Dear Partners in the Mission,

A letter from Ralph Martin

The persecution has begun. After years of secularizing influences, some of those now in positions of political, intellectual and legal authority feel strong enough to openly enact punitive measures against the Catholic Church, and sometimes, Christians in general. In just the last few years, governmental regulations have been interpreted to mean that unless Catholic institutions agree to arrange the adoption of children by “same sex” couples they will not be able to continue their adoption services. Catholic adoption agencies in California and Massachusetts have had to discontinue all their adoption services as a result of not being able to in conscience comply.

On the national level, Catholic aid agencies who don’t agree to provide abortion services have had their grants discontinued. The new health insurance rules are violating traditional “conscience” clauses and putting pressure on health care providers to perform procedures and prescribe “remedies” that are in violation of Catholic moral teaching. As Bishop James Conley of Denver said recently: “America today is becoming what I would call an atheocracy—a society that is actively hostile to religious faith and religious believers. And, I might add—the faith that our society is most hostile toward is Christianity in general, and Catholicism in particular.” He stated that the elites in our society are “deliberately engaged in a process that aims to remove all traces of religious faith from our public life.” He repeated Blessed John Paul II’s warning that a democracy without values easily turns into “open or thinly disguised totalitarianism.” But these are just the most obvious and “public” of the persecution. In countless university classrooms Christianity and particularly Catholicism are being mocked openly, the notion of objective truth and morality is being ridiculed, and the massive brainwashing of young minds continues unabated.

Ralph Martin
Dear Partners in the Mission,

of “hate speech” for simply teaching the biblical message concerning where true happiness lies in the area of marriage and human sexuality. They have, literally, been brought up before “tribunals” to respond to accusations at great personal and legal cost. The American Catholic Bishops, feeling the pressure, have just set up a new Religious Liberty Committee of Bishops and lay experts to map out a response to these pressures and find ways of confronting and opposing them. Bishop William Lori of Bridgeport, CT, chairman of the committee, stated that the committee was formed to address “growing concerns over the erosion of freedom of religion in America, where freedom of religion is considered a second-class right, subordinate to so-called ‘rights’ of abortion and same-sex marriage. In defending life and marriage the Church is increasingly being painted as a discriminatory institution and is therefore being made to suffer.”

But the bottom line, as it always has been, is that the ability of the Catholic Church to influence society is dependent on the actual number of committed Catholics it can claim to represent. The “powers that be” have noticed that the existence of a real “Catholic vote” is increasingly suspect. The long term answer of course is renewal and evangelization, which is precisely what Renewal Ministries is entirely devoted to.

In every way we can we are advancing the cause of renewal and evangelization. We are doing it through radio, television and our website, through CDs, DVDs, books, pamphlets and newsletters, through both scholarly and popular articles in a variety of publications. Through the constant teaching and preaching in parishes, at conferences, in seminars and days of renewal, with people of all ages, in more than 30 different countries, our work, and yours, is bearing amazing fruit.

“Peter, thank you for your talks this past weekend. It was an awesome experience. So many have said it was the best conference we’ve had for a very long time.”

“I am an Episcopal priest and I listen to Sr. Ann Shields’ program almost everyday and find so much of what you say to be indeed ‘Food for the Journey’ as well as for the folks of my parish. Know that you are reaching folks in the Episcopal tradition in New Mexico.”

“I am re-reading The Fulfillment of All Desire for the fifth time.” (A priest in Nebraska)

“I am a Catholic psychologist and I think Crossing the Goal is reaching men where they are at.”

“Your talk at the recent Raleigh, NC conference deeply impacted not only me but the group of seven others that were with me this past weekend.”

“The study guide to The Fulfillment of All Desire draws us into a deeper understanding of what we are experiencing when we are reading the book.” (An on-line review)

“Thank you, Sr. Ann, for the teaching series on mercy. I have downloaded the entire series and have listened to it several times. Thank you for helping me on my faith journey.”

“I wish there was a Renewal Ministries in London or Ireland!”

“I’ve got to tell you that The Fulfillment of All Desire is incredible. It’s feeding my soul like no other book. Not one word you use is superfluous. Thank you for this precious gift you have given the Church!”

“I am going through RCIA right now and your program, The Choices We Face, is a wonderful resource in my walk with God.”

“I’ve copied your last two newsletters to give to others. Inspiring!”

“Ralph’s explanation of the ‘dark nights’ in his book has helped me immensely, a powerful magnet to draw me towards Christ.” (A man from the island of Malta)

“Your radio show this morning, Sr. Ann, was fantastic. I was driving, pre-dawn, westbound through the Sacramento Valley...”
“I am listening to your Transformation in Christ CD series on John of the Cross. Words cannot express how meaningful it is for me at this stage in my spiritual life.”

“I’m playing your reflections on the daily readings for my 9th grade students here in Massachusetts.”

“Fire on the Earth particularly energizes me. I love the stories, the passion for renewal and for a fullness of Catholicism that can and should be shared with others. I am going to become a regular Renewal Ministries’ donor.”

“Sr. Ann, you have done wonderful work for so long. I am in Afghanistan with the US Air Force right now. I come home in February. Pray for me. Keep inspiring, as I know you will!”

“Anyone interested in the New Evangelization should go rooting through the treasure trove at Renewal Ministries. Click on ‘free literature.’”

(A woman in Ireland)

“I am a Catholic who has just awakened to what it really means. Your show on EWTN is really helping.”

“I can’t tell you how good it is to tune into your program. I catch it every weekday on my commute to work. It really helps me focus on what matters to God.”

“What I am learning from you I am passing on to others.”

“We here in Poland are watching Crossing the Goal!” (A monk in Poland)

“Here in Canada we have a group in our parish who are journeying through The Fulfillment of All Desire with the new study guide. People here are very hungry. The beauty of Ralph’s work is that you don’t need a degree to understand them. I could take this book and study guide to many other parishes here in Canada and people would be happy to receive it.”

“Don’t Give Up is wonderful. Catholics need hope today. Thank you for making it available for free on your website.”

“We are doing a Lenten study and sharing group with your Fulfillment of All Desire video series here at the Cathedral. The material is excellent and so beautifully presented. It’s touched my heart and my parishioners’ as well.”

I could go on and on. Thank you for helping the mission to go on and on!

Your brother in Christ,

Ralph Martin
Promises Made, Promises Kept

In a world that is becoming “topsy turvy” where black is called white, and white is black; where less people make promises or keep commitments; where trust in another is less frequent, where there seem to be fewer objective moral standards on which to base our decisions, where truth is simply another’s opinion rather than the rock foundation on which we are to build our lives, where true hope is less evident—in short, where it SEEMS that the foundation blocks on which humans have built their lives for centuries are shifting—what are we to do? I want to address simply one practical area that we can tackle daily to halt the erosion in our personal lives and in those we hold most dear.

By God’s grace, we must be an example of perseverance and fidelity in the commitments or the vows and promises we have made. We must be a sign to the current generation that commitments and vows and promises can be kept. Whatever the sacrifice involves, God will supply the grace. Let the younger generation see the reward of promises kept by witnessing courage and joy in you, even in the midst of difficulties. I remember when I was 13 years old I was invited to spend a week with a family who had moved to another city, whose daughters were among my closest friends. The day after my arrival, the fifteen year old daughter was asked to babysit three small children for an evening on a farm out of town. Shortly after her father dropped her off there, a sudden storm came up with very high winds and power was lost in the city—there was chaos. Her father decided he had to go to the farm. We pleaded to go along and without really thinking it through, he took us with him. Debris was everywhere and it took us a long time to find a way there with power lines and trees down. The police finally stopped our car and said we could not go any further. Live wires were quite visible. That father got out of the car and said to the police, “I have to go. My fifteen year old daughter is up that hill in that farmhouse with three small children—I have to go.” The police said, “But you are risking your life.” I began to shiver in the car listening to the tense exchange. Then another police officer who had joined the discussion said, “This is your daughter up there?”

“Yes,” said my friend’s father, beginning to cry. The policeman and the father took off in the darkness while the other officer stayed by our car. Even in that tense time of waiting, I felt a certain security. People cared; people were willing to risk their lives for my friend. My young brain registered that this was part of what commitment meant. About a half hour later the police officer and my friend’s father came back down. Everyone was safe but it was too dangerous to move the children right away; the police would bring them home as soon as possible. Reassured, we returned and were allowed to stay up until the children were reunited with their parents and the police had brought my friend back home. When she came in the house, she said, “Daddy, I was not afraid. I knew you would come for me.” That’s the fruit of commitment. A strong young woman was able to keep three small children comfortable and unafraid because she could trust her father.

A huge part of Christian society is the ability of people to make and to keep promises! Those promises are the backbone of a stable society. Our young people today often have a cynical edge to them because they have seen so many broken vows and promises. They have less trust and confidence in other people. And, without God in the center of their lives, many of them trust only in themselves which, as we know, leads to failure, isolation and depression.

When I was a young woman visiting my family I became ill and needed a prescription medicine. My father took me to the drugstore to pick up the prescription. Having little money, I was relieved when he took out his wallet, until he opened it and I saw there was absolutely nothing in it but a ten dollar bill. My dad’s business had gone bankrupt several years before and now working for others, he still had almost nothing beyond the absolute necessities. I knew that, but when I saw the empty wallet I realized even more how difficult things were at home. Handing the ten dollars to the clerk, he received a nickel in return. “Dad,” I said, “I’ll pay you back.” “Forget it honey,” was his reply. “I’m glad I had it to give you.” Many times in my life that image of an empty wallet comes back to me and the knowledge that my dad would give sacrificially to care for me in my need. A promise kept!

Let us in this new year review our commitments, our promises, and our vows and ask the Lord to daily make us more faithful so that the next generation may have the models and examples to become the promise keepers for the generations to come.
As a convert to the Catholic faith, I began my journey into the Church after working the nightclub and restaurant business, neither of which brought the fulfillment I had hoped for. In 1989 a friend invited me to attend church with her family after discovering that I had worked at a Catholic nursing home some years before and had done some singing in a local parish in High Point, NC. I attended church with my friend and her family, which proved to be a new experience. People at this parish went out of their way to make me feel welcomed. As a result, I continued to attend Sunday Mass, eventually joining the music ministry and singing with them for two years as a non-practicing Presbyterian.

One particular Sunday the homily was about community, which helped me realize that I had been welcomed, accepted, and encouraged by the people of this parish. I remember standing with the music group beside the altar listening to Fr. Jim’s homily. Looking around at all the wonderful people I had met and come to know and the music group that I had become part of, I thought, this is where I want to be because I have found Jesus here.

I went through RCIA and although my parents were not Catholic, they fully supported my decision to come into the Catholic Church and they were present at the Easter Vigil in 1990. During the Mass, after Fr. Jim had received the large RCIA class into the Church, he invited people to come up and pray over the newly-received. All of my friends were coming up laying their hands on my head as I bowed. At one point a pair of hands touched my head and they were shaking. I opened my eyes and it was my mother and father praying over me. We had not been to church together since I was about 13. My mind flashed back—how they had walked this journey with me, faithfully, even when I had turned my back on them. I recalled how my dad was there with me in my darkest hour and how they took me back into their home and supported me. And now, here they were praying over me. I just stood there and wept; the prodigal son had come home.

Two years later I attended a school of Catholic Lay Evangelization in Florida learning more about the call of baptism, the call to holiness and the call to evangelize. With the permission of the bishop I co-founded the Good News School of Catholic Lay Evangelization in the Diocese of Raleigh, NC which conducted two week-long sessions twice a year for three years. During that period, Bill Wegner and I began responding to requests to conduct parish missions. As a team we conducted over 300 parish missions, numerous retreats, workshops, conferences and days of reflection.

In 2006 I sensed a call to work with the disabled and became Executive Director of Handicapped Encounter Christ. I continue to lead some parish missions and renewal events and also work with Renewal Ministries as a country coordinator for Africa.+

Brent Heiser has been a country coordinator for Renewal Ministries in Ghana, West Africa since 2002. Brent is married with four grown children and eight grandchildren. He and his wife, Kathy, have just moved to Charlotte, NC.

Please Pray…

+ that Catholics throughout the world will be strengthened and empowered to live as disciples in an increasingly hostile environment, and bring the light of Christ to others.
+ for preparations for the 20th annual Lift Jesus Higher Rally in Toronto on March 3. May all those who attend be more deeply converted through the proclamation of the Gospel.
+ for the prayer intentions of all our supporters and their family members, especially as they face the challenges of illness and economic uncertainty.

Thank you for your continued support through prayer as we labor together for the Gospel and the renewal of the Church.
As they concluded their visit to the Navrongo/Bolgatanga diocese, Matt Lozano (seen here) and Brent ministered to over 600 people at a city-wide prayer meeting at Sacred Heart Parish.
...the formation has not only brought us your love in Christ but also His power to defend our faith from our many cultures of slavery and deceptions. I’m filled with joy and strengthened...”

By Brent Heiser

Unbound and many experienced freedom and the healing power of Jesus. Moses, a catechist and convert from Islam said, “Because of what I have learned here, the love of God has grown in me, and I am leaving here better equipped to share the Gospel with others.” Vida, the first woman catechist in the Archdiocese of Tamale, shared, “After these sessions, I am stronger in my prayer life. I am free and have received the Holy Spirit! These teachings have transformed and changed my life.” Matt led one man to forgive a friend who had betrayed him, and another a young man who had tried to seduce his wife. Both experienced a great release as they renounced bitterness and resentment. One young lady came up to him as we were leaving and said, “I know now that I can forgive my sister because of the testimony you shared with me about the woman who was able to forgive an abusive stepfather.” It is amazing how God can use the story of someone living thousands of miles away to touch another’s heart!

After the formation session ended we departed for Tamale to meet Archbishop Philip Naameh. We dined with him in his residence and had the opportunity to clarify some issues about the mission of the Charismatic Renewal and the position of Renewal Ministries with regard to the Catholic Church. It was a laughter-filled evening with hot and spicy Ghanaian food and rich conversation. I presented the archbishop with a copy of Ralph’s book, The Fulfillment of All Desire on behalf of Renewal Ministries.

The next evening the CCR leadership formation session began in Tamale at St. Mary’s Vocational Institute with about 95 participants. The leaders were reminded that they are, first and foremost, servants in the leadership model of Jesus, who passed on His mission to the apostles. They must lead not only by what they teach, but by example. Leadership at any level is a call, and leaders must strive for holiness in their lives daily, especially through prayer. This servant leadership should be the mark of their call to lead God’s people. On Sunday the team had the opportunity to minister to about 200 people at a city-wide prayer meeting at Holy Cross Parish. It was a day of encouragement and great joy!

Arriving home, we received these emails from some of the participants:

“Praise the Lord! I want to say thank you, for my life has not been the same after listening to you on your teaching and may the good Lord continue to bless You in all that you do.”

“I want to personally give thanks to God for your family and ministry. In fact the formation has not only brought us your love in Christ but also His power to defend our faith from our many cultures of slavery and deceptions. I’m filled with joy and strengthened, and I can’t wait to be a channel of this new found joy to my community when school reopens. Thank you and God bless your ministry.”

God is working powerfully in Ghana to set hearts free. Praise God for His “incomparable riches for us who believe!” We are so grateful to be a part of the Father’s plan to share His loving kindness and mercy to all through Jesus Christ.
On the Road

No earthly pleasures, no kingdoms of this world can benefit me in any way.
I prefer death in Christ Jesus to power over the farthest limits of the earth. He who died in place of us is the one object of my quest. He who rose for our sakes is my one desire.

St. Ignatius of Antioch

January 2012

Young Adult Mission to Mexico City
January 2–8
Jim Murphy, Debbie Herbeck and Team

*Ann Arbor, MI, Pastoral Leadership Forum
January 9–12
Ralph Martin

Vancouver, BC, Canada, Parish Retreat
Saturday, January 13
Sr. Ann Shields
Contact Vernon Robertson at: varobertson@shaw.ca

*Salina, Kansas, Clergy Formation Days
January 17–20
Ralph Martin

Fort Myers, FL, Faith & Ale
Church of the Resurrection of Our Lord
Thursday, January 19, 6–8 PM
Peter Herbeck
Contact: Michael Lancellot at: faithandalefm@gmail.com or www.faithandale.com

Baltimore, MD
National FOCUS Leaders’ Conference
January 20–22
Peter Herbeck
Contact Christine Westerlin at: cwesterlin@focusonline.org or www.FOCUSSummit.org

February 2012

Lincoln, NE, Diocesan Women’s Retreat
February 3
St. Ann Shields
Contact Allan Zach at: al-zach@cdolinc.net or 402-786-2705

*Birmingham, AL, Crossing the Goal Taping
February 12-15
Peter Herbeck

Detroit, MI, Sacred Heart Major Seminary, St. Paul Fellowship
Friday, February 24
Ralph Martin
Contact: Peter Williamson at 734-434-2781 or williamson.peter@shms.edu

Cromwell, CT, St. John’s Parish Mission
Monday, February 27–Tuesday, February 28
Ralph Martin
Contact number: 860-635-5590

They’re Back!

Mark your calendar now for two dynamic events that will strengthen your faith and equip you to serve.

Renewal Ministries and CORE Ministries present:

• The School of Evangelization—Wed, June 20–Sun, June 24, 2012
at The University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN

• The School of Catholic Bible Study—Thurs, June 28–Sun, July 1, 2012
at The University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN

For more information or to register go to:

• www.renewalministries.net or Contact Kathleen at 734-662-1730 or kkittle@renewalministries.net

• Contact Deacon Mike Thoennes at 952-465-8293 or dr.mike@tds.net

Renewal Ministries is a Catholic ministry committed to renewal and evangelization in the Church. It seeks to proclaim Jesus Christ through its TV and radio outreaches, as well as through books, tapes, conferences, retreats and other international evangelistic events.

Editor
Debra Herbeck

Design
Anne Martin

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