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- For the continued outreach of the Renewal worldwide and the work and financial needs of ICCRS.
- For the School of Healing Prayer for Leaders at Jacksonville on October 20–25, 2008
- For the National Leaders' Conference in Nashville on November 14–16, 2008
- That this Year of St. Paul will be a special grace for the Charismatic Renewal and the whole Church.
- That the Bishops' Synod on "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church" will bless the Church with a new thirst and love for God's Word.
- That each of us will accept our call to evangelize and use our gifts to build the kingdom of God among us.

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How to proclaim and receive the Good News in prayer communities

by *Therese Boucher*

Stop and think about the last prayer meeting, ministry meeting or charismatic gathering you attended. Surely there was praise and listening to the word of God. However, did you have time to dwell on God's word, or to share your particular challenges in bringing the good news of Jesus into daily life? Part of proclaiming God's word is letting it echo in our hearts. As St. Paul exhorts us in Colossians (3:16), "Christ's message in all its richness must live in your hearts."

Walter Matthews, in his NSC leaflet, *Charismatic Prayer Meetings*, offers a good explanation of how God's word is proclaimed at gatherings. He points out that the first element of praise helps us proclaim God's glory. The second element is listening to the Lord through scripture, prophecy and teachings. The third element applies God's loving care through intercessory prayer. But is our experience of "listening to the Lord" successful; or does "listening" become sharing of a string of scriptures and lengthy silences without the opportunity to apply God's word to our lives?

Ponder and pour over the word

If you find it difficult to take prayer meeting scriptures to heart, leaders might occasionally modify a prayer meeting by adding *lectio divina*, or sacred reading, between proclaiming God's word and intercessory prayer. This approach has been used by monastic communities for centuries and can be helpful at ministry meetings, workshops, bible studies and even at

large charismatic gatherings. Here are the steps. They take about ten to fifteen minutes.

- ✚ The leader of the meeting chooses and slowly proclaims one of the previous scripture readings. The goal is to allow time for group meditation and sharing.
- ✚ The passage is repeated again, inviting everyone to listen for a word or phrase that strikes the heart or mind.

- ✚ These phrases are prayerfully repeated out loud.

- ✚ Next, invite people to share the personal meaning of each phrase with the group (of ten or less). In a group of more than ten, people can share with someone nearby.

Reasons for this approach:

1. As Pope Paul VI pointed out in *On Evangelization in the Modern World*, the first people we should delve into the word with are each other. "The Church begins by being evangelized herself. She is the community of believers, the community of hope lived and communicated... and she needs to listen unceasingly to what she must believe (13)."
2. Sharing meaningful phrases helps us consider the relationship between our daily lives and God's particular word. It often triggers the gift of prophecy, as well.

3. Scripture based faith sharing provides an entry point into the community for new people, especially those who enjoyed small group sharing during a Holy Spirit Seminar.

4. *Lectio* offers a communal model of receiving God's word and a good transition to intercessory prayer for the needs that have surfaced.

Faith sharing during a Holy Spirit Seminar

It is also important to review how we receive God's word during a Holy Spirit Seminar. Too often we think of talks as the key proclamation. But this is not true. Small group sharing is equally important. It is faith sharing that helps people explore their response to the good news and discover concrete ways to live in the Holy Spirit. Faith sharing is like connective tissue, or glue, linking daily life and God's interven-

tion. The Spirit awakens faith as we share our experiences of accepting or rejecting God's word. Successful faith sharing groups also allow participants to feel at home with community members later on. It is one of the first things participants look for after a seminar. And it is ongoing sharing of our relationships with God that connects all of us as a growing community.

But good faith sharing during a seminar does not happen by accident. It happens through deliberate actions, like befriending new people, rather than spending time socializing with old friends. It happens through training at ongoing team meetings where listening and sharing skills are learned. It happens when we nurture people's daily spiritual lives through phone calls and emails. So let us commit ourselves to deeper, more conscious ways of receiving God's word thru sacred read-

ing and faith sharing. Let us pray with the US bishops, "Awakened and energized by the Spirit, let us strengthen our commitment and intensify our efforts to help the adults in our communities be touched and transformed by the life-giving message of Jesus, to explore its meaning, experience its power, and live in its light... This is the Lord's work. In the power of the Spirit it will not fail but will bear lasting fruit" (*Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States*, USCCB, pg 35). ♦



Therese Boucher is a writer and speaker. She has written several books, among them The New Life in the spirit Seminars Team Manual: Catholic Edition 2000 which is available through the National Service Committee.

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