



Catholic Charismatic Renewal International Service

## SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR CHARISMATIC COMMUNITIES LEADERS

Building healthy communities

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### **The Essential Elements of a Charismatic Christian Community**

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#### A. Introduction

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- The aim of this talk is not to present a blueprint for a Christian community but to outline the major qualities and characteristics that (from our experience) comprise a Charismatic Christian community.
- There will be many variations on how these get expressed in a given community or movement of communities—this is a good, healthy, and natural (and supernatural) result.
- Individual communities and movements will focus on certain elements more than others, and will find them expressed in unique ways. This too brings a great richness, and allows the various communities and movements to learn from each other and see the riches of what the Spirit provides.
- It is no coincidence that the main elements that we have discerned are closely in alignment with what the Catholic Church has commended for this season of the New Evangelization—and here we are looking especially to the key statements in the Apostolic Exhortation from Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013).
- The presentation has three parts:
  1. The essential qualities of Charismatic communities
  2. Seven distinctive elements of the spirituality of Charismatic communities
  3. Characteristics that serve the maturity and longevity of community life. This last part will be very brief

#### B. Three Inseparable and Complementary Qualities: A Community of Disciples on Mission

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- In our broader community (the Sword of the Spirit) we have adopted since our beginning a short tagline that expresses what we believe is the heart of our call as a Charismatic community: we are called to be a community of disciples on mission. This could also be expressed as “a community of missionary disciples.”
  - It is not a coincidence that this expression is quite similar to those that others have identified as marking the followers of Christ in this time. For example:
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- George Weigel (the biographer of Pope St. John Paul II) speaks about the Gospel truth “that forms a mission-centered community of disciples with a clear sense of identity and purpose.” (Evangelical Catholicism, 36).
- Pope Francis speaks in these terms several times in his Apostolic Letter, Evangelii Gaudium:

*“The Gospel joy which enlivens the community of disciples is a missionary joy.” (21)*

*“The Church which ‘goes forth’ is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step...” (24).*

*“We no longer say that we are ‘disciples’ and ‘missionaries’, but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples.’” (120)*

- We believe that these three marks (or characteristics) point to what we are to be as members of Charismatic communities. We have linked them to the persons of the Trinity here, simply to show that our life as disciples flows from the nature of God himself who is three persons in One God.
1. A community of brothers and sisters relating in fraternal love, a love that has its beginning in the love of God the Father: “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins” (1 Jn 4:10).
    - A Christian community is a family with God as our Father, who has invited us to be his adopted sons and daughters. This is the fundamental identity we have: God poured out his love so that we could be his new family.
    - We are sons and daughters in the Son, and we receive this love through the gift of the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5).
    - The consequence of this love poured out is a community with a committed way of life that includes worship, regular small groups, community meetings, etc. Our commitment together is the result of God pouring out his love and making us his family.
  2. A community of disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ:
    - As Jesus lived with and formed his disciples, so we want to have a discipleship culture that invites people and helps them to be formed into mature disciples of Jesus.
    - At the same time, we want a culture that is always looking to grow as disciples, so that we become more like Christ throughout the whole of our lives.
    - One of the primary means for the forming of disciples is teaching grounded in the Scripture: the word of God should shape our initiations, our pastoral care of one another, and our life together.
  3. A community of missionaries in the power of the Holy Spirit:



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- We want to (and should) be a community that has the Spirit active within it in many ways. Here we focus on mission and outreach, though we know the Spirit also leads us to greater holiness and communion.
- We want to (and should) be communities where the Spirit is free to act—where the Spirit is not constrained—while at the same time we want to have wise discernment to be able to see what is good fruit and what is not.
- Therefore, we should be a community that reaches out, bringing the Gospel to the world around us, helping the needy and the poor, and in all things being a light and a sign of the kingdom of God in our culture.

### C. Seven Distinctive Elements of the Spirituality of Charismatic Communities

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- Once again, this is not a blueprint for a common spirituality or a thorough and exact list of the elements that characterize Charismatic communities. Rather, it sums up our attempt to express the core elements that should in some way shape the spiritual life of Charismatic communities.

#### 1. GOD-CENTERED AND TRINITARIAN

- We want God himself, in his full revelation as Trinity, to be the center of our life and call. We are not at the center of things—not even our responses to God—but God is.

*“The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them.” (Catholic Catechism, 234)*

- By this we also want to avoid being too strongly focused on one truth, or one spiritual focus, or even one person of the Trinity. Certainly, every community will have certain spiritual emphases that shape its spirituality. But we want to ensure that by placing the Trinitarian God at the center, we open our life and praise/worship to be shaped by who God is.

#### 2. SCRIPTURAL: FORMED BY HIS WORD

- A scriptural foundation and spirituality for our community life follows the strong recommendation of Vatican II (Dei Verbum), that the Scripture should directly be the source of the spiritual life and teaching of the Church.

*“Therefore, like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and regulated by Sacred Scripture” (Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum 6.21).*

- While this passage applies preeminently to the preaching of God’s word in the liturgy, it also applies to how we go about our life and teaching in our communities.



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- The point is that whatever teaching we give, whatever wisdom we have to share, we want to draw this from (and relate this to) the Scripture as directly as possible.
- As Col 3:16 says, we want to allow the word of Christ to dwell in us richly, and so to allow the Scripture to shape how we teach and how we hear the Word of God together as communities.

### 3. CHARISMATIC

- Through the gift of the Spirit we have been called to express the charismatic activity of the Spirit in our life and mission. We cannot afford to let this primary gift of God slip away, even as we embrace other good things.

*“I have often had occasion to stress that there is no conflict or opposition in the Church between the institutional dimension and the charismatic dimension, of which movements are a significant expression. Both are co-essential to the divine constitution of the Church founded by Jesus, because they both help to make the mystery of Christ and his saving work present in the world.” (Pope St. John Paul II, “Message for the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities,” May 27, 1998).*

*“Thanks to the Charismatic Movement, many Christians, men and women, youths and adults, have rediscovered Pentecost as a living and present reality in their daily life. I desire that the spirituality of Pentecost be spread in the Church, as a renewed thrust of prayer, holiness, communion and proclamation.” (Pope St. John Paul II, Homily on the Eve of Pentecost, May 29, 2004).*

- We want to fan into flame the gift of God given to us—and this certainly includes the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit, and the expression of these in charismatic praise and worship.
- We want to receive this gift with the benefit of the full wisdom and discernment of the Church.
- We also want to express our charismatic life in a way that makes it possible for others to benefit, even when they are not part of our movement.

### 4. COVENANTED

- By this we mean some form of committed expression to secure our common commitment to one another. This is one of the marks of the Spirit that characterizes Charismatic communities.
- The point of covenant and commitment is not to bind people or to tie them down. Rather, this call to commitment and covenant is itself a gift of God for our time.
- In a world that has lost so much natural community and stable family life, the call to join with a group of brothers and sisters in committed relationships is a key part of God’s strategy for answering the crises of our time.



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- Some form of commitment, suited to the needs and realities of lay people, can be a great asset in providing a stable form of life around which the Spirit of God can act and meet the needs of many.

#### 5. ECUMENICAL

- By this we mean living our life in community in a way that furthers the unity of God's people.
- This too is part of the heritage of the Charismatic Renewal movement. Grace for Christian unity is part of this movement of the Spirit in the Charismatic Renewal.
- The grace follows the teaching and exhortation of the Second Vatican Council, that we should do everything we can do advance the reality of unity between Christians.

*“The children who are born into these Communities and who grow up believing in Christ cannot be accused of the sin involved in the separation, and the Catholic Church embraces upon them as brothers, with respect and affection. For men who believe in Christ and have been truly baptized are in communion with the Catholic Church even though this communion is imperfect.” (Decree on Ecumenism, Unitatis Redintegratio, 3)*

*“Today, in many parts of the world, under the inspiring grace of the Holy Spirit, many efforts are being made in prayer, word and action to attain that fullness of unity which Jesus Christ desires. The Sacred Council exhorts all the Catholic faithful to recognize the signs of the times and to take an active and intelligent part in the work of ecumenism.” (Decree on Ecumenism, Unitatis Redintegratio, 4)*

*“Relations between Christians are not aimed merely at mutual knowledge, common prayer and dialogue. They presuppose and from now on call for every possible form of practical cooperation at all levels: pastoral, cultural and social, as well as that of witnessing to the Gospel message.” (Pope John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint, 40)*

- But the application of this grace does not just happen automatically. It requires of us that we pray, that we invest, and that we look for ways to further Christian unity in our communities and in the wider Church.
- This will of course take different forms and expressions in our various locations—the ‘form’ is not the main thing.
- What is crucial is the conviction that God is calling all those who belong to Christ to be linked together and to be working towards greater unity, inclusive of united missionary efforts where possible.

#### 6. LAY IN SPIRITUALITY

- We are largely lay communities with the blessed presence of some ordained and religious members. We are not lay people attached to a religious community but communities shaped by the needs, capacities, and calling of lay people.



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- The Church is calling the laity into active mission, and we see ourselves as one response to the work of the Spirit in the laity today.

*“The laity likewise share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world.... Since the laity, in accordance with their state of life, live in the midst of the world and its concerns, they are called by God to exercise their apostolate in the world like leaven, with the ardor of the Spirit of Christ. ” (Vatican II Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, Apostolicam Actuositatem, 2).*

- We have a special call in this time to help form and nurture Christian families which are under such a strong and direct attack today throughout the world. The call to serve and strengthen families is a key part of our role as lay people living and serving in the world.

#### 7. LITURGICAL

- Lex orandi, lex credendi: We want to have our spiritual life shaped by the liturgy of the Church, and to allow the patterns of the liturgy to shape the way that we believe and pray as communities even when we are not praying according to the formal liturgy of the Church.
- And so we want to celebrate the liturgy itself with reverence and faith in a fitting way, but we also want to allow our entire life to be shaped by the way that the liturgy teaches us to approach God.

*“The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows. For the aim and object of apostolic works is that all who are made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of His Church, to take part in the sacrifice, and to eat the Lord’s supper.” (Vatican II Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium, 10)*

*“The spiritual life, however, is not limited solely to participation in the liturgy. The Christian is indeed called to pray with his brethren, but he must also enter into his chamber to pray to the Father, in secret; yet more, according to the teaching of the Apostle, he should pray without ceasing.” (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 12)*

#### D. Some characteristics that Serve the Maturity and Longevity of Community Life (briefly mentioned -for further development by each Community Leadership Group)

1. Maintaining and nurturing the initial call and vision while seeking the Lord’s guidance for further development and understanding of the call and vision.
2. Striving to maintain internal unity, especially among leaders.
  - i. Deepening of brotherly (and sisterly) personal relationships.



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- ii. Watching speech, honor and respect, .
3. Developing a process for decision-making based on:
  - i. Good consultation
  - ii. Good communication
  - iii. Having meeting norms and evaluation tools
4. Welcoming external cooperation and support, and being generous in the mutual sharing of resources.
  - i. Taking advantage of Charis formation programs is one example.
5. Promoting and implementing the kind of formation that leads to “*ecclesial maturity*” (quoting Pope St. John Paul II phrase):
  - i. of members: to live a common way of life; to grow in discipleship and personal holiness; to live as missionaries.
  - ii. of leaders: both in skills appropriate to their respective tasks and in vision for servant leadership.
6. Planning for leadership succession. This includes among other things:
  - i. Limitation of terms
  - ii. Age retirement
7. Fostering an Intergenerational approach to community life: families, singles, children.
  - i. Developing children, youth and young adults programs to ensure continuity and to avoid generational gaps.
8. Having a good and regular pattern of meetings that is:
  - i. Viable long term, and
  - ii. Takes into consideration the pressures of modern times.
9. Watching over areas that may lead to abuse of authority.
  - i. Spiritual and/or charismatic;
  - ii. The separation between internal and external forums;
  - iii. Child protection policy.
10. Catholics to be in a good relationship with the Church authorities.