

Message
from the Episcopal Commission for Doctrine
of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
for the 50th anniversary of the Charismatic Renewal in Canada

1. In 2018, we are marking the 50th anniversary of the Charismatic Renewal in Canada. Over these years, this movement of the Holy Spirit has left a discernible impression on the Church. When we, as Bishops, speak to Catholics involved in their parish communities, or hear stories of conversion or vocational discovery, how frequently we hear of the decisive role of the Charismatic Renewal. These committed Catholics – whether they have rediscovered their faith at a *Life in the Spirit* seminar, a program at a centre for prayer and evangelization, or through some other encounter with the Holy Spirit – go on to live a personal and dynamic relationship with Christ, attentive to the voice of the Father and the Spirit calling them to live as beloved sons and daughters.
2. As a Church, we give thanks to the Lord for the blessings of God which Catholic charismatics have brought our dioceses and parishes. Faithfully-attended prayer groups, the careful study of the word of God, catechesis, times of praise, prayers of intercession, the blessings and constructive challenges of life in community – all these have marked the life of Charismatic communities across Canada and have contributed to the building up of the Church in our land.
3. In 2003, we issued a letter commemorating the 35th anniversary of the Charismatic Renewal in Canada and we had noted the fruits associated with it, as well as future challenges it must face. That letter is still relevant today, and bears re-reading. However, on this 50th anniversary, we will take a different approach. Although the Renewal is not a “movement” with recognized structures and leadership – Pope Francis recently preferred to describe it as “a current of grace of the Spirit”¹ – it has this in common with ecclesial movements: that it must seek to balance the dynamism of new charisms with the permanence and stability of the Church. For this reason, we will articulate our letter according to the five “criteria of ecclesiality” proposed by Saint John Paul II to evaluate and ensure the full integration of movements and charisms within the Church.² We will gratefully consider how the Charismatic Renewal embodies and lives out each of these criteria as an instrument of

¹ Pope Francis, *Address for Vigil of Pentecost* at the Circus Maximus on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Catholic Charismatic Renewal, 3 June 2017. “A current of grace of the Spirit! And why a current of grace? Because it has neither a founder, nor statutes, nor organs of governance.”

² Saint John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 30. These five criteria will be summed up under the following headings: 1) *The primacy given to the call of every Christian to holiness*, 2) *The responsibility of professing the Catholic faith*, 3) *The witness to a strong and authentic communion*, 4) *Conformity to and participation in the Church's apostolic goals*, and 5) *A commitment to a presence in human society*.

communion and as an “antidote” to various spiritual illnesses or deficiencies in our culture, noting the challenges in living out these same criteria today, and providing encouragement for the future.

I. THE PRIMACY GIVEN TO THE CALL OF EVERY CHRISTIAN TO HOLINESS

4. Our culture has experienced in many ways a tragic loss of morality. It is therefore refreshing to see the emphatic insistence on personal holiness within the Renewal. Holiness is not the result of our own efforts; it is a free gift from the Father given through the Holy Spirit. The Charismatic Renewal reminds us of the role of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification; that being holy is not merely about following rules, but rather being allowing ourselves to inwardly transformed by the power of the Spirit.
5. The challenge for the Renewal today – a challenge shared by the Church as a whole – is to joyfully propose a life of holiness that goes against the grain of our popular culture. Only with the joy that the Holy Spirit gives us can we bear witness by our lives that following Christ and his commandments is not burdensome but refreshing and vivifying.
6. Looking to the future, we ask Catholic charismatics to continue to proclaim the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. Witness to the Lord’s action in your lives, above all with other Catholics. You have a gift to share with the Church and with the world. Do not be afraid to share and proclaim the wonders the Lord has done for you.

II. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PROFESSING THE CATHOLIC FAITH

7. Our society today is often awash with misunderstandings and confusion about Christ, the Church, and the human person created in God’s image. This inability to see the truth about the dignity of the human person – something clearly taught by the Church’s magisterium – has resulted in innumerable social ills, many of which have multiplied greatly over the last 50 years. It is a sign of grace that charismatic Catholics have shown a deep commitment to the Church’s magisterium, including those teachings that are most difficult for our fellow Canadians to accept. Thank you for your fidelity to the Catholic faith.
8. One challenge facing the Renewal today concerns the Church’s irrevocable call to ecumenism. We must observe that charismatics have often been at the forefront of ecumenism, simply because the Renewal itself was born out of an ecumenical context, thus not confined to a single Church or ecclesial community. Pope Francis has recently reiterated the call for Catholic charismatics to work ecumenically, asking you to “walk together with Christians of different Churches and Ecclesial Communities in prayer and activity on behalf of those in greatest need.”³ Remaining firm in our Catholic convictions in no way diminishes

³ Pope Francis, *Address for Vigil of Pentecost* at the Circus Maximus on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Catholic Charismatic Renewal, 3 June 2017.

the capacity for ecumenical work and prayer; rather it provides the solid foundation on which ecumenical relationships can be built.

9. Looking ahead, we ask charismatic Catholics to continue to deepen their understanding of the Catholic faith, which is open to all and which provides a treasure house of knowledge that cannot be exhausted even with a lifetime of study. In addition to teaching about the gifts of the Spirit, we ask that you also provide catechesis and formation in Catholic theology to your members and to anyone who is interested.

III. THE WITNESS TO A STRONG AND AUTHENTIC COMMUNION

10. A sign of the vitality of ecclesial movements is the expression of their communion with the universal Church, and in particular with the Pope and Bishops. In a world that exalts individualism and autonomy, the Renewal has faithfully focused on community, relationality, and interdependence both among its members and with the broader Church. This relationship with the Church's pastors is intended to be a mutually enriching one for all:

Above all, the establishment of good relations between the diverse gifts in the Church requires the real integration of the charismatic entity within the pastoral life of the particular Church. This requires that the diverse groups recognize the authority of the pastors in the Church as a reality within Christian life itself, and that sincerely desiring to be recognized, received and eventually purified, they place themselves at the service of the ecclesial mission. On the other hand, those who have been entrusted with hierarchical gifts, carrying out the discernment and accompaniment of the charisms, must cordially receive that which the Spirit inspires within the ecclesial communion, being mindful thereof in pastoral activities and esteeming their contribution as an authentic resource for the good of all.⁴

11. Today, the Renewal must learn to maintain the freshness, vitality, and spontaneity that the Holy Spirit gives, all the while remaining deeply Catholic, in docility to the Church's hierarchy. In the coming years, we ask you to continue to be involved in your parishes and Christian communities, and even to increase this involvement if possible. You could make yourselves known to your Bishops, and offer them your services which will be undoubtedly welcomed. And finally, please do not cease to pray for us, your shepherds.

IV. CONFORMITY TO AND PARTICIPATION IN THE CHURCH'S APOSTOLIC GOALS

12. In a culture of relativism that remains suspicious of universal claims, Catholic charismatics have been consistently zealous in proclaiming Jesus Christ, "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Thank you for your constant witness and unflinching confidence in the

⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter *Iuvenescit Ecclesia* (2016), 20.

Lord, who is “the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). In 2014, Pope Francis spoke to 80,000 pilgrims of the Charismatic Renewal in these words:

The charismatic renewal is a great force meant to serve the preaching of the Gospel in the joy of the Holy Spirit. You received the Holy Spirit and he has made you appreciate God’s love for all his children; he has also made you love God’s word... I expect you to share with everyone in the Church the grace of baptism in the Holy Spirit (a phrase we find in the Acts of the Apostles). I expect you to evangelize with the word of God, which proclaims that Jesus lives and that he loves all men and women.⁵

13. Of course, one of the great challenges today remains the fact that our postmodern culture has grown almost deaf to any claims of absolute truth. Yet what could be more absolute than God’s love for every human being? As Catholic charismatics, we ask you to rededicate yourselves to the New Evangelization. This will mean learning how to translate the message of the Gospel into words and actions that can be heard by our contemporaries, without in any way diluting the strength or purity of that message. This can only happen under the guidance and impetus of the Holy Spirit. Be persistent in your efforts to reach the young generations. They too need to experience the freedom that comes from life in the Spirit. And finally, in all your efforts, avail yourselves of the energy, enthusiasm, and valuable contributions of the numerous immigrants to Canada, many of whom have already been impacted by the Renewal in their countries of origin. They represent not only a new youthfulness but very often a different way of seeing and understanding the Spirit’s action in our lives and societies. Their perspectives are necessary and are to be welcomed.

V. A COMMITMENT TO A PRESENCE IN HUMAN SOCIETY

14. Over the past 50 years, our culture has placed ever greater emphasis on the consumption of products. This consumerism has created what Pope Francis has aptly described as a “throw-away culture”⁶ in which the weakest are simply discarded. We give thanks that so many Catholic charismatics have witnessed to a dedication to the least of these, whether through their defense of the unborn through the pro-life movement or through their service to the poor in our urban centres. In many ways, you have exemplified Pope Francis’ call for a Church that is unafraid to go out into the streets and get its hands dirty caring for a wounded world.
15. As many of your original members age, it will be a challenge to maintain the social outreach that may have been done in the past. Yet social action is not merely an option: it is something to which God is calling you. Trust in the Holy Spirit. Do not be afraid to entrust young people with leadership in these areas, helping them to see beyond themselves and be drawn to the beauty of living out God’s vision for humanity. Do not be afraid to engage with other organizations, Catholic or not, that work for social justice. The Gospel has implications for

⁵ Pope Francis, *Address in the 37th National Convocation of the Renewal in the Holy Spirit*. Rome, 1 June 2014.

⁶ Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium*, 53. Also cf. 195.

every dimension of our lives and, indeed, every aspect of our world. Continue to work for the coming of God's kingdom.

16. As we look to the future of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Canada, we invoke God's blessing upon all those currently involved in it, and we implore the maternal intercession of Mary, our heavenly Mother, who herself experienced the very first Pentecost. May the gifts of the Spirit poured out on that day never leave Christ's Church so that all who have been touched by the same Spirit remain steadfast in devotion to the Father in the Son.

25 January 2018

Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, Apostle