



## Vision for prayer groups

by David Thorp

In the imaginative world of cartoonist Johnny Hart, creator of the comic strip *B.C.*, there is a strange looking bird called an apteryx. In one strip the apteryx, a wingless bird with hairy feathers, looks a little confused as it is walking by a caveman. “Hello there,” it says, “I’m an aspirin.” The caveman begins to howl in laughter. The apteryx quickly realizes the mistake and blurts out, “I mean, I’m an apteryx.” The caveman laughs even more and replies, “I liked you better when you were an aspirin.” The bird, dark clouds and question marks above its head, walks away but quickly returns. “Hello there,” it says, “I’m an aspirin.” “What happened to apteryx?” the caveman asked. “I decided that being liked better is more important,” replied the apteryx.

The apteryx’s conclusion—“being liked better is more important”—can be a response that we make. Individually we can compromise or try to hide our identity to gain acceptance or so that we don’t stand out or so as not to ruffle feathers.

We can do the same thing as groups. After saying, “Hello, we’re part of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal” there can be reactions that make us want to hide or downplay aspects of our identity. If we do, then our mission can also be compromised. It is important for each person, for each prayer group, for the Charismatic Renewal as a whole to see clearly who we are by the grace of God. It’s critical that we are clear about the vision.

Vision is a call from the Lord; it starts with God. It’s something that we perceive. Vision is not something that we decide but something that we receive from God. It’s a call to a way of life, to a way of being in God, to a way of manifesting the gospel, to a way of ministering. Vision announces who we are—identity—and what we are called to do—mission.

Clarity about the vision of the Lord for us is vital. Recall the words of Proverbs 29:18, “Where there is no vision the people perish.” Other translations give these consequences of lack of vision: the people become demoralized, are scattered, break apart, die. Without keeping the vision clearly before us, we can lose our identity and we tend to gravitate towards what will make us “liked better.”

There are many different aspects to vision, many different levels on which we can talk about vision and the ways that we announce and live this out: for ourselves, for our individual prayer groups, for dioceses, for the Charismatic Renewal as a whole. Here are five aspects of the vision that the Lord is laying out for us.

### Conversion and fruitful initiation.

This is the Lord’s call to be clear that our lives are turned away from people, things and ideas and turned towards Jesus Christ. Jesus has first priority; our gaze is fixed on him and his way of being. It is a call to live fully and fruitfully the life of initiation into which we have been plunged in

our baptism and confirmation. It is a call to live with God as the reference for our life and actions, for our thoughts and decisions. It is a call, as one theologian writes, “to fall in love with God in an unrestricted manner.” It is a vision from God to continue to be converted, to seek to be pruned until there are no restrictions in our love for God and for the love of God flowing through us in a life that bears fruit.

### Full reception and exercise of charisms.

One author describes charisms as “enablements in every age, for everyone, as evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit so to exalt Jesus Christ, to edify (build up) the church and to evangelize the world.” The Lord calls us to see that there was not just one time in church history for charisms. Charisms are for today. Nor were charisms just for the early years of the charismatic renewal or for an individual’s early years, something that we grow out of when we have reached some imagined level of maturity. Charisms are not spiritual “jump starts” but are the empowerments that are needed at all times to accomplish God’s plans. The Lord also calls us to see that charisms are not just for a few people, as if the rest of the church or the rest of the prayer group’s members can be spectators as a few receive and exercise charisms.

The Lord also challenges us to a “full” reception of the spiritual gifts. At times we can limit the range of gifts to just a few (for example, tongues, prophecy and healing or to a list in one or another of the letters of St. Paul). Some scholars have identified as many as twenty-seven charisms in the New Testament. Do we have an expansive vision to see all the ways that the Lord would want to gift us? Do we have an expectation that the Lord will pour out gifts on everyone? Do we eagerly and actively seek the gifts today, even if we have been involved in charismatic renewal for many years?

**Ongoing growth in a life of holiness.** Almost from the beginning of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal there have been Life in the Spirit Seminars. I want to clearly see that the Lord is calling us to a *life* and not just to a seminar. I don't want to think I am merely attending a course from which I graduate when I'm done. It is a *life* in the Spirit

leading to holiness, to union with God. Are there ways that we are helping people to draw closer to God in personal and communal prayer? How are we facilitating their transformation into the saints God desires all of us to be by deepening their encounter with God through the Scripture and in the sacraments?

**Caring and sharing relationships.**

Part of the vision from the Lord is helping people to grow with one another—in family life, at work, within the life of the prayer group. The vision of God is not for us to have a private relationship with him. At the core of our life with God is relationship with others that mirror God's own life as Trinity. How are we helping prayer group members to have caring and sharing relationships with family members, with neighbors and co-workers?

**Bold witness of life, of words and of action.**

Having brought us into a whole new way of *living*, the Lord calls us to show *and* to tell, in order to bring others into his way of life. It won't be enough to *tell* others the "good news" if they can't *see* the good news shine from us. It is wonderful that people *see* something in us (joy, peace, patience, etc.) but how much more complete for them to *hear* about the One who has given us all that they see.

As we witness, the Lord is calling us to be bold, that is, undeterred, unstoppable. The Lord calls us, individually and as groups, to recover our zeal to evangelize.

The Lord challenges us to see this vision more clearly, to embrace it more completely and live it more faithfully so that we won't settle simply for being "liked better."

To assist individuals and prayer groups, a number of worksheets can be downloaded from [www.nsc-chariscenter.org](http://www.nsc-chariscenter.org). These worksheets include: the five points of this broad vision, a listing and description of the spiritual gifts and some questions for prayer groups leaders to use as they discover how their groups are living the vision. ♦

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