

# Catholic charismatics celebrate 'a new language of praise'

By Teresa A. Parsons

It was a puzzling, but comforting sound — part whisper, part song.

Together, the voices of hundreds of spirit-filled people speaking in tongues said nothing recognizable, yet they spoke of praise.

Scripture says Christians were given the gift of prayer in "unknown" tongues on the first Pentecost. The Acts of the Apostles reports that when Christ's disciples burst out of hiding filled with the Holy Spirit, "they began to speak foreign languages as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech."

More than 600 Catholic charismatics sought to re-create that pentecostal spirit as they gathered at SUNY Brockport for the 1986 Upstate New York Catholic Charismatic Conference, July 11-13.

Entitled "Repent, Return, Receive, Rejoice," the conference was sponsored by Catholic Charismatic Renewal of the Diocese of Rochester and drew participants from as far as Tennessee and New Brunswick, Canada.

To the early Christians, praying in tongues was rather ordinary — what St. Paul considered the least of the Holy Spirit's gifts, "expressing our plea in a way that could never be put into words."

No doubt St. Paul would have felt at home at the conference's general session on the gift of tongues Saturday evening in Seymour College Union. But latter-day Catholic Christians attending their first charismatic conference might have heard the babble of unfamiliar sounds and assumed they had wandered into the wrong room.

A few people seemed to wonder whether they were in the wrong place when Father Robert DeGrandis explained that he and Sister Betty Igo, the conference's keynote speakers, would present a workshop on receiving the gift of tongues. Some in the crowd responded with rustles and giggles of discomfort when Father DeGrandis asked all those who desired to speak in tongues to raise their hands. He counted about 50 volunteers, then informed the audience he would double the number to include all those who were too bashful to be counted.

He began with a brief instructional period, assuring the crowd that the Church does recognize the gift of tongues when it is exercised in an orderly way as a form of private prayer.

"Many priests, bishops — even some cardinals — pray in tongues," he said. If all of Christ's disciples were indeed present at Pentecost, he added, then even the Blessed Mother spoke in tongues.

When people pray or sing in tongues, they



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal  
Ernesta Del Prince of Good Shepherd Parish, Henrietta, joins with others in a gesture of surrender to God during a concert by the charismatic group — Crossroads. The group was part of a four day upstate Charismatic convention.

occasionally use modern languages previously unknown to them. But most often their utterances don't make any sense to human ears.

Yet, such speech still has meaning, charismatics claim. "It's like a baby's cry," Father DeGrandis explained. One sound could indicate that the baby is either hungry, wet or teething. Just as the mother knows instinctively what a particular cry means, so the Lord understands the apparently random syllables.

"It's a new language of praise, in which you've never lied, hurt or deceived anyone," Father DeGrandis explained.

"People say 'But how can I do it if I don't understand it?' Well, how many of you understand how a car works, what a drive shaft does? ... Like a car, you don't have to understand it to know how to use it."

With that word of encouragement, Father DeGrandis asked all those who desired the gift of tongues to stand and move to the perimeters of the room. To begin with, he

urged them to "prime the pump" by imitating the sounds he made. They did so self-consciously.

Gradually, their voices joined with those of the rest of the audience, the "neophytes" visibly began to relax, and the variety of sounds multiplied.

"The gift of tongues is simple, but not easy," Father DeGrandis explained. "It's a type of contemplative prayer ... but of the heart rather than of the intellect."

When she received the sacrament of confirmation, a teenager, Sister Betty remembers, she disconcerted everyone — including herself — by praying in tongues.

"Sister told us about Pentecost and how the Spirit told the apostles," she said. "I always took things literally."

A Franciscan Sister of the Poor, Sister Betty has exercised healing ministry for more than 15 years. Among the most miraculous cures she has observed has been her own. "My father was a classic paranoid drunk with psychotic tendencies," she recalled. "He tried to kill me several times."

"I know, psychologically speaking, I should be a mess, and yet all three of us (herself and two siblings) are leaders in the Church," she said. "It shouldn't have happened, but it did, and I keep seeing these kinds of miracles."

Although he claims to have learned everything he knows about healing in third-grade catechism, Father DeGrandis, a member of the Society of St. Joseph, found his own healing ministry in a different sort of miracle.

A civil rights activist during the 1960s, he had picketed and demonstrated his way across the South.

Then he was assigned to a black parish in Birmingham, Alabama. "I began to see that when people got involved in the Spirit, for the first time poor blacks and rich whites would come together as equals, without hate," he recalled.

Beginning in 1969, he practiced his ministry part-time, traveling from Grenada to Guyana. Almost eight years ago, he began to devote his full energy to teaching, leadership training and healing ministry.

Both Father DeGrandis and Sister Betty consider the gift of tongues a form of healing prayer. "It heals by bringing unconscious hurts to the surface," Father DeGrandis said. "Healing is an answer to prayer. I'm just teaching people how to pray. What movements like EST promise psychologically, we deliver on a spiritual level."

## Survey identifies top priorities for diocesan education board

A survey has identified training for catechists, fair salaries and benefits for Catholic school personnel, and the evangelization of inactive Catholics as the top priorities for the diocesan Board of Education to address during 1986/87.

Pastors, religious education personnel, school principals and members of parish education committees and boards were polled in the survey. The results of the canvass — which received "an excellent response," according to board members — were reviewed at the board's May meeting.

Training and enrichment for parish-based religious education teachers (catechists) were

rated as the most pressing concern in the area of religious education. The survey identified salaries and benefits for staff as priorities for diocesan Catholic schools. In the area of parish life and ministry, evangelization of inactive Catholics was the goal most cited by respondents.

New officers elected at the board's May meeting are: Joan Countryman of St. Joseph's, Rush, chairwoman; Peter Spinelli of St. Louis, Pittsford, vice chairman; and Nancy Marvin of St. Patrick's, Macedon, corresponding secretary. Richard Ernst of St. Mary's, Canandaigua, and Sam King of St. Monica's, Rochester, were elected to the board's executive committee.

## Nazareth receives two grants to support sexuality program

Nazareth Academy last week received two grant awards to support the school's sexuality program.

The Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation has awarded the school \$6,800, and the Human Life Commission of the Diocese of Rochester has allotted it \$1,300.

Nazareth Academy's program aims at teaching responsible decision making in the area of sexuality and at seeing the student-mothers complete their high school education. The program works to foster and increase student-parent communication.

Nazareth's program is in its fourth year, and is unique to Catholic schools in the nation. In

1985, Nazareth principal Sister Elaine Englert was invited to discuss the program in an address to the National Catholic Education Association's annual convention in St. Louis.

During the past three years, 12 student-mothers have participated in the program, and each of the 12 has received her diploma. According to Sister Elaine, "The program is attempting to break the cycle of feminine poverty. Our students who have become mothers will be contributors to society, not dependents."

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**This weeks question:**  
Who played the Pinball Wizard in the movie Tommy?

A: \_\_\_\_\_

**Rules:**  
Each week, the Courier-Journal, in conjunction with the House of Guitars will feature a Music Trivia contest. All you have to do to enter is answer the question, fill in your name and address and the school you attend (if applicable), cut out the coupon, and send it in to the Courier Journal. If more than one correct entry is received, a drawing will be held and one winning entry will be drawn.

If yours is the winning entry, you will be mailed a coupon for a free album or tape of your choice redeemable at the **House of Guitars, 645 Titus Ave.**

All entries must be received within seven days of this papers issue date. Winning names and answers will be printed the week following each drawing.

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