

## **Dispelling Eight Myths About The Catholic Charismatic Renewal**

(excerpt from Renewing the Renewal: A Firestorm in the Catholic Church)

I thought of its celebration [Jubilee 2000] as a providential opportunity during which the Church, thirty-five years after the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council...would examine how far she had renewed herself, in order to be able to take up her evangelizing mission with fresh enthusiasm. (John Paul II, 2001, p. 8)

As we reflect on the growth of the Renewal Movement since its early beginnings, we all would agree that it has been a powerful and fruitful gift to our Church. Many Charismatic Catholics currently serve as lectors, Eucharistic ministers, catechists, and members of pastoral teams. Others are involved with programs and movements such as Christ Renews His Parish, Cursillo, Renew, Alpha for Catholics, RCIA, Disciples In Mission, Life Teen, and the Marian Movement. A few have started religious orders for women and men and covenant communities.

Nevertheless, in light of John Paul II's challenge to use the arrival of the new millennium as an opportunity to examine how far the Church has renewed itself since Vatican II, we ought to conduct the very same examination of ourselves, the Renewal Movement and our prayer groups. The start of the third millennium might just be the perfect time to revisit our vision and mission statements, Renewal activities, and the role Charismatic Catholics play in renewing the mainstream Church.

If we take up the challenge to examine ourselves, let it be an honest self-examination that asks these difficult questions: Have we been boating too close to shore when it comes to fishing for souls for Christ? Have we only been evangelizing Catholics one-on-one, ministering to those who walk into our daily lives, or those already in our prayer groups or the Renewal? Have we actually been fishing for souls for the Renewal rather than fishing for souls for Christ? Would we be able to recognize the subtle difference?

Most would agree that ministering close to shore has seemed to work for us over the years. At least it seemed to work until recently when John Paul II (2001) asked us to examine the current impact of the Renewal in terms of its mission of evangelization. If we are convinced that the Renewal today is having a significant impact in the mainstream Church, we can be satisfied to continue with business as usual. If however, we wish to take John Paul II's challenge seriously we will probably agree that business as usual will not be an effective approach for renewing the Church in the new millennium.

The degree to which the Renewal will be a gift to the Church in this new millennium will be determined within the framework of the Holy Father's simple yet far-reaching challenge to "put out into the deep" as presented to us in *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001). The extent to which the Renewal puts out into the deep, is the extent to which it will be a viable force influencing the Church in the new millennium. In essence, if we wish to take up our evangelizing mission in the new millennium, we will be required to renew the Renewal. This renewal journey will demand from us a spirit of honesty, open-mindedness, willingness to change, courage, and risk-taking. Above all, it will require us to surrender to the promptings of the Holy Spirit every step of the way.

As we begin to take up the challenge to renew the Renewal, we might first consider eight myths about the Catholic Charismatic Renewal that have the power to impede our efforts. Without reading any further, you might already be thinking, "Ah hah, finally the truth will be told about Catholic Charismatics so that those in the mainstream Church will be able to understand us better and appreciate our gifts."

Unfortunately, those who were hoping for such an awakening will be disappointed. This is because the eight myths I wish to dispel, are not those held by Catholics about Charismatics, but rather those held by Charismatics about themselves—that is to say, the myths that we in the Renewal hold about the Renewal, our prayer groups, our individual ministries, and ourselves, as Catholic Charismatics.

Until we dispel these myths, we may not experience great success in putting out into the deep waters of the mainstream Church. In fact, if we hold onto these myths, we will most likely find ourselves anchored in shallow waters very close to the shoreline. There is a price to pay if we remain anchored in these shallow waters. The worst possible price is that we would be tossed about by the winds and waves pushing us farther away from the mainstream Church and closer to our isolated prayer groups and Renewal Movement. Should this happen, we are likely to find prayer group attendance diminishing further. Those who do remain faithful to the Renewal will continue to show up. However, it is likely they will also continue to grow more frustrated. It is also possible that the few remaining prayer groups and the Renewal will no longer have sufficient energy or resources to sustain the Renewal on a local or national level.

If we dare to consider these myths and work to dispel them, we will surely experience challenges and difficulties. Additionally, if we open our minds and hearts, and say, “Yes” to the Holy Spirit’s endless ways of bringing Christ to the world and the world to Christ, we will see great signs and wonders, and we will be witnesses to a firestorm in the Catholic Church.

Not all eight myths will be applicable to every person in the Renewal, every prayer group, or every diocesan Renewal movement across the country. However, as you read each one of the following myths, prayerfully consider its relevance and implications for your present situation. Prayerfully consider if any of these myths speak to you, your prayer group, or the Renewal?

### **1. The Spirituality Of “Living In The Spirit” Is Simply One Way To Grow In Holiness.**

The first myth to dispel is perhaps the most important. When we in the Renewal communicate to others that living in the Spirit is simply one way to grow in holiness, we betray both the mission and the work of the Holy Spirit. We need only to revisit the Gospel of John, Chapters 14-17, and the Pentecost story in the Acts of the Apostles to recognize that living in, through, and with the power of the Holy Spirit is the only way to grow in holiness. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) states that life in the Spirit fulfills the very vocation of man (cf. Gen 1:2, 2:7; #1699). It declares that the Holy Spirit animates all creation (#703), awakens our faith (cf. Jn 17:3; #684), enables us to communicate with Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12:3; cf. 2 Gal 4:6; #683), grants gifts to all (#2003), is the master and source of prayer (cf. Rom 8:26; #741; #2652), restores us to Divine likeness (#734), reveals God and the Trinity to us (#244; #684; #687), and is the source of all holiness (#740).

Through these statements, the Church reminds us that life in the Spirit is not simply one way to grow in holiness. It is the only way! The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father, is the One who helps us find our way to the Father and life in the Spirit is the only means we have to come to know Jesus, our Bridge to the Father—the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We know from Jesus Himself that no one comes to the Father except through Him (cf. Jn 14:6).

At the International Leaders conference in Rome, in 1987 John Paul reminded Catholic Charismatics that the Renewal is a new expression of an old reality. He told them that the Church is always capable of rejuvenation because at no moment has it ever withdrawn from its history of the Spirit. Life in the Spirit began on Pentecost, the day the Church was born, and life in the Spirit continues up to this very day. Its purpose is to form righteous and holy men and women (CCC, #734, #1699). When the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, first in Baptism, and then Confirmation, Reconciliation, Eucharist, the other Sacraments, the Word, and at numerous times throughout our daily lives, so too comes special graces in the form of spiritual gifts that help us love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. The reality is that life in the Spirit is the only weapon we have to combat the world, the flesh, and the devil and live as Christ taught us to live. Living in His Spirit is the one and only hope and means we have for growing in holiness. To this end, the Church continually takes up her mission, her obligation, and her authority to bring the faithful into a deeper awareness of the power of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit that make us holy and enable us to build up the Body of Christ (CCC #698).

Since we, in the Renewal are no less Church when we are at a Renewal event or at Sunday Mass, we are given no less a mission than the one given at Pentecost. Thus, at all times, we are required to give witness to and proclaim God's salvation through the power of the Holy Spirit, just as the men and women did at the first Pentecost, in the early days of the Church, and throughout all of history since the year of our Lord. Additionally, since God desires that all be saved, and since salvation is found in Jesus Christ, the missionary mandate of the Church demands that we go out and respond to every person's longing to know God (CCC #851).

How is this missionary mandate to be acted upon in our lives? What does this mandate mean for each of us individually? What is the implication of this mandate for our Church today? Our diocese? Our parish? It means we must have serious and extended conversations with our pastoral leaders and ministers, reminding them of what Jesus Himself said to His disciples about their mission and about the work of the Holy Spirit. It means we must retell, compare, and contrast the stories of the disciples' lives before and after Pentecost. It means we must let our pastors and pastoral ministers know that the Holy Father (2001), "earnestly exhorts the pastors of the particular churches, with the help of all sectors of God's people, [to] confidently to plan the stages of the journey ahead [in the new millennium]" (p. 40). It means that each local Church must set forth specific detailed plans that include goals, methods, formations, and enrichments that enable the people to know God and draw closer to Him (John Paul II, 2001).

For us in the Renewal, it means we must tell our stories to our pastors and pastoral leaders, witnessing both before and after we became aware of the power of the Holy Spirit to guide and direct our lives. We must witness to them about our lives before and after we began living in the Spirit and ministering through the gifts of the Holy Spirit (CCC #688, 767, 798-801, 951, 1508 ).

We Charismatic Catholics are the perfect ones to mentor and coach our brothers and sisters in the mainstream Church because we have years of experience and tremendous zeal for living in the Spirit. Additionally, we Catholic Charismatics may be the only ones who could talk about and give witness to both living in the Spirit and using the charisms of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, we must believe in our hearts and proclaim with our lips, "If not us, then who will put out into the deep to confess life in the Spirit?" (CCC #688, 767, 798-801, 951, 1508)

If we choose to dispel the myth that living in the Spirit is only one way to grow in holiness, we will be required to change when, where, how, why, and to whom we minister. It will no longer be a matter of "Why not let people find God in their own way." Rather, it will be a matter of "Let us encourage people find God in their own way with the knowledge that they can call upon His Holy Spirit and use the gifts of His Spirit to draw closer to Him each day of their lives."

This perspective requires those who live in the Spirit to minister in the Spirit, in the mainstream Church. This perspective also demands that we, who live in the Spirit, make ourselves available to our parishes to witness, coach, mentor, and teach others to do the same.

Here is what might happen if we choose to dispel this first myth. The Holy Spirit may prompt us to gently and humbly ask people if we can pray with them for an outpouring of His Spirit at the start of a pastoral council meeting or with the celebrant and all ministers just prior to start of Mass. The Spirit might prompt us to gently and humbly offer to pray with the people in our parish who are sick, anxious, or facing difficult situations in their lives. The Spirit might prompt us to gently and humbly request a time for "listening to God" at the start of every parish meeting. We might even be prompted to teach Eucharistic ministers how to pray with the homebound or how to develop and coordinate a personal prayer ministry at the end of Sunday Mass. When practices such as these become the norm in everyday parish life, Catholics will experience how impossible it is to grow holy without the power and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They will also discover that any time is a good time to call upon the Holy Spirit—our Comforter, and our Counselor. They will realize that in every situation and in every place, God is waiting to anoint His people with His Spirit.

Life in the Spirit, that is to say, living in the Spirit, is indeed the only path to holiness. The moment we fully embrace Christ as our Lord and Savior and live in His Spirit, we are obligated to witness and share this truth with others, for it is the mission of the Holy Spirit, in each of us and in the Church, to bring Christ to the world and the world to Christ. When this happens, there will be a firestorm in the Catholic Church, drawing others to come to the Father through union with Christ and through the power of His Holy Spirit.

## **2. The Charisms Of The Holy Spirit Are Not For Everyone.**

The second myth that needs to be dispelled is the idea that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not for everyone. If we truly believe this, we are saying in effect, that the Holy Spirit is not for everyone. Why?—because the Holy Spirit cannot be separated from the gifts He brings to the faithful. When He comes, He brings gifts. These gifts serve as the manifestation of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12:7). His gifts are a true sign of His Spirit at work in us, leading us to the Truth, drawing us closer to God, and making us holy.

What specifically are the gifts that the Spirit of God brings to us when He comes? St. Paul tells us that when Jesus ascended on high, the Spirit gave gifts to all, “And he gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers” (Eph 4:11). St. Paul speaks about these gifts as special ministries within the Church, saying, “Some people God has designated in the church to be first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers; then, mighty deeds; then gifts of healing, assistants, administration, and varieties of tongues” (1 Cor 12:28). Paul also speaks of other gifts of the Holy Spirit, when he says,

To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another varieties of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes. (1 Cor 12:2-11)

It would be impossible to know Christ were it not for His Spirit gifts of faith, hope, and love. It would be impossible to know Christ without His gifts of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, piety, counsel, fortitude, and awe. It would be impossible to know Christ without having the ability to hear God speak to us, drawing us to Him that we might contemplate His great love and mercy, His servitude to the Father, His gift of our salvation.

Since the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good (cf. 1 Cor 12:7), it is not limited only to ordained or special ministers within the Church. Rather St. Paul tells us, every person has a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Yet, so many Catholics do not know this. They do not know that God’s Spirit is manifested in them through His gifts. Nor do they know that these gifts enable them to come to know Christ more intimately, follow Him more steadily, and proclaim Him more confidently to the world.

As we move into the new millennium and look for ways to respond to the call of John Paul II to put out into the deep, we soon realize that we must initiate conversations with our pastors and pastoral leaders about the gift and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is this Spirit and the gifts He gives, that enable us to grow holy and build up the Church. We must talk with our pastors and pastoral leaders about initiatives that could heighten people’s awareness of the gift and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We must talk them about Isaiah gifts of the Holy Spirit, wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord(CCC# 1831), and the charisms of the Holy Spirit spoken of in the Apostolic Letters and by the early Church Fathers. These include but are not limited to tongues, prophecy, words of knowledge, preaching, teaching, healing, miracles, spontaneous prayer, exhortation, worship, self-control, mercy, patience in persecution, fasting and mortification, chosen poverty, chastity, exorcism,

turning away from wealth and honor, administration, hospitality, encouragement, and above all, love (CCC #688, 767, 798-801, 951, 1508; Cyril, 347).

We would be remiss to talk about one set of gifts—the Isaiah gifts, and exclude the other—the charisms of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul clearly tells us that these charisms are given to each person, for personal holiness and to build up the Church (cf. 1 Cor 12:4-11). We, who have been so long in the Renewal, know the power of these gifts to sanctify each of us individually and the whole Church. We operate in these gifts within the Renewal to build up the Church. We use these gifts to draw closer to God, overcome sinful habits, and hear God’s voice for our lives. We have experienced God’s continual anointing in our work of teaching, preaching, healing, and prophesying, as well as in our work of coaching, mentoring, and encouraging prayer group members to learn about and use the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The charisms of the Spirit are critical to the life of the whole Church.

Yet some of us in the Renewal have been holding them to ourselves. We reserve their use for our personal lives, prayer group, and Renewal events. We minister regularly using these gifts in our own inner circles of charismatic friends, within our prayer groups, and the Renewal. Yet, we have not taken these gifts into the mainstream Church. St. Paul cautioned the Church at Corinth about this very thing, when he told the people to strive more to build up the Body of Christ with the gifts rather than striving to acquire the gifts for their own personal use. In fact, he specifically told them to use the gifts to “excel” in building up the Church when he said, “since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church” (RVS 1 Cor 14:12). It is time for all of us in the Renewal to excel in building up the Body of Christ. To do this “excellent” work, we must leave our comfort zones and go, under the anointing and power of the Holy Spirit into the mainstream Church to minister.

It is indeed time to take the charisms of the Holy Spirit out of our “renewal closets” and confess them to the mainstream Church. The operative word here is “confess” because until now these charisms have been a part of our secret lives in the Spirit. It is time to bring them into the light so that those in the mainstream Church can learn about them, see us operating in them, come to understand their value to the Church, and even embrace them for their own spiritual journeys and ministries in the Church. We must model them, teach about them, and help our brothers and sisters in our parishes to discern the charisms for their own lives. Once discerned, we must help form our brothers and sisters in their gifts, encouraging and coaching them to use their gifts in the Church and in their everyday lives.

Some among us may be tempted to say, “We cannot take these gifts out of the closet and teach about them or encourage them to be used in the mainstream Church, for if we do we will surely offend people.” Once again, we may need to rethink our position. How is it possible to offend people by offering them a deeper awareness of the Holy Spirit at work in their lives? How is it possible to offend people by offering them spiritual gifts that nurture their growth in holiness and build up the Body of Christ? It seems we sometimes have a one-sided approach to offending people, especially since there is often very little concern about offending people with Bingo or beer at church festivals. A “Pentecost” perspective should bring us comfort in knowing that we are in God’s plan for salvation—a plan that demands the continual renewal of His Church through the power of the Holy Spirit—the same Spirit that came at Pentecost and gave gifts to men and women.

We simply know too much about the Holy Spirit, His work, His charisms, and His power, to be silent any longer. We must be direct and very informative when it comes to telling Catholics what their Baptism really means—that they can have a personal relationship with Jesus, live in Him, and grow holy through the power of His Spirit. In an encouraging way, St. Paul reminded Timothy to “. . . stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim 1:6-7). Paul went so far as to warn the Corinthians not to neglect the gift they had received since it was given to them by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid hands on them (cf. 1 Tim 4:14).

Perhaps we ought to receive Paul’s encouragement and his admonition as if he were delivering his speeches to us directly. We do need to be reminded not to neglect the gifts and charisms of the Spirit

for with them we too were given courage and fearlessness to proclaim Christ Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Holy Spirit and His gifts enable each one of us, and thus the entire Church, to become whole and holy. We know it is impossible to come to know Christ without calling upon His Spirit to guide and teach us, and we know it is impossible to grow in holiness without using the gifts of the Holy Spirit to sanctify and transform us.

Now is the perfect time to bring the gifts we have held to ourselves into the mainstream Church. This is not an option for us. It is a mandate that we go. If we do not go and introduce the mainstream Church to life in the Spirit and to the charisms of the Holy Spirit, it will be said of us that we stifled the movement of the Holy Spirit, for we knew of the power of the Holy Spirit to transform lives yet we did not speak out. Are we truly disciples of Jesus? If we are, we must go, and we must build up His Church. If we are not, we will find a reason or perhaps even an excuse not to go.

Over the years, we have heard Catholics and other Christians alike declare that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were meant only for the early Church in order to give birth to the Church. There are scriptural reasons why we know this is simply not true. First, Paul never puts an exact time limit on how long these gifts will be with us. In fact, he does just the opposite, when he says the gifts of the Spirit will be with each of us and with the Church, until we become one in faith and in knowledge of the Son of God (cf. Eph 4:13). We are not yet one in faith nor do we all have knowledge of the Son of God. Therefore, we must conclude that the gifts of the Spirit are indeed, still with us today. This single passage from Ephesians provides the Renewal the strongest rationale yet, for why the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the charisms of the Holy Spirit are so needed and so relevant for the Church today. We must confess with certainty that these gifts will be with us until everyone on the face of the earth knows Jesus, the Christ, and until all are one in Him.

Second, St. Paul helps us understand why God grants us these gifts. He tells us they were given to us as a remedy for our human weakness and immaturity—so that we would no longer be as children, tossed to and fro and swept away by every wind of doctrine and by the cleverness, craftiness, and deceit of the world (cf. Eph 4:8-15). We must ask ourselves this question, “Do we need a remedy for our human weakness and immaturity?” If the answer is “no” then we need not continue reading this book for it will not be helpful to the person who sees himself or herself sufficiently strong and mature in living life. If however the answer is “yes” then we must not despise these gifts but rather seek after them in order to draw closer to the One who gives them. The Church refers to the charisms as a wonderfully rich grace that enables God’s people to grow in holiness (CCC #800). We are weak and immature in Christ and we need a remedy. “Send us your Spirit, O God and give us your gifts that we most need to grow closer to you.”

Third, St. Paul tells us we have been given these gifts so that we, the saints, might be equipped for the work of ministry—for building up the Body of Christ (cf. Eph 4:12). The Church sees the charisms as a rich grace that dispenses new energy to God’s people equipping them for the task of evangelization (John Paul II, 1986, CCC #800). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) gives us further encouragement to do so when she says, “Whether extraordinary or simple and humble, charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building” (#799). Again, in section #951 we read that within the communion of the Church, the Holy Spirit distributes “special graces among the faithful of every rank” for the building up of the Church.

St. Paul enhances our understanding of the charisms of the Holy Spirit when he says,

For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them: if prophecy, in proportion to the faith; if ministry, in ministering; if one is a teacher, in teaching; if one exhorts, in exhortation; if one contributes, in generosity; if one is over others, with diligence; if one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor. Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in

spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality. (Rom 12:4-14)

In this passage, Paul reminds us that each one of us has gifts but that these gifts are all different. He emphasizes that we need each other's gifts in our lives and in our communities. He also teaches us how these gifts can serve as a remedy for our weakness and immaturity when he tells us to use the gifts we were given for the purpose they were given. The one who has received the gift of prophecy should use it in proportion to his faith. In other words, the gift of prophecy should be used to build up the faith of the people to the degree to which the prophet has enough faith to hear the word spoken and declare it to the assembly. If the prophet is timid with the gift, the body will not be as fully graced as God intended (1 Peter 4: 7-11; 1 Cor 14:1-9; 1 Rom 12:6-9).

The same is true for the gift of ministry. Paul says this gift should be used for service. If however, the minister holds back in acts that would truly serve the Body of Christ, the ministry gift will have less of a graced-filled effect on the Body. The teacher should teach under the anointing of the Holy Spirit or otherwise deprive his or her students of an anointed teaching. The one who has the gift of exhortation should exhort the people or else deprive the people of God's encouragement. The person gifted with the ability to give alms, should do so generously, not holding anything back. The one who rules should do so with care, and the person who performs works of mercy should do so cheerfully. The gift of love must be expressed with sincerity; anticipation of others needs is the expression of mutual love, and zeal is to be found in the gift of perseverance; and fervor is a sign of true service to the Lord (cf. 1 Pt 4: 9-11).

Through Scripture and the *Catechism*, we are assured that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are very relevant for the Church of the third millennium. Once we know why the charisms of the Holy Spirit are meant for the Church today, we will have the confidence we need to share what we know with others. With this knowledge, we must go forth in confidence to minister the Holy Spirit and His gifts in the mainstream of the Church. It is not ours to decide who can know about the gifts and who can receive these gifts. It is ours to witness, share, confess, and proclaim and let God decide how He wills to distribute the gifts (cf. Heb 2:3). In this regard, we are assured of the Church's support for living in the Spirit and operating in the charisms of the Holy Spirit. This is because the Church herself counsels all to accept the charisms with gratitude (CCC#800).

These charisms of the Holy Spirit are freely given to us by God and as such we must use them both humbly and responsibly for our own holiness, and even more so, to build up the Church. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), we are cautioned that there are two provisions in order for grace to flow when we operate in the charisms of the Holy Spirit. First, the charisms must be genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit—charisms that are described in Scripture and have been used in ministry since the time of the disciples. Second, charisms must be used under the authentic promptings of the Holy Spirit—promptings that lead us to place ourselves and our gifts under the authority of our pastors and pastoral leaders in the mainstream Church and in the Renewal. In this way, we will find ourselves operating in the gifts of the Holy Spirit in humility and in love for the Church (# 800). As we operate in the charisms under these two conditions, God will pour out an abundance of His grace in us and in those to whom we minister.

Whenever we minister whether in the Renewal or in the mainstream Church, it is critical that our gifts for ministry first be discerned. Although we in the Renewal are familiar with the practice of discerning gifts for ministry and being formed in ministry gifts, such practices are rather uncommon in the mainstream Church. For this reason, we may be the perfect ones to approach our pastors, offering to support a "discernment" process for the parish in order to not only discern peoples' gifts but to also help form them in their gifts—gifts of teaching, preaching, prophecy, healing, hospitality, administration, and leadership to name a few.

Since it has not been a common practice in the mainstream Church to discern peoples' gifts for ministry through a formal discernment process, pastoral leaders often do not know how gifted their people are.

Most people do not know their own giftedness and those who do know, are frequently not acknowledged or used in Church ministries such as teaching, preaching, praying with others, and exhortation. Most gifted people in a parish remain both unknown and unutilized.

We know this is true because we often hear about gifted Catholics who have left the Church and gone to other Churches to minister using gifts we never knew they had. Sometimes, we hear from ex-Catholics that they are involved in dynamic ministries in their new Churches such as teaching, preaching, leading retreats and workshops, organizing days of prayer and renewal, and so on. They tell us with enthusiasm in their voices that their new Church invited them to learn about the power of the Holy Spirit and their ministry gifts. As soon as their gifts were discerned they were invited to minister in their new Christian communities. What would our parishes be like if we discerned the gifts of our parishioners and then invited them to use their gifts in a variety of ministries—to teach, preach, heal, administer, exhort, greet, and pray with others? Who would dare to propose such an initiative?

We in the Renewal must be the ones to propose such initiatives. For this to happen, prayer groups must move out into the mainstream Church, confessing their life in the Spirit, proposing initiative to help parishes discern the gifts of the people. We must offer to pray with people, witnessing God's love and mercy, we must propose formation workshops to help form people in ministries of service, teaching, preaching, and so on. In essence, we must go wherever the Lord tells us to go and do whatever He tells us to do to help discern, exhort, emphasize, and form the gifts of the people in our parishes.

From the time of the first Pentecost, the mission of the Holy Spirit has not changed. It is the same mission Jesus defined for us before He ascended to the Father. The mission is to go to all nations and proclaim the Kingdom of God. Each one of us must therefore re-define ourselves as missionaries, commissioned by Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit to share what we know about living in the Spirit with all those we meet. We must go, using whatever means possible to share Christ, proclaim the Father's Kingdom, and heal, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

If we dare to dispel the myth that says the charisms of the Holy Spirit are not for everyone, we will be forced to move out into the mainstream Church to carry on the Pentecost mission of evangelization. However, we will not be baptizing Catholics, as the apostles often did, for Catholics are already baptized. Rather, we will be reminding Catholics to stir into flame the gift that was given to them at their Baptism and Confirmation (cf. 2 Tim 1:6). Paul reminded Timothy that God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather one that makes us strong, loving, and wise (cf. 2 Tim 1:6-7). Paul wrote this letter to Timothy after he had encouraged and, at the same time, reprimanded Timothy saying, "Do not neglect the gift you have, which was conferred on you through the prophetic word with the imposition of hands of the presbyterate. Be diligent in these matters, be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to everyone" (1 Tim 4:14).

If we agree to dispel this second myth, we will be required to remind Catholics that when they were baptized and confirmed they received the Holy Spirit and His gifts to grow in holiness and to build up the Church. We will be required to encourage Catholics to pray daily for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We will be required to tell Catholics that the Holy Spirit anoints them with His presence and His gifts each time they receive Eucharist; go to Reconciliation; pray the Mass, the Rosary, and the Liturgy of the Hours; or come before the Blessed Sacrament in adoration. Perhaps most important of all, we will be required to encourage Catholics to pray for and discern the gifts and charisms given to them by the Holy Spirit in order that they might use their charisms under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, to build up the Body of Christ—bringing souls to Christ and bringing Christ to others.

Each of us has a mission and a ministry to grow holy and to build up the Body of Christ, that is to say, the members of our family and those of our parishes. When we first learn about the Holy Spirit and the charisms, we may not realize immediately that they are meant for the whole Church. However, soon enough we come to this realization and, when we do, we must also realize that we have a part to play in letting those we meet in the Church know what we have learned. We are no longer able to stand before God claiming ignorance about our role and our responsibility in evangelizing—namely bringing Christ

and life in His Spirit to the world. The moment we all realize the fullness of our apostolate, there will indeed be a firestorm in the Church!

### **3. If We Talk, They Will Listen.**

The third myth to dispel is the belief that if we talk, they (faithful Catholics in our parishes) will listen. Haven't we all experienced times when we try to evangelize fellow Catholics by telling them about the Holy Spirit when suddenly their eyes begin to wander and they begin to fidget? Have you ever talked with someone in your parish about the gifts of the Holy Spirit when, in the middle of a sentence, the person looks at his or her watch and suddenly remembers he or she had something else to do or somewhere else to be? Perhaps you have noticed, that when you start to tell some folks about your personal relationship with Jesus or your life in the Spirit, their postures seem to say, "That's nice" or "I am not really interested in what you are telling me." Then there are those times when fellow parishioners see us coming and they simply turn and walk in the other direction. As if to add insult to injury, some parishioners have even labeled us "craze-o-matics."

It is obvious that these experiences are not very hopeful signs or encouragements that would make us want to continue evangelizing Catholics in the mainstream Church. Still, we do it, one-on-one, hoping that something we say will entice people to come to our prayer group, want to know more about the Holy Spirit, or ask us about the charisms and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In the early years of the Renewal, talking seemed to be a fruitful way to evangelize the Catholics we met, either in church or at church events. In the early years of the Renewal, as we spread the Good News about Jesus and the Holy Spirit by word of mouth, our prayer groups expanded at a rapid pace. We can surely attribute some of this rapid expansion to our word-of-mouth ministry. However, we must also remember it was all God's work using us as His instruments. It was His plan—not ours that brought them into life in the Spirit. We enjoyed this rate of growth for many years until a downward trend began in some areas of the country.

At first glance, we may be tempted to say we are at fault for this decline. Yet, we are doing what we have always done. We talk to just as many people as we did years ago but fewer seem to respond to what we say. What makes the outcome so different today? We can only speculate. Perhaps it is that many more people have heard about the Charismatic Renewal and they associate what we are saying with a group or a movement rather than with a way of living and being. Perhaps people have heard about Charismatics and some of what they have heard frightens them. It is possible that some people get the feeling that we are more of a "private club" than a ministry open to every Catholic. Maybe, because we are so excited about the Lord, we come across as know-it-alls or perhaps we even appear to be a bit haughty about our life in the Spirit. Perhaps too many Catholics do not realize that the Church welcomes and supports the Charismatic Renewal Movement throughout the world.

Whatever the reasons, when we try to share one-on-one about life in the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit, many Catholics simply do not respond. Is it possible then, that God is asking us to evangelize our brothers and sisters in a different way? What if instead of immediately sharing about the Holy Spirit, we simply said, "How would you like to go for coffee so we can get to know each other a little better? May I pray with you? May I share a good book with you? Or would you like to read Scripture together?" Imagine what would happen if we began to evangelize by simply being in closer relationship with the people in our parishes. As we grew to know our fellow parishioners, they would begin to ask us about our life in Christ and the power and gifts of His Holy Spirit. Imagine what would happen if our lives were so filled with God's love that others simply wanted to get to know us so that they could learn more about God, His love and mercy and life in His Spirit. If this were to happen, our lives would be the living Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Since our talking is not bearing as much fruit as it once did, it may be the right time to act and love in new ways that build up the Body of Christ—our parish communities. If we dare to take up this challenge,

we might then be able to say by experience, “When we act in love they listen and become curious about our life in the Spirit.”

The moment we agree to dispel this third myth, there will be consequences for us. We will be forced to find new ways to evangelize Catholics in our parishes using our actions more and our words less. We will have to learn how to replace talking with listening and loving. This may mean that we will have fewer opportunities to promote the gifts of the Holy Spirit with our words and more opportunities to offer people God’s love and mercy through listening and loving acts of kindness. This may also mean we will have more opportunities to use the gifts of the Holy Spirit as we listen to others and as we love them unconditionally. Thus, we will bring the fire of the Holy Spirit with us into our parishes, and through our obedience, God will set a fire ablaze in His Church.

#### **4. If We Invite Them, They Will Come.**

The fourth myth to dispel is the notion that if we invite them, they (faithful Catholics in our parishes) will come. Whenever we do find an approachable Catholic, who is willing to listen to our witness and exchange faith stories with us, the first thing we Charismatics tend to do, is invite the person to come to our prayer group or the very next Life in the Spirit Seminar.

Similarly, the moment we realize someone in our parish is searching for a deeper relationship with the Lord, we invite them to come to prayer group with us, attend a Charismatic conference, or make a Life in the Spirit Seminar. We become excited over the prospect of a person who has just experienced Christ Renews His Parish. We are certain this person is ready for more—namely Baptism in the Holy Spirit and the Charismatic Renewal Movement.

Over the years, prayer group meetings, conferences, and seminars on the Holy Spirit have indeed generated many blessings, helped people learn about the Holy Spirit, and resulted in many Catholics being baptized in the Holy Spirit. However, considering all the invitations we have given out these past few years, relatively few members of our parishes seem to be responding. The reasons may be varied—schedule conflicts, childcare issues, irregular work schedules, or finances. Some people may not be comfortable in large group settings. Others may not be able to get away for an entire weekend retreat. Others simply have overcommitted lives.

Whatever the reasons, the fact remains that each year fewer Catholics are responding to our invitations to come with us to Renewal events. With this trend, it seems only natural that we should wonder if ten years from now, there will even be enough people to sustain the Renewal Movement as a vibrant and enduring stream of grace in the Church.

As we ponder the outcome of decreased participation in the Renewal Movement, we are faced with questions that seem to demand answers. “Must a person attend a prayer group or Charismatic event in order to be introduced to life in the Spirit? Do Catholics who have received the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation need to attend a Charismatic event in order to receive a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit? Is it necessary to be at a Charismatic event in order to grow in the Spirit, learn how to live in the Spirit, receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, or be formed in the gifts of the Holy Spirit?”

If we answer “no” to even one of these questions, we must begin to think differently about the mission and the role of the Charismatic Renewal Movement in the Catholic Church. If we say “no” we must also begin to respond differently when we encounter approachable parishioners who are unaware of the power and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Instead of inviting them to Renewal activities as soon as we meet such Catholics, we might first learn more about them, discovering what they know about God and finding out what they want to know about Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. As we talk with them, we must be discerning and responsive to what they say they need in order to develop a personal and/or deeper relationship with the Lord.

Do the approachable Catholics we meet in the mainstream Church want to learn more about the Church? If they do, we should offer to find answers with them in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994). Do they want to know more about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? If so, we can introduce them to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as well as the Acts and Letters. If we know how to access Church documents such as encyclicals and apostolic letters (See [www.vatican.com](http://www.vatican.com)) or the writings of the saints and doctors of the Church, we will be able to find answers to their questions. We can do this with them, not for them, and not expecting them to do it alone. In other words, we can learn and grow together with them as companions on the journey.

If they want to know more about Jesus, His work of salvation, or His promise of an advocate, we can read and discuss the Gospels with them. If they want to know about prayer, we can introduce them to various forms of prayer such as vocal, meditative, contemplative, and prayer with another. If they want to know more about living in grace, the Sacraments, and life in the Spirit, we can reference the *Catechism* (1994) and share what we learn. Most of all, we can witness the work of the Holy Spirit in our own lives.

Of course, all of this implies that we ourselves are continually studying and growing in our faith—Scripture, tradition, and the teachings of the Church, and in holiness. This also implies that we are able to refer people to resource persons, books, videos, and audiotapes as needed. Whatever, whenever, and however we teach and witness, if we ourselves do so under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, calling upon the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we can be sure that we and those we evangelize will experience God's grace and healing.

As we move into the deep—the mainstream Church, we must remain focused on coming to know the people in our parish who approach us in friendship and with enthusiasm for Christ. We must strive to understand what they want and need from us. We must want to know, understand, and love them more than we want them to know, understand, and love us. For this to happen, we must encourage them to talk about their faith experiences first, before trying to tell them about our faith experiences. We must also understand what they are saying without pushing our own agendas. In everything we do, we must offer them our unconditional love.

In our intentional efforts to come to know, understand, and love the people in our parish who approach us, we will begin to establish bonds of trust. They will experience our authentic caring. As this happens, we will both become more comfortable talking about God, the Holy Spirit, and the gifts of the Spirit; sharing our faith; and praying with each other. We will know the right time to share our faith journey with them—our life in the Spirit and the charisms of the Holy Spirit. We will grow together in Christ and in our life in the Spirit. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we will know how to nurture and support each other's faith, and we will find the Spirit leading both them and us into the deep, prompting us to go, proclaim the Kingdom, and heal others in our parish.

The moment we agree to dispel this fourth myth, consequences arise for us. Yes, we will continue to invite people to prayer group and Renewal events. However, when they do not respond to our invitations, we will have plan "B" ready to go. We will ask ourselves, "How can I get to know this person better? When can I spend time with this person? What spiritual reading books can we read together? What Scripture passages can we share (Jn 14-17 and Acts 1)? Or, what does this person want to know about Jesus, the power Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, the Church, or the saints?"

There is indeed a gradual, but steady, decline in prayer group attendance in many parts of the country. Of those we invite to our Renewal activities, very few come. Nevertheless, great hope lies before us in this new millennium. The hope is this—the more we give others understanding and love, the more they will wonder about us, ask questions, and be curious about our life in the Spirit and the Charismatic Renewal. In this new millennium, we ought to dispel the myth that "If we invite them they come." Instead, we might say, "If we invite them and they do not come we always have Plan B. We will go to them and we will listen, understand, and learn about them first and then tell them about us." The more

they learn about us, the more they will learn about Jesus and the Holy Spirit at work in us and together we will set a firestorm ablaze in the Catholic Church.

## **5. Prayer Groups Evangelize The Church.**

The fifth myth that ought to be dispelled is the notion that prayer groups evangelize the mainstream Church. For some time now, we have held onto the belief that prayer groups evangelize the mainstream Church. In reality, this is not what happens. In fact, it is probably more accurate to say that prayer groups evangelize themselves—supporting and encouraging their own members to grow in Christ through weekly teachings at prayer meetings, and through prayer group or Renewal sponsored retreats, conferences, and days of renewal.

Prayer groups typically do not consider it their mission or ministry to plan, design, and offer teachings or spiritual growth experiences to their parishes. Nor do they intentionally offer formation workshops for the expressed purpose of forming parish members in the gifts of leadership, prophecy, healing, evangelization, teaching, preaching, exhorting, prayer, praise and worship, or discernment. As we think about this fact, most of us might be tempted to defend ourselves by saying that our parishes never invite us to present spiritual growth experiences, give teachings, or offer days of formation. While this may be true, most of us know that our parishes bring people in from other parishes and other cities to present the very teachings and formation workshops that we ourselves could do.

Considering the breadth and depth of experiences we have had in retreat and conference work, workshops, and days of renewal it seems we should be offering our ministry gifts to our parishes. John Paul II (2001) asked us to translate the Gospel of Jesus Christ into “pastoral initiatives adapted to the circumstances of each community” using “detailed pastoral plans” with “goals, methods, formation, and enrichment of the people involved” (p. 40). We have the mandate. We have the reason, We have the authority of our Holy Father. Therefore, there is no reason why we should not be developing proposals to present teachings, preach missions, and conduct formation workshops in our home parishes.

In order to dispel this fifth myth, prayer groups will have to take up the challenge to put out into the deep—the mainstream Church. However, before they go, they must call upon the Holy Spirit to anoint them with courage and creativity. Prayer group members must come together, pray, and talk about their charisms, natural talents, and skills. They must discern their call to put out into the deep. They must conduct a self-assessment to determine how well they have done thus far, in putting out into the deep. They must assess each person’s natural talents, skills, and spiritual gifts, keep formal records, and develop a listing of those who are willing to put out into the deep (See the Chapter titled, “The Renewal and Prayer Groups As Training and Formation Centers”).

Once this discernment is complete, prayer groups will be prepared to plan and design new initiatives that have the potential to promote spiritual growth and a fuller awareness of what it means to live in the Spirit. These plans will then need to be presented to pastors and pastoral teams for their consideration and approval.

When ministering in the mainstream Church we must approach our pastors and pastoral teams humbly—seeking to serve them in whatever ways they desire, rather than have our needs served by them. Some prayer group members may even need to seek the forgiveness of their pastors and parish priests for having come on too strong or for having acted in a self-righteous manner. Whether it was conscious or unconscious on our part, we must repent of any attitudes or dispositions we may have had that said to our pastors, “You need what I have.”

It is also very important that prayer groups approach their pastoral leaders as the Prayer Group, not individuals. Ministry in the mainstream Church must remain a team effort in which members meet, pray, discern, and support one another at the same time they are ministering in the mainstream Church.

Another important point to remember when using the charisms of the Holy Spirit in the mainstream Church, is that we must be docile, not flamboyant, subtle not obvious, and humble not proud. Above all, we must be generous, not self-fish in praying for and promoting the charisms in our brothers and sisters for indeed.

When prayer group members minister in the mainstream Church, they must be visible role models of what it means to live in the Spirit and operate in the charisms of the Holy Spirit. They must model preaching, teaching, prayer, spontaneous praise, exhortation, healing, and wisdom. As they model, they will have opportunities to offer simple explanations for the charisms and for life in the Spirit. This will spark people's curiosity even further and start them asking questions. Such questioning is the beginning of conversion and it oftentimes opens people up to desire the charisms, prayer for them, and receive them.

What would happen if prayer groups were to propose parish retreats, workshops, or days of renewal for teens, parents; Confirmation or First Holy Communion candidates and their families, guardians, and sponsors; bereavement groups; divorced or separated Catholics; or members of Altar-Rosary? Imagine if the prayer group sponsored a Lenten or Advent activity such as an evening of Taize prayer, or a mission on a spiritual growth topic such as Christian parenting, recently canonized saints, the mystics, or how to get more out of prayer.

Further imagine what would happen if, while preaching and teaching, prayer group members operated in the charisms of the Holy Spirit, giving brief explanations—using the words of Jesus about the Advocate in John's Gospel chapter 14 verse 26. If these things were to happen, prayer groups could truly say they were evangelizing the Church.

If we agree to dispel this fifth myth in the new millennium, we will actually be agreeing to transform prayer groups into evangelizing ministries in the mainstream of the Church. This carries with it significant consequences for prayer groups and their members. Prayer group leaders will be required to assess their vision and mission statements in relation to *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001). Prayer groups will be required to plan and design initiatives that enable them to propose ministry activities that support the spiritual needs of their parishioners. Prayer groups will be required to coach and mentor their prayer group members, raising them up, discerning their gifts, forming them in their charisms, and exhorting them to go, proclaim, and heal in the mainstream Church. All will be required to call upon and use the Isaiah gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and awe as well as call upon and use with sensitivity and discernment, the charisms of the Holy Spirit—teaching, preaching, healing, tongues, prophecy, interpretation of tongues, and word of knowledge. Finally, all will be required to give credit to the Holy Spirit for the gifts they use in ministry. This, in turn, will encourage others to ask for and receive these same gifts so that they too might build up the Body of Christ.

Prayer groups and the Renewal in general have indeed succeeded in evangelizing Charismatic Catholics who participate in Charismatic prayer meetings, retreats, conferences, and formation days. In this new millennium, we must continue to do so. However, our prayer groups and the Renewal must also take seriously the call to put out into the deep—to minister in the mainstream Church. If prayer groups and the Renewal accept this challenge, they will become support groups and formation centers for their members. Imagine the firestorm that will blaze throughout the Church should prayer groups begin to plan, develop, and implement retreats, missions, days of formation, workshops, and conferences for the mainstream Church that promote life in the Spirit.

## **6. The Mission Of The Renewal Is Baptism In The Holy Spirit Through Life in the Spirit Seminars And Retreats.**

The sixth myth that needs to be dispelled is the notion that the primary mission of the Renewal is Baptism in the Holy Spirit through Life in the Spirit Seminars and retreats. Many would agree that the mission

of the Renewal is Baptism in the Holy Spirit—introducing people to life in the Spirit. The way this happens is different for every prayer group, every Renewal, and every person.

We would be in grave error however, to limit our understanding of empowerment in the Holy Spirit to a formal prayer for “Baptism in the Holy Spirit” or to a formal program such as the Life in the Spirit Seminar. Becoming awakened to the power of the Holy Spirit in one’s life is determined by God’s action in the soul and in the soul awakening to His action. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is not the result of any one program or format that we administer to God’s people. Rather, it is the process and experience of being brought into an ever-deeper awareness of God’s love and abiding presence with us and within others. We experience Baptism in the Holy Spirit when we encounter the face of the living Christ. Baptism in the Spirit happens as we surrender to God and are immersed in His life. Baptism in the Holy Spirit happens each time God reveals Himself to us.

God baptizes or awakens His people to His Holy Spirit at the most surprising times in their lives. We need only listen to our own witnesses to hear the many beautiful ways God works in His people. His anointing can fall while we are weeping over our sins, in the midst of prayer, when we are giving Him praise, receiving Eucharist, experiencing His forgiveness, sensing our helplessness, hopelessness, and need for Him, or at any other moment God chooses to penetrate our souls with His Divine Presence.

When I witness my own conversion story, I relate how I was washed in God’s love while kneeling at my bedside. My girlfriend said, “Let’s pray!” I was waiting for her to pray a vocal prayer, such as the Our Father, and instead she prayed a spontaneous prayer. I do not remember the prayer because the moment she began to pray, I could feel God’s love washing over me. Through the guidance and promptings of the Holy Spirit, I immediately found myself immersed in Scripture, nourished on the Eucharist, and washed clean in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Several months later, I found my way to a prayer group and a loving community where I learned what had happened to me that night as I knelt at my bedside. Over a period of many years, prayer group members and leaders in the Renewal formed me in the gifts and charisms of the Spirit.

Seminars and prayer formats that promote “Baptism in the Holy Spirit” are indeed one important means through which the people of God are introduced to life in the Spirit. However, we must also agree that these are not the only means. In fact, each one of us individually must consider that one-on-one evangelization and personal prayer with others is another powerful way to bring others into “life in the Spirit.”

Prayer groups and the Renewal must begin to propose workshops, retreats, missions, and days of renewal to the mainstream Church in order to teach and model for others to what joy and peace life in the Spirit can lead. The rationale behind such initiatives is rather simple. First, John Paul II (2001) asked that we propose such initiatives to our pastors when he said to pastors, “. . .with the help of all sectors of God’s people, plan the stages of the journey ahead. . .the exciting work of pastoral revitalization—a work involving all of us (p. 40-41). Secondly, while we all know and understand that we received the Holy Spirit when we were baptized and confirmed, many in the mainstream Church do not know this for their lives. That is to say, they do not know they can call upon the Holy Spirit and the charisms of the Holy Spirit to grow holy and to build up the Church. This can mean only one of two things—either, they were never taught this truth or they did not “receive” this truth when it was taught to them.

Whatever the reason, most Catholics do not look for or expect spiritual gifts and outward signs of God’s presence in their lives, nor do they expect to have within themselves, the gift of His voice, His wisdom, His discernment, and His healing to guide and direct their lives and their ministries in His Church. Many do not realize that Jesus desires a personal intimate relationship with them and that He accomplishes this through His Holy Spirit. Whatever the reason, many do not know about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit each time they receive the sacraments. Not only do they not know of the Holy Spirit’s visitation, they also do not know that each time He comes He brings gifts for their holiness and their use in building up the Church (Eph 4:8).

In this third millennium, prayer groups will surely use some of the very same formats they have always used to teach about living in the Spirit, namely Life in the Spirit Seminars and retreat weekends. However, prayer groups may need to be evermore attentive to new ways to accomplish the Pentecost mission. In this millennium, there will surely be opportunities to plan and develop new initiatives that nurture and encourage a deeper awareness and openness in people to acknowledge the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In this new millennium, there will surely be opportunities for us to propose spiritual growth experiences to our pastors and pastoral leaders. We must take advantage of this exciting time in the Church and propose initiatives that enable us to teach about the Holy Spirit and help members of our parish discern their gifts. We can instruct and model when and how they can use their gifts in every parish ministry and organization within the parish. We can teach and model in ways that heighten people's awareness of living in the Spirit and in ways that spark their curiosity.

Several years ago, while giving a weekend retreat, many of those present were "baptized in the Holy Spirit." I had not taught about the Baptism nor had I prayed over anyone for it to happen. In fact, the retreat was titled, "Earth, Wind, and Fire." The session on "Earth" dealt with the Father's creative love, "Wind" focused on the Word of God being sent to Earth to redeem and claim God's children for His Kingdom. "Fire" focused on the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit to reveal the Truth. As I was teaching, I became aware of the powerful presence of God in our midst moving the minds and hearts of those gathered and moving my tongue to teach. As I finished teaching, I called for silence and then prayed over the people in the Spirit. Throughout the prayer, those gathered continued to be bathed in the Holy Spirit. Once the prayer was completed, I felt the Lord prompting me to talk about what it means to be washed—bathed—renewed by the Holy Spirit and what it means to live in His Spirit. I was able to do this with little or no effort because God had opened them to see and hear what He was doing through their own experiences.

What would it be like if in place of ministering through a Life in the Spirit Seminar, we were to share our prayer time with other Catholics and during that time, God baptized them in His Spirit—bringing them into a fuller awareness of the graces that flow from their Sacramental Baptism? What would it be like if we were to minister to Catholics in the mainstream Church, and as we did, they were anointed in God's Holy Spirit? What would happen if we gave a teaching at a parish day of renewal and then called for a time of silence followed by a prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and for His healing?

The moment we agree to dispel this sixth myth, we can be sure that, once again, there will be consequences. It will be necessary for us to broaden our understanding of the mission of our prayer groups and the Renewal. Once we do this, we will be required to plan, design, and offer our parish spiritual Renewal activities that awaken Catholics to the presence of the Holy Spirit and His gifts.

Once we agree to dispel the myth that the mission of the Renewal is Baptism in the Holy Spirit through a particular retreat or seminar format, we will be required to remain in prayer—listening for the promptings of the Holy Spirit to learn how God wants to bring His people into the baptism of His Spirit. To accomplish this we will be required to contemplate the face of Christ (John Paul II, 2001) in prayer—in praying the Scriptures of His life, death, and resurrection. We must strive to know Christ intimately. We must clear our minds of the world's thinking and take on the mind of Christ—studying and responding to the radical nature of His call that beckons us to live in Him through the power of His Holy Spirit.

If we minister in and through Christ Jesus, we will be able to hear God's plan for His people. If we pray always, we will be able to stay in tune with the action of the Holy Spirit while we minister. We will be better able to discern what God is asking us to do and we will be able to obey Him. The more we practice listening for His voice, the more we will be able to hear how He wants us to promote life in the Spirit as a natural and normal way of life in the mainstream Church. Finally, if we continually contemplate the face of Christ, we will grow daily in our trust of Him and be strengthened in our response to His Pentecost plan to renew the face of the earth.

In this new millennium, let us broaden our understanding of the mission of the Renewal. Let us not limit our mission to supporting and introducing Catholics to life in the Spirit using formatted experiences. Let us agree that our mission is to awaken Catholics to their call and responsibility to live in the Spirit for their own holiness and for the good of the Church. Let us agree that our mission is to awaken Catholics using whatever opportunities and methods the Lord prompts us to use.

We must set out into the deep offering spiritual growth experiences to our parish members. We must prepare ourselves to offer whatever supports, encouragements, and ministries are necessary for members of our parish to learn about life in the Spirit. As we do this, we must also be prepared for large groups of Catholics to experience a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Are we ready to respond to God's Pentecost mission in the mainstream of the Church? Are we ready for such a firestorm in the Church?

## **7. Charismatics Left Their Prayer Groups To Serve In Their Parishes, Building Up the Body and Promoting Life In The Spirit.**

The seventh myth that must be dispelled is the idea that prayer group members left their prayer groups in order to evangelize in their local parishes. As prayer groups and prayer group members decrease, we in the Renewal try to find comfort in the notion that, over the years, Charismatics left our prayer groups in order to promote "life in the Spirit" in mainstream Church ministries. It is probably more accurate to say that Charismatics left prayer groups for a variety of reasons, some good and some not so good.

It is comforting for us to believe that inactive Charismatics are all evangelizing, witnessing, and bringing the power and the gifts of the Holy Spirit into the mainstream Church. However, this may not always be the case. Some inactive Charismatics may be just that, inactive when it comes to using the gifts of the Holy Spirit and inactive in encouraging others to use the gifts. While it is true that many inactive Charismatics are in a variety of ministries in the mainstream Church, for the most part, they are not intentionally promoting life in the Spirit, nor are they using the charisms of the Holy Spirit when they minister.

If there were large numbers of ex-Charismatics living in and promoting life in the Spirit, as well as using the gifts and charisms of the Spirit, we would see the laity operating in gifts such as healing, preaching, teaching, and shared prayer at every level of parish life. If this were true, more parishes would be spiritually rich communities, teeming with prayer, healing, praise, and vibrant worship. Such communities would call upon the gifts and charisms of the Holy Spirit for every liturgy, every meeting, and every parish function. If indeed, inactive Charismatics had influenced the parish by sharing the gifts and the power of the Holy Spirit, every liturgical celebration and every activity of the parish would be incorporating prayer, praise, worship, wisdom, exhortation, prophecy, healing, joy, peace, love and all of the gifts and charisms as a normal part of parish life.

If we agree to dispel this seventh myth in the new millennium, we will be agreeing to find ways to gather formerly active Charismatics together and exhort them to operate with us in the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the mainstream Church. If we agree to dispel this myth, we will be required to invite inactive Charismatics to come with us into ministry in the mainstream church. Dispelling this myth carries with it significant consequences for those of us who know ex-prayer group and Renewal members. We will be required to develop initiatives that invite inactive Charismatics to gather for the expressed purpose of learning how to integrate life in the Spirit into everyday parish life. If we agree to dispel this myth, we will be required to coach, mentor, and support inactive Charismatics and invite them back to prayer group to be formed and fed and then to go out with us into the mainstream Church.

What would happen if former prayer group and Renewal members knew they were called to be instruments of the Holy Spirit, introducing the gifts and charisms of the Holy Spirit to members of their parish communities? What would happen if together we offered to present workshops on how to use prayer, discernment, or prophecy (listening for God to speak) to ensure that deliberations at parish

meetings were guided and directed by the Spirit? What would happen if together we proposed an initiative to pray with the celebrant and liturgical ministers prior to the start of each Mass? What would it be like if prayer group members, with approval from the pastor and/or pastoral leaders, offered to pray with people at the end of every Mass?

For any of these ministries to happen, prayer groups would have to become schools of holiness, prayer, and communion (John Paul II, 2001) where members would be supported in growing holy and more deeply in love with God and one another. Prayer groups would be required to reorganize themselves to become schools of formation, preparing their members for evangelization work in their local parishes. In essence prayer groups would have to redefine their vision and mission statements.

If such ministries were developed, with all of the Charismatics in the parish, these ministries would become powerful tools for continually nurturing Baptism in the Holy Spirit in the mainstream Church. When this happens, it will be accurate to say that former Renewal members have gone into the mainstream Church to evangelize their parishes—that is to say, to introduce people to life in the Spirit and the gifts and charisms of the Holy Spirit. Then it will be said, that former and current prayer group members are evangelizing in the mainstream Church and setting a firestorm ablaze.

## 8. The Renewal Is Dying.

The final myth that must be dispelled is the notion that the Renewal is dying. Nothing could be further from the truth. If we make an honest assessment of the depth of our formation and our years of experience living in the Spirit and operating in the charisms of the Spirit, we can only conclude that the Renewal is just now beginning to mature. In its maturity, it is being forced to put out into the deep—the challenging mission field of the mainstream Church. Once there, the Renewal will be required to expend new energies as it offers its years of experience, depth of formation, and mature gifts to those in the mainstream Church. The mainstream Church is exactly the right mission field, for it is ready for harvesting. It is time to send the workers into the field.

The Renewal is not dying. If it were, we would be forced to conclude that the Pentecost mission is dying and without the Pentecost mission, the Church herself would be dying. This simply is not the state of affairs. God is asking the Renewal to be renewed, to listen for His voice, and be drawn into a deeper understanding of its role in His mainstream Church. The sooner we acknowledge that God's Renewal is more alive today than it has ever been, the sooner we will be anointed with a zeal and a fire in our souls that will be unquenchable until the day we attain unity in our faith and in knowledge of the Son of God (cf. Eph 4:13).

When this happens, we will be as the people were at Pentecost, waiting to hear from our national, diocesan, and prayer group leaders, the answer to the question, "What must we do?" When the answers come, we must be prepared to respond to the Pentecost mandate to go, proclaim the Kingdom of God, and heal. This mandate was given to the whole Church the day Jesus appointed the twelve (Mt 10: 6-8; Mk 6:7-13; Lk 9, 1-6) and the seventy-two (Lk 10:1-11), and the moment He commissioned those gathered around Him just prior to His ascension to His Father (Mt. 28:16-20). We in the Renewal have no less a mission than the whole Church.

When He sent the twelve out on mission, He told them to give away everything they had received from Him—every gift, blessing, healing, forgiveness, teaching, preaching, touch, and expression of unconditional love. He said, "Go rather to the lost sheep...As you go, make this proclamation: 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons. Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give" (Mt. 10:6-8). This means we can no longer hold the gifts of salvation and unconditional love, the gifts of forgiveness and healing, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit and life in His Spirit. We must give away all that God has given to us.

This act of giving away everything we have received requires us to follow Jesus more closely, listen to Him more carefully, and be with Him and in Him more constantly. Jesus said to the man who was walking beside Him on the road, "Follow me." But the man replied, "[Lord,] let me go first and bury my father.' But he answered him, 'Let the dead bury their dead. But you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God'" Lk 9:59-60). Some might say, "I already tried to talk to my pastor." or "My parish would never be open to that." or "You don't know how dead my parish really is." Such excuses liken us more to the man walking along the road with Jesus than to the twelve and the seventy-two who went out to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Jesus is telling us, in this passage, that selfishness and excuses have no justification in the Kingdom of God.

When Jesus tells the man on the road to go and proclaim the Kingdom of God, He is asking him, and all who would follow Him, to leave the comfort of their homes, change how they are currently living, move out in a completely different direction, and proclaim His Father's Kingdom. When He tells us to follow Him and to go and proclaim His Father's Kingdom, He is instructing us to leave the comfort of our prayer groups, change how we are currently ministering, and move out into the mainstream of His Church, and once there, we are to proclaim the Good News of His Father's Kingdom.

Now another man, walking along the same road with Jesus, wanted to spend some time at home first. He told Jesus that after he said farewell to His family, he would be ready to follow Him. To this man Jesus responded, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

What is the meaning of this Gospel passage for us in the Renewal? When it comes to moving out into the mainstream Church, will we be just like this man who needed to say his farewells to his family? Are we asking Jesus to wait a while longer until we have said our farewells to the comforts of our prayer groups? Will we keep looking back, unable to look forward because we want things to be as they once were? Is Jesus trying to tell us not to hold on to what we have done in the past but rather, move forward into the mainstream Church? Does He want us to put our hands on the plow—that is to say, take up the difficult and challenging tasks that lie ahead of us? Does He want us to keep our eyes on Him and listen for His guidance and direction? Does He want us to take greater risks for His Kingdom than we have ever taken before?

The Kingdom of God has been proclaimed to us since the earliest beginnings of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement. It seems only natural that we should now be called to this authentic form of discipleship in the third millennium. We have experienced God's healing touch and His signs and wonders. In contrast, so many in the mainstream Church do not yet know about the Father's Kingdom on earth and in heaven, the meaning of the Cross of Jesus for their lives, and Jesus' healing power. This is because so many Catholics do not know about His Holy Spirit—the Advocate, the only One who is able to lead them to these truths. Likewise, many in the mainstream Church have never experienced God's signs and wonders. They do not know that He is a God of miracles and wondrous works. Many Catholics are today, the lost sheep of the house of Israel, not knowing they are lost and not knowing there is so much joy in living in Christ.

If we choose to dispel the eighth myth that says the Renewal is dying, we will be required to re-energize and renew our own hearts, minds, and souls in order to be a part of the renewal of the Renewal and at the same time to be a part of the renewal of the mainstream Church. While it will not look like the Renewal of the past, it will look like a Renewal that has put out into the deep.

We, the elders in the Renewal, have a critical role to play. Once we have agreed to dispel these eight myths, we must pray and respond to God's call to plan, design, and implement new millennium initiatives and offer them to our parishes. We must be the ones to exhort and lead prayer groups and Renewal ministries into the mission field of the mainstream Church.

### **What Then Is To Become of Our Prayer Groups?**

If we choose to dispel one or more of the eight myths about the Charismatic Renewal and if we choose to embrace the call of John Paul II to put out into the deep, the Renewal at national, diocesan, and prayer group levels will need to adapt and develop new formats and initiatives in the third millennium. This must happen if we wish to serve as missionaries in the mission field of the mainstream Church. The moment prayer group members decide to go into the mainstream Church to proclaim the Good News, the goals, objectives, methods, and content of Renewal gatherings will need to change. The Renewal and every individual prayer group will need to become schools of formation for growing in holiness, prayer, and communion. The Renewal and every individual prayer group will need to become the place where people gather on a regular basis for spiritual renewal, refreshment, teachings, workshops, problem solving, discussions, re-learning, re-grouping, and most of all refilling.

The model for using the Renewal in this way is presented to us by Christ Himself. When the seventy-two returned from their first mission, they were jubilant telling of the miracles they had witnessed and rejoicing in God's power working through them. They exclaimed to Jesus, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" Jesus used the time immediately following their return to support, encourage, instruct, and teach them saying,

"I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky. Behold, I have given you the power 'to tread upon serpents' and scorpions and upon the full force of the enemy and nothing will harm you.

Nevertheless, do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”

At that very moment he rejoiced [in] the holy Spirit and said, “I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him.” Turning to the disciples in private he said, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I say to you, many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it”. (Lk 10:12-23)

When Jesus tells the disciples, upon their return to Him, what He has seen of Satan’s fall at their hands, He is testifying to their work in His name, agreeing that their work was indeed fruitful and miraculous. When Jesus tells them to rejoice more in the fact that their names were inscribed in heaven than in the signs and wonders they had seen, He was coaching and mentoring them, trying to get them to understand above all, that being a child of God was far greater a miracle than performing any miracles in God’s name. Here, Jesus was cautioning the disciples about being too prideful and puffed up as He reminded them to focus on their real purpose in life—that of spending an eternity with the Father.

We also realize in this passage that Jesus spent a good amount of time with the disciples upon their return, at least long enough to pray with them, thanking His Father for giving them gifts for ministry. Jesus used this same time to teach His disciples about His relationship with His Father—their agreement and their oneness, as well as their anointing of those whom they choose to anoint and appoint. Finally, in Jesus’ prayer for His disciples, He blessed their eyes and their ears for their future ministry work. In effect, Jesus used the time of their return to coach, mentor, instruct, debrief with them and retrain them in the areas they were weak or lacked understanding.

On a regular basis, we must do as the disciples did. We must return from ministry and place ourselves in the presence of Jesus and in the presence of one another—the Body of Christ. Our prayer groups and the Renewal are the perfect places to do this. They can serve as our home base from which we can go out into the deep. They can become schools of formation in leadership and ministry gifts as well as in personal holiness, prayer, and communion with one another. They can become the safe places we go to discuss and analyze our work and to challenge each other’s actions and motives in ministry. Our prayer groups and the Renewal can become the places we go to in order to be strengthened by God and they become the places where we learn how to surrender our wills to God, allowing Him to develop and form His gifts in us. They can become the mature Christian communities we need in which our gifts can continue to be discerned and developed. Finally, our prayer groups and the Renewal can become places where we intercede for our parish, each other, and each other’s ministries.

In a futuristic millennium vision, the prayer group would serve as a formation institute for the parish (See the Chapter titled, “The Renewal and Prayer Groups As Training and Formation Centers”). It would be the place where members of the parish would come to have their ministry gifts discerned and be formed and nurtured in their natural gifts and in the charisms of the Holy Spirit. It would be the place where parish organizations could come to assess their goals and activities in relation to the Pentecost mission—to go, proclaim, and heal. As this happens, our prayer groups would begin to thrive once again but this time with a new millennium mission and vision—with the purpose to continually put out into the deep—the mainstream Church.

Our Catholic Church is in desperate need of renewal. If it were not John Paul II (2001) would not have used the word “must” when he told us to “put out into the deep” (p. 23). We ought not to deceive ourselves by denying the present situation in the Church. Some Churches are closing and others, by all account, should be closing. Some Churches with falling attendance are clustering together with one or two priests. Many ex-Catholics fill the seats and the bank accounts of other churches—mostly non-denominational and mostly evangelical. Many faithful Catholics in the pews are there because of the rules not the Ruler.

Finally, it should come as no surprise that many Catholics on fire for the Lord struggle daily to remain in the Church. They are hungry to receive personal prayer ministry, hear an anointed teaching, be challenged in specific ways to live out the Gospel, and participate in Spirit-filled praise and worship. Their loyalty is split between Mass and the Spirit-filled church down the street as they attend services at both churches each weekend. They are always, in their own minds, on the verge of leaving the Church, but they keep giving her one more chance to meet their family's spiritual needs for growth and direction in their lives. It seems they are waiting for someone to give them a reason to stay. They know the power of the Eucharist in their lives but it is not enough to allay their fears that they do not know how to live in Christ. They fear that their children's spiritual development is not being nurtured by the Church nor by them since they do not feel they are getting adequate teachings on how to raise their children in the faith and how to create a Christian environment for their families.

There are so many reasons why the Renewal must put out into the deep. Let us pray to have the courage to step out of our comfort zones and go into the mainstream church to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Let us pray to propose initiatives that introduce mainstream Catholics to life in the Spirit. Let us pray to model what it means to live in the Spirit in the mainstream Church. Let us make bold proclamations of the Truth of Pentecost to our pastors and our pastoral teams. Let us give everyday Catholics in our parish, our witness to the power of the Holy Spirit. Finally, when the history of the Charismatic Renewal is written for the third millennium, let it be said that we left our comfort zones and did not look back. Let it be said that we put out into the deep to proclaim the Kingdom and heal, as Jesus commanded. Let it be said, that because we went, the fire of the Renewal did not go out but instead turned into a firestorm in the mainstream Church.

Is the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement ready to set a fire that will turn into a firestorm in the Catholic Church? Is it ready to go, proclaim, and heal? There is no better nor more critical time to do this than now! If we dare to dispel the eight myths about the Charismatic Renewal and put out into the deep, we will know without a doubt that the Renewal is not dying. It is alive and well, enabling the Holy Spirit to do the work He must do—sanctify the people of God and making the Bride of Christ holy and pleasing to the Father in preparation for the second coming of Christ. When these myths are finally dispelled, we will be caught up in a firestorm in the Church and we will be witnesses to the Holy Spirit renewing the Church and the entire face of the earth!

## **Take Time To Reflect And Act**

Take a few moments now to ponder which of the eight myths you most need to dispel, and why. As you reflect on the myths that you most need to dispel, talk about the implications of doing this, for yourself individually, for your prayer group, or for the Renewal in your diocese or in the country. What actions might you take to establish your commitment to dispel the myth(s)?

1. The Spirituality Of “Living In The Spirit” Is Simply One Way To Grow In Holiness
2. The Charisms Of The Holy Spirit Are Not For Everyone
3. If We Talk, They Will Listen
4. If We Invite Them, They Will Come
5. Prayer Groups Evangelize The Church
6. The Mission Of The Renewal Is Baptism In The Holy Spirit Through Life in the Spirit Seminars And Retreats
7. Charismatics Left Their Prayer Groups To Serve In Their Parishes, Building Up the Body and Promoting Life In The Spirit
8. The Renewal Is Dying