

Feature

Revamped 'Renew' debuts in diocese

By Lee Strong

"Renew is a spiritual cancer."
 "Renew will cause disunity in parishes."
 "Renew confirms people in their errors."

These were among the claims voiced by opponents to the Renew program when it was undertaken by the Diocese of Buffalo in 1984.

Renew, a parish-based program of spiritual renewal introduced by the Archdiocese of Newark a decade ago, was greeted by similar opposition in a number of the 85 U.S. and 15 foreign dioceses that have undertaken it.

According to officials in dioceses that have completed Renew, however, none of the dire predictions about the program have proven true.

"It was an excellent process for people," declared Marge McNerny, associate director of Renew for the Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis, which completed the formal portion of the process last fall. "It opened up a whole new way of being church."

"I don't think a week goes by that I don't hear somebody say what a great thing Renew was," observed Monsignor Thomas F. Maloney, who directed the program for the Diocese of Buffalo. Some Buffalo parishes are still running small-group meetings more than a year after the diocese completed Renew, he said, while other parishes built on Renew by forming youth, liturgy, bereavement, and social ministry committees.

"It certainly did a lot for our parishes," said Sister Maureen Donofrio, CSJ, who served as

associate director of Renew for the Diocese of Syracuse. "People are more active in parishes. They got all excited about their faith all of a sudden. They tune into the Sunday liturgies."

The Diocese of Rochester — which, in 1985, praised Renew but opted not to undertake it because of the time and expense involved and because of the diocesan commitment to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults — will get its first taste of the renewal process beginning Friday, Feb. 3, when the Northern Cayuga Cluster begins the three-year program. The opening event is a two-day prayer vigil incorporating Benediction, the rosary, liturgy of the hours, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, silent prayer, Scripture readings and instrumental music, and culminating with a Mass.

"We thought the parish was in need of a renewal," said Father William Moorby, parochial vicar of the cluster. "We considered several possibilities, and we decided on the Renew one because our diocese had looked at it and thought it was one of the better ones."

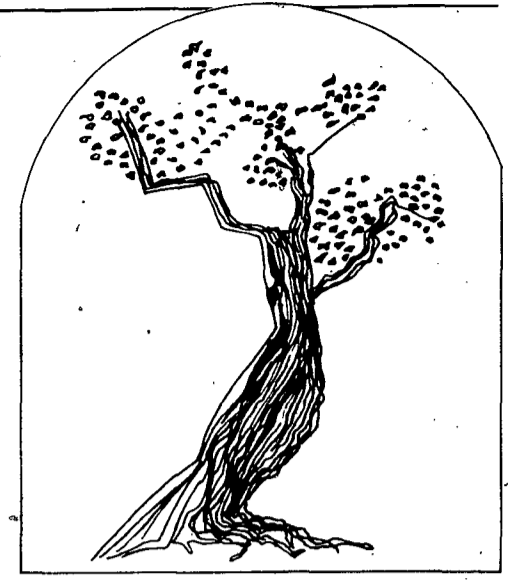
The three parishes that constitute the cluster have committed themselves to a process that involves five six-week "seasons" aimed at deepening faith, developing lay leaders and bringing inactive Catholics back to an active faith and greater involvement in parish life. Through liturgical celebrations, large-group sessions, small-group discussions and individual study and reflection, the program tries to deepen the liturgical, spiritual and prayer life of parishioners.

Although Renew is designed as a diocesan-wide renewal effort, a number of parishes and clusters have chosen to go through the program on their own, according to Father Thomas McClosky of the National Office of Renew, located in the Newark archdiocese. "Probably because something else was going on at a diocesan level, some parishes or groups of parishes have decided to go ahead on their own," he said. "It's quite challenging to do it by yourself, but a number of parishes have done it quite well."

The Renew program the cluster is undertaking is not the same program that drew fire in the mid-1980s from Catholics United for the Faith and the *Wanderer*, a conservative Catholic newspaper. Robert Dylak, publisher of the *Catholic Advocate*, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Newark, observed part of the problem with the original Renew program was that it was designed for the archdiocese, not for other, smaller dioceses.

"When Renew started here, there were a lot of people running parallel education programs," Dylak explained. "Renew was never meant to be an education program." When smaller dioceses began using Renew, however, they did not have these parallel education programs in place, and began using Renew to fill the roles occupied by several groups in Newark.

Meanwhile, as Renew was asked to fill roles for which it was never intended, the program came under attack by conservative Catholic groups. James Likoudis, president of Catholics



A PROGRAM FOR PARISHES

Renew

United for the Faith, said that Renew offended many Catholics in Buffalo when the diocese began the program in 1984.

"What you have with Renew is a loss of the sense of the sacred, relegation of doctrine to the unimportant, a lot of liturgical tampering, a lot of left-wing social teaching and a lack of sound catechesis," Likoudis said. These problems, he continued, "caused alienation in parishes, polarization, and, in Buffalo, bitterness."

Likoudis also criticized the lack of specific Catholic content in the original program. "What is needed by Catholics today is sound catechesis," he noted. "Renew offers no systematic teaching of Catholic doctrine. Until we come to grips with that, you'll have the same floundering of priests, religious and laity."

Proponents of Renew pointed out that the renewal process was never intended to be catechetical, but acknowledged that the program was having such a major impact on parish life that it needed greater doctrinal content. Concerned about the criticisms and the growing use of Renew outside the archdiocese, Peter L. Gerety, then-Archbishop of Newark, requested that the Committee on Doctrine of the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops examine the program.

The committee report, released in December, 1986, praised Renew, but offered suggestions to improve it. They cited as areas of major concern Renew's tendency towards a generic rather than Catholic Christianity; a need for greater balance and completeness due to an emphasis on ministry of the laity and a lack of emphasis on holy orders and the magisterium of the church; a need for more emphasis on the cognitive aspects of faith as opposed to focusing largely on personal, emotional aspects of faith; and a need for broader definition of the Eucharist and an emphasis on sacrifice and worship.

The Renew office undertook a complete revision of the program. Meanwhile, Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, who succeeded Archbishop Gerety, established a committee of theologians to review the new material. The Renew office submitted the revisions, received the committee's evaluation, and revised the program a second time. The diocesan committee approved the second revision and the new material was published in 1987 by Paulist Press.

Robert Hamme, an editor with Paulist, said that the revised Renew process is streamlined, and much of the questionable material has been dropped or rewritten.

Among the revisions: the number of options available to small groups during each of the seasons of the program has been reduced to two for adults and one for teenagers; a parallel liturgical service using bread and wine that led to some confusion about the nature of the Eucharist has been excised; a preface incorporating excerpts from the documents of Vatican II and more recent documents of the church has been added to the introductions to the material for each season of the program in an effort to situate the theme of the season in the context of

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