

# Charismatic Catholics mark silver anniversary

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

In their first 25 years, charismatic Catholics have grown from a mere handful of zealous Christians to a group comprising, by some estimates, more than one-fifth of all Catholics in the United States.

Worldwide, 72 million Catholics have participated in some form of the charismatic movement, according to information provided by the Pittsburgh-based 1992 National Catholic Charismatic Renewal Conference Office.

Here in the Diocese of Rochester, 20 charismatic prayer groups regularly meet in various parishes, according to Don Germano, one of three lay Catholics who constitute the diocesan liaison team to the movement.

The diocese offers a charismatic Mass every second Friday of the month at St. John Fisher College, and about 450 people regularly subscribe to the renewal's monthly diocesan newsletter, he said.

The Catholic charismatic movement began in February, 1967, when a small group of students at Duquesne University met at a weekend retreat center and experienced an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which many Catholic charismatics liken to a modern-day Pentecost.

Since their fledgling days, charismatic Catholics have moved from the church's fringes deep into its very heart and soul.

Charismatics have influenced the church in countless ways, from reviving dormant parishes — particularly in some Hispanic communities — to breathing new life into Catholic Scripture studies and adult catechesis.

Charismatics now occupy church leadership positions on all levels, from religious and priests to bishops and cardinals, and all levels in between.

Parish council leaders, Catholic school principals and lay ministers of all types can claim thousands of charismatic colleagues.

"You can hardly go to a Catholic function today without meeting people that have not been touched at one time or another by the Spirit through the charismatic renewal," commented Dick Pelino, a veteran of the movement in the Diocese of Rochester.

Along with his wife, Pat, Pelino credited the renewal for radically changing their view of Christian faith. Many charismatic Catholics were looking for a deeper faith, one compelled not by convention but created by love, he concluded.

"It gave us an opportunity to be able to be at home in the Catholic church," Pelino said of the charismatic movement. "If it had not been for a (charis-



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

After the conclusion of an Aug. 10 charismatic Mass at Christ the King Church in Irondequoit, some of the participants pray over Ryan Horan (center) and her mother, Annette Palermo (above Ryan).

matic) conversion experience, I probably would not have been at all in the Catholic church."

Drawing Catholics like the Pelinos back into the church and setting their hearts on fire was one of the earliest goals of the first charismatic Catholics.

Charismatics derive their name from "charism," denoting supernatural graces from the Lord. They are often distinguished by their belief in the "baptism of the Holy Spirit," in a sense, a sudden awareness of the overwhelming presence of God in one's life.

Like the Apostles at the first Pentecost, the pioneer charismatic Catholics from Duquesne met and prayed in an upper room — the second-floor chapel of a retreat center.

Hence, when more than 15,000 charismatic Catholics from all over the globe met in Pittsburgh from June 5-7 of this year, they called their 25th anniversary gathering "Return to the Upper Room."

Thousands of Catholics in the Diocese of Rochester have also spent time in that upper room of their souls, inviting the Holy Spirit to mold them and lead them in a manner that still seems unorthodox to most Catholics.

Charismatics are known for Masses at which worshipers sing and wave their hands, and at which congregations often hear personal stories related by Catholics who have experienced spiritual or physical healing

they attribute to the Lord.

Charismatics will also pray over one another at services, asking the Holy Spirit to heal fellow worshipers who often wind up "resting in the Spirit," literally slumping to the ground and not rising for several minutes.

And on some occasions, charismatics will prophesy, or "pray in tongues," speaking in languages both decipherable and indecipherable to other worshipers.

Such aspects of the Catholic charismatic movement sometimes have overshadowed its less exotic aspects, including the movement's emphasis on Scripture reading and personal relationships with Jesus Christ.

"I don't know how people got hung up on charismatics having charismatic gifts," commented Germano. "It may be that charismatics are the only ones who use the gifts."

Indeed, if the first 25 years of the movement saw charismatic Catholics earn the respect and admiration of church leadership — including the current pope — the second 25 years may see the charismatics actually approach becoming the church itself, some observers assert.

"I think the direction for the renewal

now is to help people come to a fuller awareness of the Spirit in their lives," said Father William A. Moorby, spiritual director of the diocesan charismatic renewal. "If it is successful, it will cease to be a movement."

Although they acknowledged that the number of people formally participating in charismatic events has declined somewhat in the last few years, diocesan charismatics also pointed out that worship styles and the faith of many Catholics has been enlivened by the movement.

For example, many Catholics call up the charismatic group at Christ the King Parish in Irondequoit asking for prayers of healing from its members, according to Marie DiRaimo, one of four pastoral team leaders for the group.

"Healing has always been one of the gifts of the early church," she said. "Now it's revived."

Non-charismatic Catholics also sometimes attend charismatic services, participants noted, looking for a deeper appreciation of the liturgy.

"I think a lot more people are accepting the power of the Eucharist and accepting the power of the healing of Jesus," DiRaimo added.

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