



Serving life

The story of Al, a parolee released into Rochester's Cephas Attica program, underlines the difficulty of learning to live within society's conventions. See *Insight*, pages 8 and 9.



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Resting in the Spirit



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

During a charismatic healing Mass July 12 at Letchworth State Park, Father Paul Schnacky, left, Joie Palozzi, center background, and Vinnie Palozzi, right, pray over Connie Salamida.

Renewal group seeks to re-articulate vision

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

Nostalgia is in these days. Newspaper articles regularly ask what became of this rock musician or that actor, while television magazines reminisce about shows popular decades ago.

Yet those who wonder what became of the charismatic renewal don't likewise have to brush away the cobwebs and dust of time.

On Thursday, July 12, all they had to do was drive to Letchworth State Park.

There in the gathering twilight, more than 270 people assembled in a pavilion.

The event displayed all the trappings of an informal Mass, with the congregation sitting on lawn chairs or at picnic tables, holding photocopied music sheets.

But early in the Mass, the celebration's distinct nature became apparent. Songs and responses ended with the babble of people proclaiming, "Praise you, Jesus," in the midst of undecipherable words in indeterminate languages — commonly known as "speaking in tongues."

The homily concluded with a procession of people suffering from such ills as back problems and circulation woes — all heading toward the touch of Father William Gaffney, CSSR. As the priest prayed over them, a number of them fell to the ground, "resting in the spirit." Soon the floor was covered with the fallen, their numbers growing as the priest continued to pray over the afflicted.

"Who is our Lord?" Father Gaffney asked the worshippers.

"Jesus is Lord," they proclaimed.

The service was a healing Mass, an annual event at Letchworth put on by the Mount Morris Prayer Group. Another such healing Mass will be held on July 20 at Good Shepherd Church in Rochester.

Three times a year, charismatic retreats are held at Notre Dame Retreat House in Canandaigua — where Father Gaffney is rector — drawing as many as 100 people each time.

Each week, approximately 40 charismatic prayer groups gather in the diocese, with each meeting attracting anywhere from 10 to 50 participants.

The charismatic renewal in the United States is very much alive. But it has reached a key point in its history, noted Walter Matthews, associate director of the National Service

Committee of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the United States, Inc.

"Looking at the numbers and demographics, we've been stagnant for a number of years," Matthews told the *Catholic Courier* from his office in South Bend, Indiana. "Right now we face the challenge of re-articulating what the vision of the renewal is."

The vision, Matthews explained, "is that Jesus Christ came and died for you, and he wants you to give your whole life to him, and he wants you to accept him as lord and savior of your life, and he wants to open up to you the gifts of the Holy Spirit to use in your life."

This "vision" first surfaced at Duquesne University in 1967, jumped to Notre Dame University, and rapidly spread throughout the United States. Matthews estimated that during the first 23 years of the movement, approximately 10 million Catholics have passed through the renewal.

The renewal reached its peak in terms of numbers in the late 1970s, Matthews said, comparing the history of the movement to a bell curve.

The early years were marked by a sudden explosion of interest and enthusiasm. The renewal began at a key time in the church's history, following

closely on the heels of the Second Vatican Council. The changes fostered by the council, as well as the social turmoil taking place during the 1960s, had left people confused and searching for something in which to believe. The charismatic renewal offered a sense of direction.

By the mid 1970s, however, the period of initial growth gave way to one marked by greater organization and the development of leaders. The movement reached its peak during these years, Matthews observed, but it also lost some of its initial enthusiasm and commitment.

Now, Matthews noted, the movement is in the midst of a third phase, one on the downside of the bell curve. This phase has been marked across the country by a decline in the number of people participating in prayer groups and a consequent decline in the number of groups. *New Covenant Magazine*, which served for many years as an unofficial publication for the movement, has seen its circulation fall from more than 75,000 in 1986 to a current figure of 50,000.

Charles Garagozzo, one of the coordinators of the Mount Morris Prayer Group, observed that the decline in numbers was in part a consequence of the movement's maturation.

In the early days, he said, "people were all running around looking for an experience of one kind or another. Some were taken by the emotionalism, and not by the true doctrine of the church. As the emotion ran out, their interest ran out."

Those who remain with the movement, Garagozzo contended, are strongly committed. He said his own group at one time attracted 55-60 people a week. After 15 years, the group continues with a core of approximately 12 people. Additional people come

Continued on page 2

Jesus

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