own self worth, not based on human achievement, not based on human reasons, but on the realization that God loves me; I am his son.

Spiritually, I was healed. I now have an invincible, intuitive, spontaneous conviction that God loves me. That brings up within me a deep sense of humility, that it is not my own merits, and a sense of tremendous gratitude to God.

So what happened to my chemistry? I appeared for that examination a fourth time—soon after this experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit—and everything went well. I passed with a first class. As a result, I’m qualified to teach chemistry at any university in the world. But do you know, I never taught chemistry again!

When I was ordained in 1975, three years after my baptism in the Spirit, my Jesuit Provincial said: “Fio, you are qualified for two apostolates. Which do you want to choose?” I said, “What are they?” He said, “Well of course, there’s chemistry. But, you had an experience of God and you are able to communicate it to others. Why don’t you get into the Charismatic Renewal and be full time for it?”

Over the years I have had the opportunity to go to over eighty countries to speak at conferences. Wherever I went, I would ask people, “If I was a chemistry professor, would you have invited me here?” From this I realized that God did the best thing he could do for me by bringing me through that period of suffering. Otherwise I probably would have been too proud and too much a “head” person to

get involved in the Renewal. He had to do something to bring me to the source of life, to the Lord and giver of life.

To God, each one of us is a son or a daughter first—a sinner second. That was my experience. I was a sinner. I rebelled against God. I had given up prayer. I did not believe in him any more. And yet, he loved me first. It is not because I deserved it, but because he knew that I was misguided, lost in the desert. His amazing grace came to bring sight to my eyes and to bring hope into my life.

This is true not only of me, it is true of you. When God looks at each one of us, he does not see us first as a sinner. That is what the accuser of the brethren would like us to think, that first of all we are sinners. No! First of all is not what we are of ourselves but what God has made of us. His Son had to die on the cross to make of us a new creation. And so when God sees each one of us, he says: “That is my son. That is my daughter.” Only afterwards is the realization that we are also sinners.

Look at the parable of the prodigal son. Here was a boy who had rebelled—who in every way was a sinner. As he came back to his father he recognized, “I can never be a son again. I will always be a sinner.” And what did he do? He came to his father thinking he would say: “I am no longer worthy to be your son. Treat me as a servant.” But the father would have nothing to do with that attitude. He ran and he embraced his boy and said: “You are my son first and always. Nothing can change this, not even your sins.” In grace and in disgrace, we remain sons and daughters.

So say that out loud: “For God, I am a son/daughter first. A sinner second.”

When Jesus taught us to pray, he said, “First remember that you are a child, and cry out as a child, ‘Abba, dear Daddy.’”

The first three phrases of the Our Father are three kisses that we as children implant on our Father’s cheeks. “Abba, Daddy, holy be your name”—the first kiss.

“Your kingdom come”—the second kiss.

“Your will be done”—the third kiss.

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The test of maturity:

Charismatic Renewal and evangelization in the third millennium

by Archbishop Stanislaw Rylko

One of the greatest challenges the church is called to face at this beginning of the millennium is the never-ending task: evangelization. As always, the church listens attentively to the words of Christ: “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15). The church founded by Jesus Christ has been sent to evangelize the world and lives in a permanent state of mission. Mission is the reason for her existence!

The pope invites us today to a “new evangelization.” What is the element of novelty that should characterize the evangelizing action of the church in our times? The novelty is determined by the unprecedented character of the actual world situation. The widespread process of secularization, religious indifference, moral and religious relativism (even in the countries with a long Christian tradition), terrorism and war, scientific progress more and more dissociated from ethical values—all these require a new attitude in the way we evangelize. The present situation calls for an intensification of efforts on the part of all evangelizers so as to find new ways of proclaiming the gospel, more respondent to the spiritual demands of contemporary man.

Evangelization is a very complex concept and it entails several strictly connected processes, among which stand formation and proclamation. In today’s world, both processes face great difficulties and obstacles. The actual culture generates fragmented and debilitated personalities



The parish needs to have within itself a micro-structure of smaller communities.

which are therefore unstable and incoherent. This kind of culture influences even Christians. Consequently the Christian identity becomes weak and confused, faith is divided between routine and tradition, superstition, magic and new age; religious belonging is superficial and distracted; unable to have a significant impact on people’s lives and behavior.

Today, there is a lack of places where people can be formed in depth. Christian families are often in crisis and fail in giving a solid basic foundation to their children’s faith. Parish life, still an indispensable support structure to the life of the church, is not self-sufficient any longer. Often our parishes are too big and anonymous. They are not successful in creating in the faithful a sense of communion and closeness. So the formation and proclama-

tion offered in our parishes have a generic character because of the diverse people to be addressed. It is difficult for them to be centers of authentic Christian formation.

What should be done? In order to be a place of formation—to offer the faithful a truly effective and missionary formation in a ‘personalized way’—the parish needs to have within itself a micro-structure of smaller communities. In other words, the parish needs the ecclesial movements. Only in this way can the process of formation and of Christian initiation truly reach the personality of each person in depth.

The task of evangelizing within ecclesial movements is directed primarily to Christian formation of mature personalities. It

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Summer Conferences 2003: Just live it!



What started off as a simple conference for a couple hundred youth has turned into one of the largest ministries to Catholic youth in the United States.

by Fr. Dave Pivonka

God is alive and his presence may be most clearly seen in teenagers. Yes, you read correctly. Those kids with strange hair and odd speech, with parts of their bodies pierced that never should have been pierced. Yes, those people. God's Holy Spirit is alive and well in the younger generation and he is moving in power. One of the places this can be seen best is at youth conferences sponsored by Franciscan University of Steubenville. One need only spend thirty-six hours at one of these conferences in order to see God's anointing. Many people ask what makes the youth conferences so powerful. In order to answer we should look to their beginnings.

In 1975 Fr. Michael Scanlan, then President of Franciscan University, thought it would be a good idea to offer conferences for high school students. As the years passed more and more teens visited the campus of Franciscan University in order to experience God's anointing. Soon the conference grew so large that the Univer-

sity had to sponsor two conferences during the summer. And the youth kept coming...and coming. Soon Franciscan University could not handle the numbers of teens who wanted to be a part of what God was doing. In 1994 Bishop Sam Jacobs, then of Alexandria, Louisiana, offered to host a Franciscan University youth conference. It would be called Steubenville South. The first conference gathered a few hundred teens and then it grew...and grew...and grew. God was doing something very special. Franciscan University simply couldn't handle the number of teens who wanted to experience God's grace, love and mercy. So Steubenville East at the Shrine of Our Lady of LaSalette in Attleboro, Massachusetts, was born. And the young people kept coming...and coming.

Next came Steubenville West in Arizona, Steubenville St. Louis, Steubenville of the Rockies in Denver, Steubenville Atlanta, Steubenville North in Minneapolis/St. Paul, Steubenville Charleston, South Caro-

lina and Steubenville San Diego. What started off as a simple conference for a couple hundred youth has turned into one of the largest ministries to Catholic youth in the United States with thirty thousand high school teens participating in Steubenville Youth Conferences during the summer of 2003.

So, why did thirty thousand teens attend Franciscan University Youth Conferences last summer? What makes the conferences so powerful? The answer is quite simple: God. The conferences are not complicated. An environment is created where God is able to work. Each year a theme is developed which will provide direction to the conferences. Last summer's theme was "Just Live It." The scripture which gave further direction was John 15:16: "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain." (Knowing that you can't wait to know the theme for 2004 here is your sneak preview: "Rise Up: A Catholic Revolution." Things are shaping up for an

amazing summer!) In the summer of 2003 the youth were challenged to really live their faith. On the one hand it is easy to say we love God but it is much more difficult to really *live* our love for God.

One of the greatest difficulties our young people (and a few *older* people) have is a tendency to compartmentalize their lives. They go to Mass and youth group but also go to parties and get drunk or get involved in harmful relationships. Due to many influences of our culture, many youth have lost a real sense of right and wrong. They may do the “church thing” but also be in-

Through dynamic preaching, anointed worship and the celebration of Eucharist, teens are experiencing a God who is able to fill the emptiness in their lives.

involved in behavior that will lead them away from God. Many of them feel this struggle, this battle raging inside them. Something planted deep inside them (grace) hints and sometime screams to them that there is more, that there is freedom from the world in which they are trapped.

Young people have a longing for the spiritual; every human person has a longing for the spiritual. Deep in our hearts we know that there must be something more. Unfortunately many teens look to other places to fill this emptiness. When these same teens come to the Youth Conference they encounter a God who is alive and active. Through dynamic preaching, anointed worship and the celebration of Eucharist, teens are experiencing a God who is able to fill the emptiness in their lives. They experience a God who helps them come out of the shadows, a God who allows them to see things more clearly. One teen stated: “I realize that I had been lied to. All the time. The world had been lying to me and didn’t really care about me. I found in God truth that helped me realize who I am and who God is.”

It is by the power of God’s Holy Spirit that these teens are experiencing Jesus. These teens are truly experiencing a new Pentecost. Lives are being changed. Hearts are being renewed. Minds are being healed.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit are being poured out on these young people. They are experiencing baptism in the Holy Spirit. They may not know the traditional language; the word “charismatic” may not mean anything to them. In fact, they would probably deny being part of a “charismatic movement” because the language is foreign to them; but they are being filled

with the Holy Spirit. That cannot be denied. They are experiencing a call to go out with others and to share what they have experienced. The Holy Spirit is becoming more evident in their lives. The fruit can be seen in more and more teens desiring to attend the Youth Conferences. Teens come each summer and say, “I want what John or Debbie got last year.”

God continues to raise up a generation of young people. History shows that God often chooses the young to teach the old, and we pray that the Holy Spirit continues to shower grace on a generation of young people. May they continue to experience God’s love and power so that they may be a light in a world that so desperately longs to see. ♦



Fr. Dave Pivonka is Vice President for Mission Effectiveness at Franciscan University of Steubenville.

Festivals of Praise

Recognizing the powerful encounter with Christ that occurs at a Steubenville Youth Conference, the National Service Committee and the Association of Diocesan Liaisons at their January 2003 meeting in Augusta, Georgia, discerned a need for participant follow-up. The two groups formed a committee that also includes staff from the Steubenville Conference Office and youth ministers from various parts of the country. Gatherings called Festivals of Praise are being tested in off-campus settings with youth leaders, liaisons, and leaders in the Renewal helping to organize these events. These gatherings will be held several times a year and include music, praise, worship, a short teaching and end with a Eucharistic procession. The goal is to offer numerous opportunities to have a vibrant experience of the Holy Spirit that will bear fruit into adulthood, opening them to the power of prayer and giftedness in the Holy Spirit. The first Festival of Praise is scheduled to be held in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana, in January. ♦



Day of Prayer and Fasting

Friday, February 20, 2004

The various national leadership groups of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal have designated the Friday preceding Ash Wednesday as a Day of Prayer and Fasting. The date this year is Friday, February 20th.

Participants are encouraged to pray for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the United States and that the church in our country might be renewed in the grace of Pentecost.

This is the third year the national leadership groups have designated such a day. In doing so, the leaders hope to strengthen the unity of the Renewal and communion in the church.



**Fr. Tom Forest
awarded
*Pro Ecclesia et
Pontifice***

Pope John Paul II has awarded the *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* to Fr. Tom Forrest, CSsR, who served on the National Service Committee from 1975-1978. Fr. Forrest also served as Director of the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Office and as chair of ICCRS in the 1980s, and as Director of Evangelization 2000.

The papal award, given on the occasion of Fr. Tom Forrest's 50th anniversary of priestly ministry, "is designated primarily for those distinguished by their activities and excellent works," and was sent with "warmest felicitations from the Holy Father."

The National Service Committee rejoices with Fr. Tom Forrest and prays that God may continue to bless him throughout this 50th anniversary year. ♦



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