

## Content breeds contentment

by Jane Guenther

**T**he scriptures tell us that Mary, the mother of God, and the apostles gathered in prayer in the upper room waiting for the Advocate to come upon them in the experience of Pentecost. For over forty years now vibrant prayer groups have been one of the means of sustaining the element of a new awareness of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as manifested on that first Pentecost. Yet today we have knowledge of the decrease in prayer groups and in those attending. Perhaps a look at the basic elements of leadership and content may help us to strengthen our groups anew.

Our parish conducted a Life in the Spirit Seminar this past fall with 60 participants. The experience of being baptized in the Holy Spirit is one that fills us with excitement and hope and so we work to continue this thrust in

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our life and want to share it with others. Mary, who attended our Life in the Spirit, experienced this and wanted to begin a prayer group at her own parish.

I shared with Mary some of the basic elements of a prayer meeting and encouraged her to talk with the pastor first to gain his support. I shared how we gather on a weekly basis in a prayer meeting to praise God, share some of our charismatic gifts, encourage the manifestations of them, receive a teaching, apply the teaching, intercede for others, and in the process, grow in holiness so that we are renewed in the Spirit on a weekly basis. I will never forget the priest who shared at one of the Charismatic Conferences in the 1990s, that “I have to

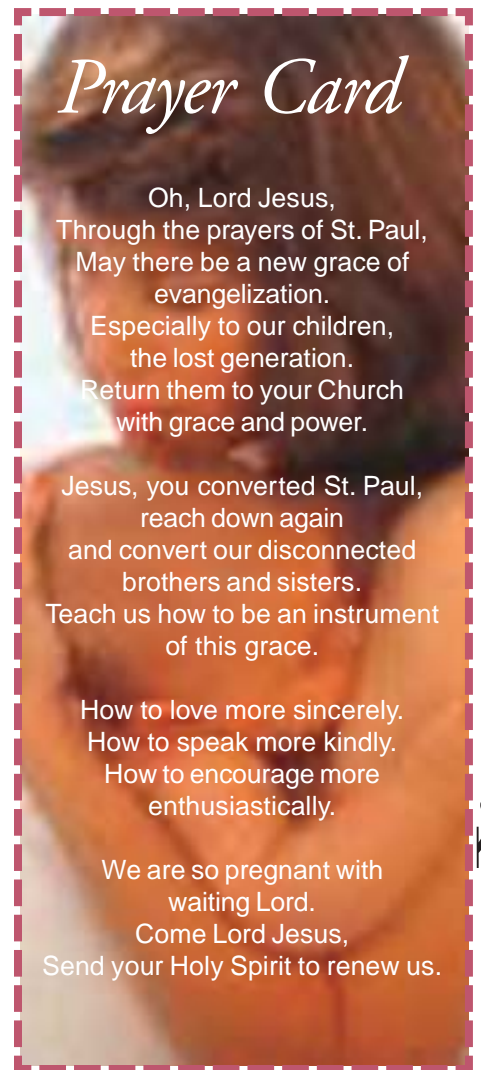
### A new generation continued

Evangelization the Church has called us all to embrace. The Lord is using this generation in a powerful way as evangelists of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**T**his past summer, over 500,000 young people gathered together for the 23<sup>rd</sup> World Youth Day, held in Sydney, Australia. During this time, pilgrims from across the world gathered to hear the words of Pope Benedict XVI—for many, the words came right to their cell phones! On Saturday, July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008, those that signed up to receive papal text messages received this text, “Dear

friend, u must be holy & u must be missionary: never separate holiness from mission – BXVI”

Indeed, these young people are challenged radically by the words of our beloved Holy Father never to separate holiness from mission. Never to separate the holiness, referred to in the preface for feasts of Holy Men and Women, from the call of the Great Commission, and never to separate the time the Lord first gifted us with the Great Commission from the ways he is calling us to step out in faith today. The time is now. ♦



## Prayer Card

Oh, Lord Jesus,  
Through the prayers of St. Paul,  
May there be a new grace of  
evangelization.  
Especially to our children,  
the lost generation.  
Return them to your Church  
with grace and power.

Jesus, you converted St. Paul,  
reach down again  
and convert our disconnected  
brothers and sisters.  
Teach us how to be an instrument  
of this grace.

How to love more sincerely.  
How to speak more kindly.  
How to encourage more  
enthusiastically.

We are so pregnant with  
waiting Lord.  
Come Lord Jesus,  
Send your Holy Spirit to renew us.

keep asking to be filled with the Holy Spirit, because I leak.”

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**Petitions:**

Please pray for the following intentions, concerns of the National Service Committee.

1. For a generous participation in the Pentecost Novena that these prayers would open and speak to hearts.
2. For an empowered Pentecost Sunday that all the faithful would experience God's presence, love and grace.
3. For the new members of the National Service Committee and chairperson Fr. Richard Loch, that their time on this committee be a joy, resulting in fruitful service.
4. For a blessing Lord, on the new vision and mission statements of the National Service Committee. Help these guidelines strengthen and encourage the work of the committee.
5. For an outpouring of the Spirit on all prayer groups, all vocations and all laity, especially those that have allowed themselves to drift away from the Church.



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Recently, I was asked to come visit a few of the prayer groups in our area to help in the discernment of new leadership. The model of leadership that I prefer for a prayer group is Trinitarian in form. If three persons can in essence be one God, we can model that unity in the leaders called forth by the Spirit for a prayer group. The three leaders would discern their role each meeting, for example that of a music leader, a worship leader, and teacher for the evening.

The **music leader** prays for the inspiration of the song choices that will lead the members to let go of their burdens and allow the Holy Spirit to come in. The **worship leader** allows the movement of the Spirit to be articulated. The worship

leader encourages others to share their charismatic gifts of prophecy, words of knowledge, images. The **teacher** is the one who comes prepared to lead the group in deepening their relationship with God by delving into a Scripture, forms of praise, or exploring the capital sins, to name a few.

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Variety leads to vibrancy. Their leadership will have a unifying effect on the larger group. It allows the manifestations of the charismatic gifts to be encouraged by the members present.

In St. Paul's letter he warns the Galatians not to abuse their "liberty" by following "the works of the flesh." He then lists a long catalogue of vices. Look seriously at the vices mentioned in Galatians 5:19b-21a, "immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like." When there is disunity in a prayer group gathering elements of these sins can be a source.

It is important that when "two or three gather" that the gathering emulates the presence of God. Our prayer groups today need to look at the content of their gatherings so they might flourish in contentment. The familiar saying "you are what you eat" can easily translate to "you are what you let in." The content of our mind and heart truly can breed contempt or contentment. If we gather for a prayer meeting and the content is gossip, complaining, or acts of selfishness, then the word of Paul, "they who do such things

shall not obtain the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:21b), will bear truth.

The content of our prayer meetings will breed contentment as we recognize the fruits of the Spirit as extolled by St. Paul: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." As we experience the fruits at our prayer meetings, we will open ourselves to them being present in our encounters outside of the prayer group. When we are filled with these fruits it makes it easier for the great treasure of the Holy Spirit to be shared.

When we prepare in leadership roles of the prayer group do we gather and earnestly pray for the Spirit to lead us in our planning? This is the essence of Paul's words to the community of Galatia. It is more important to open oneself up to being "led by the Spirit" rather than by the "works of the flesh." Do we put the emphasis within our prayer groups on what we in the flesh can accomplish or where the Spirit is leading us?

The inability to give up control holds us back from experiencing the true freedom of our faith and manifesting the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit leading to the fruits of the Spirit. Who wouldn't like that weekly experience to help us keep our eyes fixed on the prize, Christ Jesus. Mary's group is forming and discerning their leadership with the full support of their pastor. Praise God!! ♦

*Jane Guenther is currently serving the Archdiocese of St. Louis as the Coordinator of the Catholic Renewal Center. She was recently elected to the National Service Committee, see page 15 of this issue.*

