

ICCRS LEADERSHIP BULLETIN

Formation for current and new leaders in CCR

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Charismatic prayer meeting or prayer club

■ Endie Rahardja

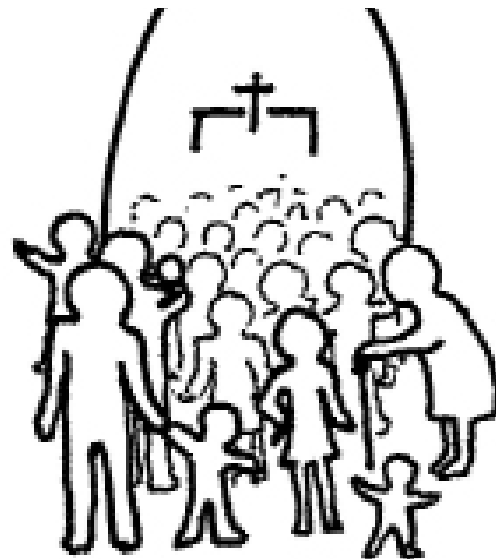


One of the characteristics of the people who have experienced baptism in the Holy Spirit is having a personal relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It produces a hunger for the Scriptures and the Eucharist, a deeper prayer life, and a heart that is always longing to praise and worship God personally or in a Charismatic prayer meeting or Charismatic community.

In a Charismatic prayer meeting, men and women who have received the baptism in the Holy Spirit gather as one family to love, praise, honour, and give thanks to Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour. During a prayer meeting, they are praising and worshipping God while exercising the gifts of the Spirit. Particular gifts commonly used are the gift of tongues or singing in the spirit, listening to the Word of God through Prophecy and Scripture, and having fellowship with each other.

One of the characteristics of a Charismatic prayer meeting is acknowledging the presence and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. For example, in preparing for a prayer meeting, the music leader chooses the songs through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. During the meeting, an openness to the Holy Spirit results in the Spirit manifesting His gifts through the Body. Some are moved by the gift of prophecy or word of knowledge and wisdom. On some occasions, people may experience God's love to such an extent that it causes them to laugh or cry. Very often, inner healing accompanies this experience of love. The Holy Spirit alone knows what each person needs. He will often answer deep personal needs during this prayer meeting time.

Another characteristic in the Charismatic prayer meeting is fellowship among the participants where they all come together as brothers and sisters in Christ. They love each other with the love of God, so they may feel the presence of God within them, as the Holy Spirit encourages and support each other in faith. Through this depth of fellowship, the absence of a person at a regular prayer meeting can even evoke sadness. Some Charismatic prayer meetings have lost



these characteristics. Several Charismatic prayer meetings have become prayer clubs, where every activity relies on human knowledge, with human skill, where there is no longer a dependence on the Holy Spirit. They no longer use the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Leaders have not learned about the gifts of the Spirit and are unable to distinguish between a genuine charismatic group and a prayer club. The people who attend a 'prayer club' can be closed to the spiritual gifts and do not move in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit through the gifts. There can also be a lack of commitment to fellow members.

In Indonesia, the National Service Council encourages all Charismatic leaders to attend the program called "Back to Basics." The program teaches participants to understand the nature of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and how to run a prayer meeting. The aim is to allow CCR leaders to grasp the importance of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, of using the spiritual gifts, and of fellowship, so that participants will feel God's love in every prayer meeting.

The Charismatic prayer meeting is at the heart of the Charismatic Renewal. It is a place where people should experience for the first time how to praise God in a new way, how to practice the spiritual gifts, and to receive God's love and anointing. It is our mission to restore the Charismatic prayer meeting to God's intention for it. Otherwise, it will only be a prayer club. 🏠

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Bearing fruit that lasts!

■ David Bustamante



As a small child, I walked with my parents in the subtropical jungles of Bolivia to look for wild blackberry bushes. The berries inside the bush were hard for us to pick because many thorns protected them. Our satisfaction was immense when we collected even a small amount.

In the life of a Christian, God the Father will come to seek the fruit we have produced, spiritual fruit that must last beyond our own time on Earth. God Himself will judge our fruit. We are responsible for doing everything we can to give Him the best fruit possible and in the right quantity.

We can find the keys to this in the Holy Scriptures.

1. STATE OF GRACE: “You are clean already, by means of the word that I have spoken to you” (John 15:3).

A charismatic Catholic leader must always be in a state of grace to fight temptation and stand firm against sin. Many prayer groups and ministries have faltered or even disappeared because their leaders have not persevered in the face of temptation. Some believed that the call they received at the beginning would be enough to complete the mission. Although the Lord uses dirty vessels to transmit his grace, He also wants to purify these vessels to use them again.

If a leader does not meet this first condition, his service can be a beautiful human work, but it will not bless him or his environment the way the Lord intended.

2. CONNECTION WITH JESUS: “Remain in me, as I in you” (John 15:4).

Usually, we pray asking God to give us his spiritual gifts: speaking in tongues, gift of prophecy, gift of healing, deliverance, miracles, etc. and the Holy Spirit, being generous, gives us the gifts He desires (cf. 1 Corinthians 12). However, once we receive them, we run a serious risk of believing that we already have everything we need and that is enough. This is a serious mistake. Indeed, the gift received empowers us to serve, but if we do not obtain the Lord's food, that is, to keep ourselves in personal and community prayer, to actively participate in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, to fast, and to pray the Rosary, we will not produce lasting fruit. We can become isolated and dry up. If

so, we will then be collected and thrown on the fire where we will burn (cf. John 15:6).

3. SERVE IN THE LOVE OF GOD: “This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you. No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends” (John 15: 12,13).

St Paul tells us in the First Letter to the Corinthians that without love, we are nothing. Only service that we steep in love will produce enduring fruit.

H.H. Pope Francis has rightly asked the whole Church to live the extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, bringing the love of God to all who need it, both bodily and spiritually. To paraphrase my archbishop, the Jubilee of Mercy is over, but Mercy will never be over. We must carry out our service to others with a heart of mercy, which reveals the essence of God Himself. A merciful and loving community that acknowledges its weaknesses and failures is more prepared to openly welcome and accept all people desiring a relationship with God. When correction is necessary, we must apply it with love and mercy. Loving action is imperative when nurturing others to bear fruit that will last.

4. DO NOT DENY GOD HIS GLORY: “It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit and be my disciples” (John 15: 8).

It is a grave sin to take away from God's glory, which is His alone. He is the author of all the blessings we receive. Communities and prayer group leaders should not impose decisions that they have made themselves. Rather, they should serve the community and consult a leadership team. Although it seems impossible, we must acknowledge that many charismatic leaders attribute to themselves the merits of the glory of God by seeking human recognition, becoming egotistical, and selfishly promoting their gifts. They do this when they should give God praise and glory for the gifts He has given to them. Some even charge a fee for exercising the charisms. This behaviour will not produce enduring fruit.

Finally, I have learned that just as the blackberry bush protects its tasty fruits with thorns, making it difficult for people or animals to enter, we must protect the fruits God has given us by asking for the intercession of Mary Most Holy and all the saints. 🕯

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Beyond the prayer meeting

■ Andres Arango



This year, the Golden Jubilee of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) calls us to take the presence of Jesus beyond our prayer meetings.

The evangelizing dynamics of the CCR must reflect the signs of the times in the new ways the Spirit wants us to preach the Gospel. Pope Francis often mentions a “church permanently going out.” This means not staying in our comfort zones waiting for people to come to us. Rather, we must go out to meet others, to walk with them in their daily lives, and to help them have an encounter with our loving Lord Jesus.

In this article, I will introduce three elements that can help us live a new evangelizing call in the CCR that goes beyond our prayer meetings:

1. Evangelizing new generations: some questions we must ask ourselves within the CCR are: How are we passing on the experience of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit to new generations? Are teenagers in our communities receiving the Good News? Are we using a familiar language to evangelize young adults to accept the Lordship of Jesus in their lives? Pope John VI said, “When they [means of social communication] are put at the service of the Gospel, they are capable of increasing almost indefinitely the area in which the Word of God is heard; they enable the Good News to reach millions of people.

The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* #45). God calls us today to use social networks and other new technologies to be digital missionaries to young people so they can discover Jesus.

2. Works of Mercy: we have reached the end of the Year of Mercy, during which many people have practised works of Mercy, especially physical ones. However, there is one question left: What now? Is this not something all Christians must do every single day of our lives? I have seen a great model of how to combine our evangelizing work with our call to care for those in great need. This idea came up in the CCR youth in Mexico and has expanded to other countries in the Americas... it is called “Un Kilo de Fe” (a kilogram of faith).

Organisers ask every young person attending a CCR

congress to contribute a kilogram of non-perishable food. In this way, young people listen to the Good News, experience the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, and then go to underprivileged areas in the city to share food with those who are in need. This great work proclaims the Gospel and gives youth a chance to serve those who suffer daily and let them hear the promise of Jesus: “Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take as your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food” (Matthew 25 : 34,35).

3. Carrying the message to the peripheries: Pope Francis is a great model of evangelizing—not necessarily with words but with action—those who are in the peripheries of society. For this reason, he invited the CCR to take their experience to different places: “organize Life in the Spirit Seminars for brothers and sisters living on the street, also for brothers and sisters marginalized by so much suffering in life” (Saint Peter’s Square, 3 July 2015).

I would like to share a beautiful testimony that I saw while visiting a diocese in the USA. We were preaching about the importance of being creative in evangelisation and a servant of a community gave us an excellent example of how to go to the peripheries. During many years, the servants of a prayer meeting went weekly to a city park and took hot chocolate and bread to people living on the street. Logically, the servants gave them food and a smile so they would feel loved. However, one day the servants decided to offer a Life in the Spirit Seminar to the people living on the streets. For seven weeks, while they gave them food, the servants talked informally to each of the needy about the topics of the seminar. All the servants who went to the park that first week talked to them personally, telling them that God loved them. During the second week, they shared with them that we all make mistakes. On the third week, the servants proclaimed that Jesus had come to save us and, on subsequent weeks, gave the other teachings of the seminar, until they reached the moment of praying for the Baptism in the Holy Spirit for everyone present.

What a wonderful example of how we can help with the material needs of our brothers who are suffering and at the same time bring them the loving presence of Jesus. 🕯



THE CROSS OF THE RENEWAL

With great joy we announce the resumption of the Cross of the Renewal production and distribution. The project, conceived and implemented in Canada by our brother René Brimo, now in heaven, to give a symbol of belonging and witness to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal’s stream of grace and for the continued support of ICCRS in its worldwide service mission.



QUESTIONS TO THE ICCRS DOCTRINAL COMMISSION

The ICCRS Doctrinal Commission, currently headed by Dr. Mary Healy, is in consultation with theologians and experts from around the world.

If you have a question about the CCR, please send it to newsletter@iccrs.org

Is it right to speak about “forgiving God”?

We often hear people say they find it difficult to forgive God for a trial in their lives, like an illness or the death of a loved one; or that they feel much better now that they have forgiven God. Is this way of speaking legitimate?

The problem is that to forgive implies that there has been wrongdoing. God, being pure love and goodness, does no one any wrong. He does not hurt us or make us suffer. Of course, on many occasions, He did not seem to have protected us from suffering. However, the Lord says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts and your ways are not my ways...For the heavens are as high above earth as my ways are above your ways, my thoughts above your thoughts” (Is 55:8,9). We do not understand all that God does, all the circumstances He takes into account, how He respects the freedom of all those who surround us, and how He guides us, accompanies us, and protects us. All we can be sure of is that He does what is best and He does so with unconditional love and tenderness. So, is it right to speak about “forgiving” God?

The Bible never recounts instances of forgiving God. It does show many people, including true believers, even David and Jesus Himself, crying out to God, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Ps 22:1; Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46). However, even Job, after losing his wealth, his health, and his children and after long complaints and accusations about God and to God, does not forgive Him. When God reveals Himself to Job and shows him how mysterious His ways are, Job bows before God’s immensity and wisdom, and acknowledges, “I was the man who misrepresented your intentions with my ignorant words.” It is Job who asks for forgiveness for having accused God: “having seen you with my own eyes, I retract what I have said, and repent in dust and ashes” (Jb 42:3, 5b-6).

Nonetheless, we do need to consider the psychology of forgiveness. We forgive not only objective wrongdoing but also perceived wrongdoing. A word we have not understood or a look we have misinterpreted sometimes causes us as much suffering as a truly malicious action against us. In these cases, we need to re-establish our trust in the person and our relationship with him or her. It may not be forgiveness in the strict sense of the word, but a theologian would say it is forgiveness in an “analogical” sense: it is not the same thing, but it

resembles it. Moreover, it is the same process and has the same effects. When we wish to “forgive” in this wider meaning of the word, we need to do the same things we do when we forgive in the more narrow sense. We recognize we have been hurt, turn towards the person, make the choice to trust or love the person gratuitously as he or she is, accept that this process will take time—and in all that, ask for God’s help, because only He can enable us to forgive. Both types of “forgiveness” are part of a full reconciliation.

If this is true, then we can say the same about our relationship with God. Even though He does not harm us, we may feel as if He has done us wrong. We may think our suffering comes from Him or at least that He should have protected us more. In this case, the process of reconciling ourselves with God and restoring a full and deep relationship include this process of forgiveness in the analogous sense. God Himself desires it, even if it is not fully fair to Him, in the same way as someone who loves us dearly hopes we forgive him even of things he did not do because he desires us to be in the deepest and most intimate relationship with him. This is precisely why the Scriptures show so many examples of people crying out to God to complain and even to accuse Him. God encourages this because it is the first step of reconciliation with Him: acknowledging we are hurt and turning toward Him. However “off track” the way of turning toward Him is, it truly is a first step that will allow us to restore the relationship.

Nonetheless, a true relationship calls for truth and transparency. Forgiving God for something of which we have accused Him always means asking Him for forgiveness (in the strict sense of the word) as well. Job shows us the way: we certainly need to “repent in dust and ashes” for our lack of trust, our false image of Him, and our difficulty in perceiving and acknowledging His goodness to us. Actually, this is true for our relationships with others as well. When we forgive someone, we often need to ask for forgiveness for our lack of understanding, for having blown things out of proportion, and for not having perceived the goodness that this person also has. So, in the end, yes, we can speak about forgiving God, if we realize that we are not using “forgiving” in the strictest sense of the word and, especially, if we ourselves repent and also ask God for forgiveness. 🙏