

Charismatic Prayer Meetings and Gifts

Presented by Fr. Bob Hogan, B.B.D.

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Some practical guidelines to help charismatic prayer groups function well

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Part One – for Prayer Group Members

Following are some practical things to help charismatic prayer groups to function well.

Come Prepared

Everyone needs to come prepared for the prayer meeting. Preparation is not wrong. Sometimes we get that idea that preparation will ruin spontaneity. But to worship in Spirit and in truth, we need to study. Every prayer group member needs to have a foundation of prayer and meditation built up through the week. Then the Holy Spirit has a storehouse from which He can bring up themes at the prayer meeting. Prophecy can then be received at several levels as the Holy Spirit works with each person's inner storehouse.

Eleven Helpful Attitudes and Actions

Following are eleven points to help your prayer meeting grow. Each person who comes to the prayer meeting should cultivate these attitudes and actions.

1). DAILY PRAYER AND STUDY

The prayer meeting absolutely depends on the daily prayer and study of each member. We must have time set aside each day for prayer and study of God's word in the Scriptures. Leaders cannot assume that everyone is doing this. We all struggle to keep our prayer time and need encouragement. There are many good resources available. Help your group by making these resources available to your group. *Miracle Hour* by Linda Schubert is good for people who are learning how to pray. A series of teachings from this book is recommended. Other good resources include *One Bread, One Body* and *The Word Among Us*, which contain meditations for the daily Scripture readings at Mass. *New Covenant* magazine gives good teaching that will help build the foundation of a solid prayer life. The *CharisCenter Newsletter*, put out by the National Office for Charismatic Renewal, is excellent for leaders.

2). FOCUS ON WORSHIP

Every person who comes to the prayer meeting must focus on worshipping the Lord. We have to overcome the "filling station" mentality which focuses on self. Yes, God does fill us when we worship Him, but our motive in praising Him is not so that we feel good, but to give glory to God. We come together for one main purpose: to worship God. We also come for teaching, fellowship, healing, etc., but these are not central. We come to immerse ourselves in the life of the Trinity!

3). RESPECT VARIETY

There are as many expressions of praise as there are people in the prayer group. We can regard this variety as a gift or as an aggravation. When the way another person is worshipping God gets on my nerves, is the problem with them or with me? Is it the Holy Spirit in me that is disturbed or my flesh? In a good prayer meeting there can be quite a variety of praise within the common focus of worshipping God. We should be blessed by the variety in worship, marveling at how the Holy Spirit builds up a symphony of praise all around us. Of course, this should take place within a context of order.

4). REPENTANCE

Before coming to the meeting, each person should ask himself, "Is there anything that will keep me from being able to worship God?" Is there any anger, jealousy, hurts, worries or pride? Ask the Lord to send His peace. Be honest about my tendencies. Do I always tend to become proud or jealous in certain situations? Has it happened again? Be honest, bring it to God in repentance, and He will bestow His peace. We will be ready to worship.

5). HAVE A GROUP MENTALITY

As Christians our worship is communal, not individualistic. Personal, yes. We each express our worship to God in our own way, but together as the Body of Christ. Great worship is together. There will be a variety of expression, but the praise is built together. We must find just the right balance between individuality of personal expression and the essential togetherness.

6). EXPECTANT FAITH

Before we come, we must expect that God is going to be present in a special way-that "something good is going to happen." Of course there are times when we will just barely stagger in and the Lord will refresh us, but we shouldn't make a habit of this.

7). READINESS TO SHARE AND SERVE

Throughout the week each member should be asking, "What is the Lord doing in my life?" Reflect on this. No one will share all of what the Lord is doing in their life-just the part that becomes anointed and alive during the meeting. Each one should ponder and treasure what God is doing in his or her life.

"When you assemble, one has a psalm, another some instruction to give, still another a revelation to share, one speaks in a tongue, another interprets" (1 Corinthians 14:26).

Good sharing needs preparation, or we tend to ramble. Our sharing ought to be spontaneous, but well reflected upon. It ought to fit. It ought to be to the point. It is easy to start with a genuine word from the Lord and then lose it by adding our own commentary. Our focus needs to stay on the Lord. But we should be gentle with each other when we get off track.

8). COMMITMENT

Each group has a different kind of commitment. It is good to ask the question, "What are we committed to doing together?" At the very least we should:

- pray for each other during the week
- pray for the prayer meeting
- commit to a daily prayer life
- commit to sharing the fruit of that personal time with God.

When people feel supported, they become more faithful. It is frustrating and discouraging when a significant number of people don't come to the prayer meeting. We need to have a core of really committed people or the prayer group will die. We need to talk about commitment. It is important to be realistic and not bite off more than we can chew.

9). TREASURE AND PONDER THE WORD HEARD

The leaders should review the theme of the meeting so that the members have something to take home with them. If the theme is not clear, don't force it, but try to find something to ponder in the week ahead. We must act on God's word in our everyday lives after we are reasonably sure what He is saying to us.

10). RIGHT ORDER IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES

We need to maintain proper relations with our families and friends, with people of the opposite sex, with our brothers and sisters in the faith. This frees us for peace, reconciliation, honesty and unity. If our relationships are not in right order, it means trouble for the prayer meeting. Married people should let their spouse be a part of the prayer group at least to some extent. A couple cannot be totally disconnected in such an important area since their whole lives are related and bound up with each other. This requires wisdom and guidance from the Lord. Pray about this! Call on the grace of matrimony. It is a powerful grace! We need to ask if we are over-involved at church or out of control in our lives.

11). HOSPITALITY

The first impression is the one that is left on newcomers. Did they feel welcomed? Did they feel as if they were part of things? Did they feel cared about without feeling smothered? How we welcome people is very important. We need to listen to them first. We need to accept them where they are and seek to get to know them before we tell them a lot. There will be plenty of opportunity for us to share later. They should feel that we are interested in them. We don't pry, but show an interest in them. We should love them first. If we put ourselves in their place, we will get the right idea. We must teach often how to be hospitable. We all need to learn this, especially in our culture. Our families are in such a mess that many have never learned simple Christian hospitality!

Part 2 – for Prayer Group Leaders

The following remarks are directed especially to prayer group leaders. These are some of the nuts and bolts of leading a good prayer meeting. Just as the other members must come prepared, so too the leaders must prepare for the meeting.

Meetings Time and Length

1). START AND END ON TIME

This is especially true if new people are coming to your meeting. It is important to respect their expectation of the meeting time. This is not to be interpreted rigorously, but with some flexibility according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Starting and ending on time gives a sense of consistency and order to the prayer meeting.

2). LENGTH OF MEETING

A prayer meeting will generally last from 1 to 2 hours. This depends on the size and maturity of the group. A small group, for example, may have a hard time sustaining 1 1/2 hours. If there are new people coming, you can't go on forever. On the other hand, a mature group flowing in the gifts may go longer. If you have regular teaching, you will need extra time to fit it in.

Leadership

3). LEADERS MUST MEET AND PRAY BEFORE THE MEETING

There needs to be a core team of leaders who meet together before the prayer meeting to pray for the prayer meeting and plan things such as teachings. The core team should listen in prayer to see if the Lord is giving a specific focus to the prayer meeting. It is better for a team of two people lead the meeting together. One serves as the presider of the meeting and the other serves as a partner who especially helps discern what is going on.

4). GROW INTO LEADERSHIP

It is a mistake to rise to leadership too quickly. When people are put into a leadership position without growing into it, they tend to feel overly responsible, which leads to burnout. It is hard to remember that the Lord Jesus is in charge and let go. Be who you are. Don't try to take more authority than you have. We need to be prayerfully humble about this, asking the Lord, "What is my authority in this group?" This will depend on our background, our maturity, and how well people know and accept us. Don't try to be more than you are. Let God raise you to the kind of leadership and authority you should have.

5). LEADER NEEDS TO LISTEN MORE THAN TO SPEAK

A good leader will listen well to what is being said. He will ask, "What is the Lord saying in this?" The leader must exhort the people to be open to God's word, to ponder it and treasure it. He will lead the group in responding to the Word in an appropriate way; perhaps by a song, or by kneeling down, or by a time of silence. He may direct the group to focus on a particular image and allow it to move their hearts. The leader needs to use wisdom and prudence to pace the meeting, allowing enough time to ponder God's word, not jumping from one thing to another too quickly. But when one prophecy or word builds on another, it is important to allow this to happen, too. But, in general, we want to avoid the "charismatic smorgasbord" where we get a wide variety of things without really digesting them. Then we come away with no idea what the Lord has said. Again, the leader must use the wisdom that comes from the Holy Spirit to regulate the flow of the meeting. But a rule

of thumb is the following: early in the meeting, the focus is on the praise and worship of God. So if there is a prophecy, etc. at this time, you would normally go right back into praise. But if prophecy, etc. is received later in the meeting, it would be more appropriate to invite people to be quiet and let the Word of God soak in.

Remember the ABC's of Speaking

We need to regularly remind each other of the ABC's in speaking at a prayer meeting:

A – Anointed and Audible

Be aware of your tendencies. If a lot keeps coming to your mind and you tend to have quite a bit to share with the group, be slower to speak and longer to discern. Is this really for the whole group? If, on the other hand, you dread speaking up, you should be quicker to decide that it is the Lord calling you to speak.

Everyone must be discerning and not just shoot from the hip. What do we mean when we say the word is anointed? It could be a sense that the word comes from God. It could be a thought that comes into our mind and persists and we sense that the Lord is present to us in that thought. A sense that it fits. For someone who is new to prophecy, there could be a very powerful urge to share the word, even physical manifestations such as a pounding heart, etc.

Usually the “anointing” becomes more subtle with maturity. This is a very subjective area and you can never be 100% sure that a word is from God, but usually a word is “more certain” or “less certain.” If a word is “less certain,” we usually don't share it with the group.

B-Brief

At times someone may be led by the Holy Spirit to lead the people in a longer meditation, etc., but normally we should be brief and to the point. This gives everybody a chance to speak. Again, there is need for wisdom here. For instance, if a new person goes on and on, let them go, but say something to them after the meeting.

C-Christ-centered

The focus should be on Jesus. We're not just sharing our story; we're giving glory to God and Jesus Christ. This does not mean we suppress our personality and sound like clones of one another; it means we unite our personality to Jesus Christ. We allow Jesus to shine out through our personality.

Planning

Being charismatic doesn't mean just being spontaneous without any planning. In fact, there is a great need in the Charismatic Renewal in the Greater Cincinnati area to pray for more people with gifts of administration. We need people to help bring organization and order within our individual prayer groups. We also need to organize leaders city-wide and regionally. We need to get them together to do some long-term planning. We need people with the charisms to organize this. Where is God calling our prayer groups to be in half a year? What teachings do we need to give then? When will we visit with our neighboring prayer groups? Will we do a whole series of teachings? We need to get together a team to consider these longer range plans.

Resources used to prepare this teaching:

Bringing Prayer Meetings to Life by Fr. Chris Aridas and John Boucher. Excellent!

Prayer Group Leadership Development by Ron Ryan.

Excellent! The core group in each prayer group should go through this book at least every two years. Some of the chapter titles: "The Role of Charismatic Renewal"; "Understanding Baptism in the Holy Spirit"; "The Role of Prayer Groups"; "Praise and Worship"; "Leading a Prayer Meeting"; "The Role of Music Ministry"; "Understanding and Fostering the Charismatic Gifts"; "Developing a Core Group"; "Dealing with Problem Situations."

Part 3 – Song and Praise

THE CHARISMATIC PRAYER MEETING AND GIFTS (PART 3)

Song and Praise

It is good to teach the group about this topic often, since it is central to the Charismatic renewal. The very essence of the renewal is to enter into deep worship of God, to be immersed in the Holy Spirit. How we worship is not so critical as that we worship. It is not natural for people to vocally praise God. If we are not praising God in our personal prayer life, we will probably not do it very well at the prayer meeting. It is tempting for most of us to believe God is calling us to spend our personal prayer time in quiet. But there is a tendency to get caught up in our own agenda if we have not focused on God. But when we enter into praise, something changes in our inner spirit. All of the other stuff we are filled with is cleared out and we open up and are really able to hear God. Now the Holy Spirit is able to speak and act in a way that really changes us. On our own emotions, we are able to praise God for about three minutes. We need to develop a conviction about worshiping God that will propel us beyond this. We need to develop a vocabulary of praise. We need to be able to stay with the praise until we come into the very presence of God. The

The Miracle Hour of Prayer by Linda Schubert is really good for developing praise in our personal prayer time.

Do Regular Teachings

A teaching series on praise from the Scriptures or from praises in the Mass helps Catholics to see that praise is already part of their heritage. The praise psalms (e.g. Psalms 95-104, 113-118, 135-136, 145-150 to name a few) are an inspired source of exalted praise. We can use them to joyfully recall what God has done for us personally and for His whole people in salvation history. It can be helpful to go through the Most Holy Trinity, thanking each Divine Person in turn:

“Father, I praise you for your personal love for me, for my identity as a child of God because You are my Father, for sending Your Son; Jesus Christ, You are my Lord and Savior. You have given Your life on the cross for me. Thank You for being my Brother and Companion. Thank You for my identity as Your disciple and that I can live with You. Holy Spirit, You are the fountain of new life welling up within me. You have made me a temple of the Holy Spirit.”

Praise is Evangelizing Yourself

Praise is evangelizing yourself and giving praise, worship, love, and honor to God. Because praise can be foreign to many people, it is useful to start with something they are already familiar with. For Catholics, we can unveil the tremendous praise contained in the Gloria:

“Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on earth. Lord God, heavenly King, Almighty God and Father. We worship You, we give You thanks, we praise You for Your glory! Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; You are seated at the right hand of the Father, receive our prayer. For You alone are the Holy One, You alone are the Lord, **YOU ALONE ARE THE MOST HIGH, JESUS CHRIST**, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father!”

The Gloria is a tremendous teaching on praise. Quote it! Let it sink in! Do the same with the Holy! Holy! Holy!, with the acclamation before the Great Amen, with the Lord's prayer.

A Heart for Praise

In addition to teaching our people to grow in a language of praise, perhaps by teaching them phrases such as “Jesus, I trust in You,” or “My Lord, and My God,” we need to teach them to be open to the Holy Spirit Who gives us a heart for praise. It is the Holy Spirit that makes praise come alive for us.

Praise at Least 10 Minutes Every Day

IN YOUR DAILY PRAYER TIME spend at least 10 minutes in song and worship and praise. This will focus you on God. Then, when you go to quiet, it will be an anointed quiet. You will be open to what the Lord is saying and doing. We need to help people to understand that this is why we worship. When we go to quiet prayer too quickly, we are filled with our own thoughts and concerns, worries and cares. Praise and worship helps us to be open to what God is saying. It moves the center of our attention to God and opens our hearts to Him.

LISTEN

After opening our heart to God, we should spend some time listening to God. To help treasure what God is saying to us, some people may want to keep a prayer journal. Some may just occasionally jot down inspirations or note how God is working in their lives, while others may produce a whole written dialogue every time they pray. This depends on the person. We should do whatever is helpful to genuine prayer.

LIVE IN THE PRESENT

We need to develop recollection, that is, living in the present. God doesn't speak in the past or the future, but in the present. This is often hard for us, since we may be worried about the future or upset about the past! Worship helps us put this aside so we can hear God speak in the present. We need to keep developing that sense of God in the present. SILENCE. We need to help our prayer groups be OK with silence.

Generally it is good to begin the prayer meeting with everyone standing. This gives us the idea that we are standing before the Lord! (Of course this depends on the age, etc., of our prayer group members-we don't want to keep them standing forever.)

TIME FOR SILENCE

But after a time of good praise, the leader may invite the group to quiet. For example, the leader may say something like, “The Lord has said a number of words to us; let's take an extended time for quiet to let them sink in.” The leader needs to give permission to the people for this so they aren't uncomfortable with the silence. Otherwise they could be wondering, “Are we supposed to be silent or not be silent?” Other times the quiet flows quite naturally and no one needs to announce it, but there are times when it helps to say, “The Lord is calling for us to be quiet now.” We also need to help people know how the Lord works in that quiet.

Worship Opens Us to the Spiritual Gifts

We need regular teaching on worship in the context of a charismatic prayer meeting. The book by Ron Ryan, Prayer Group Leadership Development, is good for this.

Part 4 – Teaching and Types of Sharing

Without REGULAR TEACHING, the prayer group is in trouble. We need a foundation to grow from. Be humble and use resources that are available. We need to plan our meetings. For instance, when we will have a series of meetings on praise and worship, or on the role of the Holy Spirit and the baptism in the Holy Spirit? Fanning the Flame is a must for all Catholic charismatics. It shows how the baptism in the Holy Spirit relates to the sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. It is the best explanation available to place the charismatic renewal into the Catholic context.

Modified Life in the Spirit Resources

Fr. Hogan has developed a modified Life in the Spirit Seminar which heavily uses the four following resources:

- 1) Fanning the Flame, mentioned above.
- 2) Miracle Hour by Linda Schubert, mentioned previously.
- 3) Coming to Life: Being Baptized in the Holy Spirit by Fr. Robert DeGrandis. This is very helpful. It goes through the basic themes of the Life in the Spirit Seminar with simple explanations and stories.
- 4) An Introduction to Catholic Charismatic Renewal by John and Therese Boucher. This is a new pamphlet that came out just a couple of years ago.

Other Resources

Renewal in the Spirit Seminar

Fr. Hogan's own modified seminar, Renewal in the Spirit Seminar, has more teaching than the traditional Seminar, while maintaining the same basic outline. He has included 45 minutes of teaching for each seminar, more thoroughly showing how the baptism in the Holy Spirit fits into the Catholic setting. He also has made an outline of reading assignments from the above mentioned four books for each of the seven weeks of the Seminar.

Charicenter Newsletter

Charicenter Newsletter is available from Charicenter USA, P.O. Box 628, Locust Grove, VA 22508-0628. They would appreciate a \$10 donation for the newsletter, although none is required. It helps support the work they do, such as a recent symposium on "The Baptism in the Holy Spirit and the Church," which was attended by 70 theologians. Together with the bishops, they are helping to create a context in which the baptism in the Holy Spirit can be understood by Catholics.

SPECIAL MEETINGS

It is good, after listening to the Lord, to plan special meetings from time to time.

EMPOWERING FOR SERVICE MEETING

Every two months or so, even if the prayer group members do not minister together but individually, it is good to meet for this purpose. Start out with praise as in a regular meeting. This is to come into the presence of God, to immerse ourselves in the Holy Spirit, to put on the mind of Christ. Then each person is invited to reflect in quiet for 15 or 20 minutes on his life of service, whether in family, at work, in the parish, or in the prayer group, etc. We allow the Lord to speak to

us about this service. Is He calling us to let go of some area, or to focus on another? Believing that we have indeed heard the Lord, we then break up in to small groups to share what each person has heard. Then we pray over each other to receive God's power in that area. A spiritual gift can be any area of ability or responsibility that we surrender to God and begin to experience His guidance and power.

PUTTING OFF THE OLD SELF, PUTTING ON THE NEW SELF MEETING.

Again, start with praise and worship to focus on the Lord. Then spend some time in quiet, after reading, perhaps Galatians 5 or Romans 8 which tells us that the Spirit puts to death the deeds of the flesh. We want to get the old self off of us and put on the new self in Jesus Christ. We want to be formed in the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, etc. What deeds of the flesh is God trying to put off of us? What is my struggle now? Bring it to Jesus, Who took all our sins and all our wounds and our old self to the cross. If we bring it to Him, He has the power to free us and create a new self in us. After time for reflection and listening to the Lord, we again break into small groups, share what we have heard, and pray over one another for the graces of inner transformation.

FELLOWSHIP FOCUS.

Once in a while, have praise and a party! This gives us a chance to share what's going on in our lives. But we must make sure we pray first and are centered on Him.

YEARLY RETREAT.

It is good to have a special day when we all get together other than the normal prayer meeting time. Again, we may need to be humble and take advantage of resources provided by other groups. INTERCESSORY AND HEALING PRAYER. The focus of the prayer meeting should not be on intercessory or healing prayer, even if you are a healing ministry. Worshiping God is what opens us to what God wants us to do. What is more important to deal with in my life: my hurts or my self-centeredness? Even though our hurts are more immediate, and may lead to self-centeredness and fear, etc., the biggest healing we need is to be freed from our self-centeredness. Then we can be God-centered and other-centered. If we pray over people too often, it may lead to an increase in self-centeredness. This could be happening if we do not witness any growth after repeated prayers. It is true that we all need support and prayers, but that should never be the only reason to come to the prayer meeting.

More Resources

New Covenant Magazine. Write Our Sunday Visitor, 200 Noll Plaza, Huntington, IN 46750-9957.

WWCCR (Western Washington) Publications. They have many resources for growth, including Ron Ryan's Prayer Group Leadership Development Program, Born in the Spirit Seminars (similar to the Life in the Spirit Seminars), Alive in the Spirit Seminars (a follow-up growth seminar). Presentation Ministries has lot's of good resources, including One Bread, One Body, many other pamphlets and tapes, and a Discipleship Program for ongoing training. This is a great resource in our area. Write 3230 McHenry Ave., Cincinnati, OH 45211 or call 662-JESU.

Franciscan University of Steubenville Summer Conferences. Going to conferences together can be a great way to be renewed and re-focused.

Servant Book Express. Many helpful books.

Charism, the Long Island Charismatic Renewal Office has many excellent teaching tapes. Fr. Chris Aridas and John Boucher.

Charismatic Renewal Services, 237 North Michigan Street, South Bend, IN 46601. Should be the first place to look for any of the above resources. They have the best prices anywhere and free UPS delivery, with a special discount for orders over \$125.

St. Boniface Parish in Florida has an excellent leadership training manual. They have formed small groups in the entire parish.

The Spiritual Enrichment Seminars, a video by Fr. Paul Feider. Comes with booklets for leaders and participants. This is an excellent for smaller prayer groups which may not have the resources to put on their own Life in the Spirit Seminar.

Part 5 – Questions and Answers

THE CHARISMATIC PRAYER MEETING AND GIFTS (PART 5)

Afternoon Session, presented by Fr. Bob Hogan, B.B.D. and Obie Nicolini of the Incarnate Word Community in Dayton.

What if Can't be Explicitly Charismatic?

Q: I have been asked to present a program for Confirmation parents but it cannot be explicitly "charismatic." What should I do?

A: (Fr. Bob): First of all, the Holy Spirit works in other ways than just the charismatic renewal. We need to realize this and be humble about it. At the same time, we need to be honest and tell people our own background. We do not have to apologize for being charismatic. The pope has shown his support for the charismatic renewal and the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Office is under the Vatican.

We need to keep telling people about the grace of the renewal. We need people to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Not all of those who are baptized in the Holy Spirit need to be in prayer groups, but some need to make this commitment. Some people are called into the charismatic movement, not for the sake of the movement, but so that the baptism in the Holy Spirit can be brought into the heart of the Church. This is one purpose of the charismatic renewal-to bring a deeper understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit to the wider Church.

As for the program for the Confirmation parents, you can put together something from parts of other resources. Ask the question: "What can I say to this particular audience? What will they be able to receive? What must I say to them?" You want to get across some of these fundamental teachings:

Fundamental Teachings

- 1) we all need a power and guidance that is greater than ourselves;
- 2) we all need to be able to enter into God's presence in prayer. Praise and worship are important! People need to hear this even if they are uncomfortable with it. We need to help them enter into this life of prayer, into the presence of God in deep worship. This does not mean that we have to promote a particular style of worship (hands in the air, tongues, etc.);
- 3) we must help them to understand salvation in Christ and then help them make a personal commitment to Jesus. These basic truths are the same for all Christians, not just charismatics. We all need to be open to be empowered and guided by God, or we are just humanists.

Q: The women in our group seem to be more open to the gifts of the Spirit than the men. Is this true in general? What can I do to help the men?

A: (Fr. Bob): Women seem to have a more intuitive sense that helps them to be more open to inner inspiration. Sometimes the problem with men is a real lack of openness, and they need to get over that. But even if they are willing, men are more task oriented. They will need more specific teaching and encouragement.

Men more than women need to understand what they are supposed to be doing before they will act. Sometimes it is helpful to have small groups of men only. Then they may participate in a way they never would in a mixed group. While it is good for men and women to meet separately, it is also important for married couples to pray and share together.

Discernment Necessary

Also, while men need more encouragement to share their inspirations, women need more discernment. They are intuitive to things from many sources and need more to identify what is from God before sharing their inspirations.

A: (Obie): Men's nights are a good idea. You have to talk to men differently. You have to appeal to the way they are. You have to call them forth. It is true that women usually respond much easier than men do. But men can respond. Their emotions are just as deep. It's just that their wall is thicker. You man need to break through that wall, and not so delicately as you would with women. It takes a special gift, a special wisdom to do this. It takes the right person so speak to them. We also need to encourage the men who are exercising the gifts and hold them up as role models to the other men.

Summary

(Fr. Bob): To sum up:

- 1) men need more specific teaching. They need to understand more before they'll be open to it;
- 2) men need a more specific calling: "It's important for you to be open to this." "We need you as part of this."

Q: What would cause a prayer group to lack the gifts? How do we correct this?

A; (Fr. Bob): The gifts don't come out of thin air.

Prayer Life Essential

The prayer group members must have a life of personal prayer and praise. Each member must have regular daily prayer time, read Scripture daily, and ponder the Word of God, taking it in. Then you have a storehouse that the Holy Spirit can draw from during the prayer meeting. You also must be trying to grow in the gift of worship. Worship clears you out enough to be open to what God is saying inside. Then the gifts are manifested when the Holy Spirit pulls something out of your storehouse during the prayer meeting-prophecy, words of wisdom and knowledge, etc.

Prophecy and Word of Knowledge

By the way, let's not emphasize prophecy so much that we neglect the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge. These gifts come out as small teachings. The word of wisdom could be an insight into some aspect of the faith. The word of knowledge could be an insight as to what God is doing in the group right now. You don't generally speak in the first person as you would when giving prophecy. Prophecy usually encourages or lifts up the group, gets your attention, or sets a direction. It usually doesn't give a whole teaching. Once again, it is essential to the prayer meeting for people to have prayer and study and reflection as a consistent part of their lives.

Part 6 – Prophecy and Discernment

THE CHARISMATIC PRAYER MEETING AND GIFTS (PART 6)

Afternoon Session, presented by Fr. Bob Hogan, B.B.D. and Obie Nicolini of the Incarnate Word Community in Dayton.

Should Prophecy be Written?

Q: Should prophecy be written down? Is prophecy just for the people who are present, or for the parish, etc.?

A: (Obie): You have to look at the context the prophecy is spoken in. Usually it has the purpose of encouraging us, building us up, freeing us to respond to God. This type of prophecy is probably just for the prayer meeting itself, helping us to recognize what God is doing.

Sometimes prophecy is more specific and directive. This kind needs a lot more discernment. Prophecy is both the Word of God and the word of man. This mixture is in all prophecy. As St. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13:9, our “prophesying is not perfect.” None of the gifts are perfect because they operate through us, who are not perfect. However, the gifts are valuable. Prophecy is the Word of God. But prophecy is not the Word of God in the same sense that Scripture is the Word of God.

We can make the mistake of taking all prophecy with the same weight or even take prophecy with the same weight as Scripture. If this were so, we would be obliged to write down all prophecy, reflect on it, and act properly on it. But this is not the main purpose of most prophecy.

There are directive prophecies that must be discerned and acted upon. For instance, in 1978 a prophecy was received by a prayer group in Lebanon that said, “Get out!” They took this literally, and the next week the place where they met was bombed. You will know it if its a prophecy you're supposed to act on. The Lord gives both the Word and the ability to not misinterpret it. The Lord doesn't usually give prophecy in a group that is for anyone else outside the group, but there are exceptions.

A: (Fr. Bob):

Discerning Prophecy

Discerning prophecy takes great prudence. I recall a woman in a prayer group who had psychological difficulties. There was no doubt that her prophecies were mixed with her human need, but if we listened well, there was something from the Lord in it.

The core group felt that it was not our job to tell her to stop prophesying, but rather to help her, since there was this kernel of God's Word in what she said. Since all prophecy is imperfect to some degree, it is better to work with what we receive. People prophesy on different levels. Someone without a consistent prayer life may still receive inspiration from God, but it tends to be about the same thing all the time. Yet God will work through them in what they are able to receive.

Prophecy is often deeper with a person who has a real ongoing life of prayer, study, and worship. If someone says, "God told me to tell you this," be careful. I would never say this. Rather, I may say to someone, in prayer, "You know, it just struck me that if there's any area in your life where you're lacking forgiveness, I encourage you to be open to God working in that way in your life." Then, it's up to them. If it's a true word, it will strike home. God will already be preparing the person to receive such a word. I don't need to tell them, "God told me to tell you this." I need to share what I sense, which is imperfect.

The goal is not that I get out my word – the goal is that the word is taken in and changes a life. But it is true that at times we feel, "I've got to tell them. God wants me to say it!" On the one hand, we must be open to what God wants, but on the other we must be reasonably sure that God is the one urging me to speak. It is best to give more specific prophecy more time, to discern it on a wider basis.

A: (Obie): In a group where the gifts are not operating, sometimes expectations are larger than life. Then we need to make the group aware that it's OK to do this wrong. If we're growing in the Lord, we're going to make mistakes, especially at the beginning. Our attitude should be, "Lord, we lay this in your hands and we want to grow in it. Now help us."

Permission to Speak, not Expecting Perfection

The whole group needs to work together on this. It is freeing to give people permission to be imperfect and know that we will stand by them and support them, especially when they give us permission to correct them, and we give them permission to correct us, too! Some teaching along these lines would be good. It can be very freeing in opening up the gifts to ask, as you pray, "What are you sensing right now?" "What's going on right now in your heart?" We often just need prompting to speak what is in our hearts! God is giving all kinds of stuff, but people are afraid to speak out because nobody ever gave them permission!

A: (Fr. Bob): Sometimes people just need to be comfortable enough with each other to open up. Sometimes it's helpful to break into small groups just to share. You don't need to have an inspiration – just share what God has been doing in your life. This allows people to become comfortable enough to speak.

Small Group Sharing and Whole Group Sharing Different

While we're on this subject, we also need to teach them the difference between small group sharing and whole group sharing. It is legitimate in the small group to tell anything and everything that is going on with you and the Lord, but in the larger group we need to be more discerning. Does what I have to say fit in with what God is doing in the group? You don't want to be too rigid about this, either, but people shouldn't just throw out whatever's hitting them.

As leaders, pray for the gift of wisdom! You have to sense when things are getting out of hand, but correct gently. Treat people as people. Again, avoid extremes. But these ways of getting people to share can open them up to share inspirations in the prayer meeting.

Part 7 – More on Prophecy

THE CHARISMATIC PRAYER MEETING AND GIFTS (PART 7)

Afternoon Session, presented by Fr. Bob Hogan, B.B.D. and Obie Nicolini of the Incarnate Word Community in Dayton.

Prophecy for Everyone?

Q: A lady in our prayer group has a prophecy for nearly everybody. She'll say, "I've written down a prophecy for you." Do you think this is really from God?

A: (Fr. Bob):

Inner Messages

There may be an influence from the Marian movement where people are writing down inner messages. God can do that. But most of what God says is to me. He wants me to hear something that will change my life. If we think God is always giving us something for someone else, but not for us, we're probably not hearing God. God knows we need to be changed first. We need to take the plank out of our own eye before we take any specks out of anyone else's eye.

We need to be very humble about this. Some people do have specific insights. But we must still present the insight in a way that will be fruitful. Unless we know the person very well, it is best not to give a direct message. Even if we are absolutely sure it is from the LORD, it is better to pray,

"LORD, if this is meant to be shared, give me the opportunity."

Then share it if He gives the opportunity.

Alternately, simply suggest to the person, "Did you ever think about it this way?" and give the gist of what it's about to them and see if it strikes home. Usually the people who give these kinds of messages give you the message and then you never see them again, so there's no opportunity to discern it in the Body of Christ.

Ask the Lord

We need to be careful with any prophecy that's not somehow tied in to the wider Body of Christ to be discerned. Would this person be willing to sit down with me and with some other people to see what the LORD God is saying to me? If they are not willing to do this, it makes their prophecy very questionable. If the person just approaches you and says, "I'm an empty vessel that does God's work and here's God's message for you" and then leaves-that's a misunderstanding of how God works. We've got to be careful. When someone does give us a message like this, don't just dismiss it outright. It is better to pray,

"LORD, I look at this, I take it in, I put it into the storeroom of my mind and heart. If it is something that is meant for me, I trust that you will bring it back."

God Confirms Prophecies

Whether through other circumstances or events, or through our prayer time, God will confirm the things that are meant for us and make them lasting. We put it in that storage room and if the Spirit wants to use it, He will bring it back. We need to trust that He will bring it back at just the right time.

We in the Charismatic movement need to be careful of giving prophecy to others. We get a bad name when we have people running around giving messages to their pastor, their priest, etc., about everything. Then we wonder why they're not open to the Charismatic renewal! Remember: we have to deal with people first, message second.

People First, Message Second

The message is essential, but God loves people first. We need to have an involvement with people. Within that involvement, God will sometimes speak to us for each other to build each other up, to help each other. In this context we want to be open. For example, during a Life in the Spirit seminar people on the team will come up and report what they believe the LORD is saying. I just try to take it in and, sure enough, frequently it comes back at just the right moment. This was something I needed to hear, I needed to know and because they shared it with me, the Holy Spirit showed me the right time and the right way to use it. So, don't quickly dismiss everything, but put it in the storeroom and ask, "LORD, if it's meant to be, I trust you'll bring it back."

And if the message is something really specific, get more people involved to discern it.

Q: [inaudible]

A: (Obie): In that kind of prophecy, ask "What is the connection of the person who gives it to the people?" Is there some form of commitment, some form of responsibility? Is this person teachable? Are they connected somewhere? Are they flighty, that is running from one prayer group to another? Sometimes it is just a misunderstanding of the role of prophecy. If they're not grounded somewhere where they can get the kind of teaching or correction they need, they may mean well, and in fact may be getting something from the LORD, but the effect is not usually good. If we have responsibility for the group, we need to do whatever is necessary; to talk to this person, to find out what we can, to help them get connected, etc.

Where Does Mary Fit In?

Q: I left a prayer group because there was so much emphasis on miracles, the Blessed Mother, the Blessed Sacrament, the Rosary, etc. and not much time for praising Jesus. How does Mary fit into a charismatic prayer meeting?

A: (Fr. Bob): I can't do this justice here since my doctoral dissertation is on Mary and the Charismatic Renewal and I can give you 600 pages worth. I love the Rosary!

In the leaders meeting before the Renewal in the Spirit Seminars, we pray the Rosary and then we go into a time of worship. Mary is our companion. She opens us to the grace of the Holy Spirit. Mary was the first person to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. So Mary is companion who helps us enter into praise. Her Magnificat is a prophetic praise prayer! So, we need to enter in to the spirit of Mary in praying, but our focus is not mainly talking about Marian apparitions or events. Mary helps us to be receptive to the Holy Spirit. She was among the 120 at Pentecost. Mary is a woman of praise, filled with glory!

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the LORD. My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.... “

We need to re-teach praise, and one way that can help some Marian people is to understand Mary's praise. For a change of pace you might want to devote part of a prayer meeting, from time to time, to a different kind of prayer. Begin with a time of worship as usual, and then perhaps have a more meditative kind of prayer, for example, the Rosary.

Major Focus is Entering into Worship

But the major focus of what we are about is entering into worship. Mary can help us enter in to that. Charismatics have a tendency to want the instant inspiration, which sometimes can be superficial. Be honest about it! We need to have a real life of prayer. In our personal prayer we need to worship so that God brings us into anointed quiet. Then when we read Scripture, it really moves us. Or we can just be in a more contemplative presence of the LORD. We need both contemplative prayer and prayer of praise. They work hand in hand. In that contemplative presence, the LORD can give us deeper insight. He can immerse us in His love. Praise opens us up, prepares us for good quality contemplation.

Sometimes we need to teach our people that each kind of prayer has its place. I love the Rosary. I say it every day. I believe that by treasuring each of the Mysteries, I'm constantly letting the main themes of the Christian life sink into me. Many of the inspirations I have their source in the Rosary. It's powerful! But we need to help people understand the role of worship, which is the focus of what we're doing in a charismatic prayer meeting. This we need to make sure we keep clear.

Spiritual Books and Scripture

Q: I can get so caught up in spiritual books that I neglect the Scriptures. Then I wonder what is the right balance. Tell us exactly what you read!

A: (Fr. Bob): [Laughter]. I have to do a lot of reading because I'm a theologian and I have to keep up with things. But some things move me and change me more. Some particular book or thing I'm reading may strike me. It hits me and I keep going back to it. I read it two or three times. I underline it and I mark it. I spend time and prayer with certain sections.

For me, much of what I teach comes from the book called *The Life Changer* (published by Servant Publications) by Fr. Francis Martin, who is a priest in the Charismatic Renewal and a Scripture scholar.

There's also a new book on the Holy Spirit by Alan Schreck called *Hearts Aflame*. Excellent! It talks about the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church and the charismatic movement. It just came out from Servant Books. Alan Schreck is from the University of Steubenville. He was one of my teachers. He has an earlier book called *Catholic and Christian* which is the best book I know explaining Catholic background in an understandable way. I also like a couple of other authors you wouldn't know as well, since they're non-Catholic.

Richard J. Foster is a charismatic Quaker whose books on prayer and spirituality are just wonderful. I have certain people I just keep going back to. I say, "LORD, sink this into me!" When we evaluate our spiritual reading, it's not just quantity. What has become part of us? Again, I like the image of the storehouse. We've reflected and meditated on it so much that it's stored up in us and the Holy Spirit then can use it whenever He wants.

Only Catholic Literature?

Q: Do we have to limit ourselves to Catholic books in a Life in the Spirit Seminar, etc.?

A: (Fr. Bob): Again, you've got to use prudence. It depends on the audience you're dealing with. It depends on the situation. It depends on good order with your pastor. If your pastor doesn't want anything but Catholic material, then don't use anything but Catholic material. You may still take inspiration and ideas from other books and use them.

My own approach, which is the wider Catholic teaching, is that we believe in an ecumenical Church. We see gifts in others and should be able to use them. The Vatican has dialogue with other churches, and they read other people's books. We should learn from them. I've been blessed by other people's books. I've been blessed by Richard Foster, this charismatic Quaker; Dr. Larry Crabb is a Christian psychologist that I also like very much and I use his ideas a great deal. In situations where it won't present a problem, I explain these things. In other situations I may still use their ideas, but translate them a little more into a Catholic context.

On the one hand, we need to encourage positive, Vatican II understanding of Catholicism, that we can learn from Christians of other denominations, but on the other hand we have to be aware that there are books, sometimes Pentecostal books in the past, that did some things that weren't consistent with Catholic understanding and led to some confusion. We have to be careful. There may be some wonderful stuff, but some of it we cannot use the way they would.

Spirit-Filled as a Description – Be Careful

For example, at the last meeting (September 17, 1995 at St. Ignatius Church in Cincinnati) I said, "I do not like using the word 'spirit-filled.'" As in, "I am a spirit-filled Christian." It's very common among Pentecostals. I think it leads to two problems:

1) It can make you feel like you've already got it all; you're wrong if you do!

But the Spirit may have touched certain areas of your life and other areas are totally under the control of the flesh. That's why Paul is writing all these people about the flesh and the spirit. These are all baptized-in-the-Holy-Spirit people, friends! These are people so-called "filled with the Holy Spirit," but whole areas of their lives haven't been transformed yet because they haven't submitted those areas to the Holy Spirit;

2) "Spirit-filled" can impede a true understanding of the Holy Spirit.

As Catholics we believe that in Baptism everyone receives the Holy Spirit. God gives fully. We may not have received fully. That's what baptism in the Holy Spirit is about-preparing you to receive more fully God's gift that He has already imparted through the sacraments.

We need to realize that Jesus loves us before we love Him! Jesus chooses us before we chose Him! I have no problem baptizing little children into the household of the faith. God is telling them, "I love you before you love Me! I choose you before you choose Me!"

God is Never Give Incompletely – We Receive Incompletely

But at some point, you need to personally appropriate that through faith and hope and love so it becomes alive for you. But God has given all that He wants to give in the sacrament. God is never incomplete in giving what He wants to give. We are incomplete in receiving. That's the Catholic understanding of this. That's why you need that Fanning the Flame document. Read that to understand it in a Catholic context, which is much better. I think Pentecostals would do much better if they stopped using the word "spirit-filled," too, not just the Catholics. It sets up a dichotomy-what is it saying about the person who is not "spirit-filled"? But the word is trying to say something. It is saying, "I have had an experience of the Holy Spirit helping me know Jesus in a deeper way." We need to be able to say that – to not deny the experience – to not deny the importance of it. But not to act as if the Holy Spirit....

I know that the Holy Spirit was working in me as a little kid. I got up early every day and went to daily Mass from the second grade to the seventh grade because I knew "that's Jesus Christ there." I wouldn't have known that except by the Holy Spirit. However, my senior year in high school, I also gave my life more personally to Jesus and experienced the Scriptures becoming alive, experienced Jesus present right there with me and had a new ability to pray and a desire to serve that freed me in a new way. But that experience is not an end in itself. The Holy Spirit wants to be poured out on you in a continual way. We need to continue to ask for those gifts.

So, yes, we need to be open and learn from all the faiths. Be careful that you try to understand what might not be consistent. You're going to run into problems because some priests just really don't know what the Catholic Church says about the Holy Spirit. But you've got to be prudent and loving with that situation.

Part 8 – Learning from Other Faiths

THE CHARISMATIC PRAYER MEETING AND GIFTS (PART 8)

Afternoon Session, presented by Fr. Bob Hogan, B.B.D. and Obie Nicolini of the Incarnate Word Community in Dayton.

Spirit-Filled not a Biblical Term

Q: [inaudible]

A: (Fr. Bob): It all depends on the person that's involved and how they're going to react to it. There's nothing in the Catholic Church that says we shouldn't be learning things from other Christian faiths. But we need to be discerning.

Q: When I tell people from other faiths that I'm a Catholic, they say, "You don't talk like one!" How can I explain it to them if I can't use the term "spirit-filled"?

A: (Fr. Bob): If I get the opportunity in the right way I explain to them why I think that "spirit-filled" is inappropriate.

First of all, it's not Biblical! It's not Biblical! Do you realize that? There is nothing about a "spirit-filled" Christian anywhere in the Bible! It's not a Biblical term. It's a creation of us.

The Bible talks about being filled with the Holy Spirit, but it doesn't talk about that just as an end in itself. We know they received the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, but in Acts 4 the early Church begins to be persecuted and they gather together and pray, "Lord, now we're under persecution. We have a new thing we've got to deal with that's different than we had before." They pray and it says, "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and the place shook."

Filled with the Spirit is an Ongoing Process

The Holy Spirit continues to be imparted for each new challenge; we need to bring the Holy Spirit into every situation, every part of our lives—our pride, our prayer, our family—it's an ongoing process. So that's why I think you just need to be able to ask, "Have you experienced the Holy Spirit making Jesus personally real for you?" That's the heart of baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Fr. Francis Martin says it like this:

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a grace of revelation by which we come to understand Who Jesus Christ is, that we realize Him truly as Lord and Savior, and we begin to have an experiential knowledge of that inside. This does not mean I'm perfect! But something new is there, so there's nothing wrong in saying, "it's a new experience of the Holy Spirit making Jesus more real and alive for me."

But to give it the general term "spirit-filled" causes problems. If I call myself "spirit-filled" then it means there must be others who aren't "spirit-filled."

What about Born Again?

Q: Could we say “born-again”?

A: (Fr. Bob): We can't say it, it's too short – we Catholics are long-winded! A good starting basis for explaining what has happened to us is:

- 1) “I've had an experience of the Holy Spirit being renewed, awakened and made alive in me in a way that made Jesus more personally real”;
- 2) “I now experience God as someone Who actually is guiding me”; and
- 3) “I experience God's power and strength to follow His ways, a strength that I know is more than myself.”

A simplistic example may help: we're like a glass of milk. When we are baptized in the Holy Spirit, chocolate syrup (Jesus and the Holy Spirit) is poured into us, but it needs to get stirred up. As we exercise faith, hope, and love through prayer and the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit begins to affect more and more of us, just as a spoon stirs the chocolate syrup into more and more of the milk. That is what being open to the Holy Spirit is meant to do.

How to Encourage Gift of Prophecy?

Q: How do we encourage a person who is new to the gift of prophecy to exercise their gift? What if they are too shy to come up to the microphone in a large meeting; how can their gift be discerned and encouraged?

A: (Fr. Bob): In any large gathering you need to have a discerner. You need to have someone to go to. At any big National meeting there are always one or two people on the team who are discerners. A person goes and shares at least the gist of what they're saying and those people discern if this fits, how it fits, when it should fit...

Q: That's not what I'm asking. Let's say a person has just gone through a Life in the Spirit Seminar and they feel they have received the gift of prophecy. But they feel too bashful to go up to the microphone. Should they just speak it out from where they are in the prayer group body? Or should they be told to wait until they can come up and share it with everybody?

A: (Fr. Bob): It depends on the order of the group. If the order of the group is that we always speak in the microphone, then they all need to speak in the microphone. If the group's order is that they can speak from their place or from the microphone, then they can do either.

We can encourage people by once in a while bringing together those who feel they have been receiving gifts of prophecy, or who feel the Lord wants them to be open to prophecy. Those who are more experienced with prophecy can teach the less experienced. It even talks in Scripture about prophets discerning prophets, so they can get some teaching and can be open to how the Holy Spirit works.