Dear Friends,

WE'RE LIVING THROUGH CHALLENGING TIMES.

Even in the midst of this season of “severe mercy” that has come upon the Church, we have much to celebrate. It is the Lord who is purifying and expressing His covenant love and faithfulness to us:

“Those whom I love, I reprove and chasten” (Rv 3:19).

Jesus is purifying His Church, exposing sin and applying a redemptive discipline, not simply to punish or to reveal our shame, but to produce a response of zealous repentance. He wants change, radical change of heart, especially, but not exclusively, in her leaders.

I recently was praying through the seven letters to the churches in the book of Revelation. There is much to learn in them about the Lord, and about how deeply concerned He is about the health of His Church, the direct way He identifies the spiritual sicknesses in her, and the specific nature of His diagnosis and remedies. He is clear about the kind of response He expects from His Church, and the consequences that will follow if it resists His leadership and refuses to repent.

I really believe we’re living through a similar kind of serious pastoral intervention by the Lord. As a result, the letters can provide helpful insight as we seek to understand our own situation before the Lord. One thing is clear, the Church today is crippled by some of the same maladies that Jesus addresses in the letters.

To the Church in Sardis, He says:

▶ “I know your works; you have the name of being alive, and you are dead” (Rv 3:1).

Wow! What a direct diagnosis! What a wonderful physician! The body is dying. It looks good on the outside, riding high on its reputation, but inside it is dead and dying. His remedy is:

▶ “Awake, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of God” (Rv 3:2).

Nothing escapes the penetrating gaze of Jesus the Lord. How many churches look good on the outside and have a good reputation, but are not producing mature fruit? Is it a community that is living out the Great Commandment, growing in radical love of God and neighbor? Are they passionately engaged in the Great Commission to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19)? Jesus’ instruction to them is clear:

▶ “Remember then what you have received and heard; keep that, and repent” (Rv 3:3).

The consequence of not responding are clear.

▶ “If you will not awake, I will come like a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you” (Rv 3:3).

To the Church in Thyatira he says:

▶ “I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance” (Rv 2:19).
This was a church that was alive in many ways, yet Jesus identifies a serious problem among them. Their leaders are tolerating the false prophetess Jezebel, who is “teaching and beguiling my servants to practice immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols” (Rv 2:20). The leaders, and to some degree the church as a whole, was tolerant of false teaching and immoral, idolatrous behavior in the community. The community was being defiled by serious sin that was profoundly offensive to God, and if not repented of, would lead to eternal death. How many parishes in our countries could be given the exact same diagnosis? How many bishops of dioceses, pastors of parishes, and rectors of seminaries have tolerated false teaching by those who beguile the sheep? How many leaders, even lay leaders, never say a word out of the fear of men?

It is instructive to note that Jesus said that He “gave her (Jezebel) time to repent, but she refused to repent of her immorality” (Rv 2:21). When she refused, He made the consequences clear:

- “Behold, I will throw her on a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her doings, and I will strike her children dead” (Rv 2:22).

Again, wow! That is Jesus shepherding His Church. Listen closely to His diagnosis, His remedies, and His warnings. This is the voice of Love. It is not harsh, mean, judgmental, intolerant, or hateful; it is truth, coming from a heart of perfect Love.

There are extremely important lessons here that Jesus is teaching us. We all have areas of service and responsibility that Jesus has given to us—our marriages and families, our businesses, parishes, dioceses, institutions of learning, etc. They all belong to Him. He has entrusted them to us and expects us to follow His leadership in exercising our responsibility over them.

How many priests and bishops, and how many of us, have been given “time to repent” but haven’t? How many of us have decided to “go along to get along” or have failed to act because of inordinate self-love, a fear of not being liked, or to avoid conflict? Jesus came to the false prophetess in mercy, but when she ignored Him, He applied an appropriate remedy: a severe mercy. The purpose of His loving judgment is to remove all that hinders love.

To follow in Jesus’ footsteps takes courage, especially today. But we should all take heart. Jesus is zealous to not only root out sin, but to forgive us and provide us with the strength we need to love as He loves in every situation.

Jesus’ ultimate concern is to do what it takes to bring each one of us home to the Father, and to share with us the riches of His own glory. To those who conquer, He promises great rewards!

It is a great blessing for us to be living in these difficult days. It provides us opportunities to bear witness to the One we love, to receive His grace to join the army of loyal friends and faithful witnesses who “conquered him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, because they loved not their lives even unto death” (Rv 12:11). May these words someday be said of each one of us.

COME, HOLY SPIRIT!

Peter Herbeck
Bishop Lesanu-Christos Matheos, of the Eparchy of Bahir Dar-Dessir in Ethiopia, recently visited the Renewal Ministries’ offices. He was in the United States to attend the ordination of an Ethiopian priest in Chicago and to visit Ethiopian priests and communities.

Bishop Lesanu has seen amazing stories of conversion in his diocese over the past couple of years, especially in the Gumuz tribe. The Gumuz are very isolated, but two young men from the tribe who had encountered Jesus at school worked with the bishop to bring a priest to their people. Last year, 280 people were baptized!

And this year, Bishop Lesanu helped baptize 405 Gumuz people! He said the Gospel is bringing about tremendous change in the Gumuz culture. He said there are two things the Gumuz people value: not lying and not stealing. He said that even if a member of the Gumuz tribe were to kill someone, they would never lie about it.

He added, however, that the Gumuz also have a habit of killing people if they are annoyed with them. He said they don’t place much value on human life. He explained that if a person’s family saw their loved one about to be killed, their typical response would be to simply kill the person themselves. By killing you before the enemy, he said, “they think they saved you.”

This “killing culture,” as Bishop Lesanu described it, has been reduced since the Gumuz have come to know Christ. He shared a story about a mother who asked her sons to seek revenge on their father’s killer. All four sons refused, citing as their reason the fact that “the Lord says not to kill.”

“Today was a shock for the society,” said Bishop Lesanu.

Bishop Lesanu added that the Gumuz people are independent; they don’t want to beg. He once received a dollar from a woman—“and, with the heart of the lady who gave it to me, that one dollar is worth more to me than one million dollars.”

“The Gumuz are unique because they are innocent,” he continued. “I tell them to keep that value and tradition. They give back if they are given any more than they need.”

He said he doesn’t like to make the Gumuz people wait too long to be baptized, because “it is a matter of salvation. We don’t need them to be theologians; we want them to be baptized.”

The faithful receive additional teaching before receiving their First Communions. He described the beauty of the Gumuz people’s faith: “They kiss the cross every time they come to the priest. They love the cross. They will run up to a priest if they see him on the street and say, ‘Bless me, Father’ and ask for absolution.”

Bishop Lesanu’s diocese is both new and very big—more than two-thirds the size of Italy. Yet he only has a very small number of priests and religious to assist him in serving the faithful.

He became acquainted with Renewal Ministries after doing an interview with Church in Need. At the time, he was a chaplain for the Charismatic Catholics, who “looked very Protestant.”

“This was a big load for me,” he explained. “I was given the big responsibility just to be an umbrella over them. I knew no one else. Church in Need published the interview, and many Catholics from around the world reached out to me. Michelle Moran, who was then president of ICCRS (International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services), contacted me.”

Through that connection, Renewal Ministries’ Country Coordinators Lloyd and Nancy Greenhaw came to serve in Ethiopia. One way the Greenhaws have served is by teaching university students.

“We have more than eleven big government universities in our area,” said Bishop Lesanu. “Each university has 40,000 to 50,000 students, with just one percent who are Catholic. We have to take care of them and give them good formation.”

Bishop Lesanu added, “In 2016, one year after my installation as bishop, I had a lot of problems directed to me. I questioned, ‘Is it really the will of God that I am a bishop?’ I had a car accident, there was division among my priests, and some of the faithful changed religions. It caused me to question myself. I was in contact with Ralph Martin and Sr. Ann Shields, and Sr. Ann told me to prostrate myself in front of the Eucharist very often. She said, ‘Everything has to be for the good of the mission, and God can help you.’

In one year, everything changed.”

Additionally, a priest who travelled with the Greenhaws last year saw the bishop’s living conditions—he had no office and worked out of his bedroom—and offered to pay the rent on a bigger house for a year. Now, Bishop Lesanu has an office space and the Dominican Sisters of Catherine of Siena work there as well, doing pastoral education.

“I can see the Lord put me in that place and is following me, assisting me,” said Bishop Lesanu. “I can see that it is His will that this work be given to me.”
It’s easy to walk through life believing human beings are the center of everything. But God breathes us into being. We have no claims on God. God has every claim on us. But how does this apply to sex?

When God created spiritual beings, one of them, Lucifer, grew prideful and led a rebellion against God. The few angels who stayed with God defeated Lucifer—whose name changed to Satan, the adversary, the devil. He remains the most powerful thing God created, but now is totally warped and bent.

Unfortunately, we listened to the adversary and believed a liar instead of God. As soon-to-be St. John Henry Neumann said, this was a primordial catastrophe that deeply wrecked our race. We were always meant to become like God, which Eve saw in the fruit. It was to make her wise, and we thought we should become that by grasping, and by making happen in ourselves this gift that was always meant to be given to us, but was intended to simply be received.

Without Jesus, the human race is now senselessly darkened and without hope. We’re exceedingly vulnerable to our adversary, who lies to us and knows exactly how to drive our flesh toward evil. Listening to the adversary—sinning—brings serious consequences. To sin means to place yourself into the hands of a tyrant and a trafficker, to be enslaved. Sin separates us from God and drives us deeper and deeper into sin. If we persist in sin and do not repent of it, those consequences will endure eternally.

However, God wants us to become like Him. To do that, we must strive against the adversary, with God’s help. And in the fullness of time, God calls a people unto Himself so He can enter into the story to bring it to its rightful conclusion. A time is coming when the living and the dead will be judged, and God will bring justice.

This is the stark reality that Jesus reveals about humanity. It can be confusing: Many seemingly good people do not confess Jesus; how can they be in a bad place? We forget that to not love God revealed in Jesus is the most unjust thing anyone can do. It’s horrifying, it’s worse than anything else you can think of, and justice will be done to those who inflict horror upon God.

This very stark picture is why God has always shared with His people, who are meant to be a light to the world:

_I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you this day, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you . . . But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you this day, that you shall perish._ (Dt 30:15-18)

God wants to bring the human race out of this wreckage and to salvation. That’s why He entered into this story and tried to draw close to humanity. There are absolutely only two options: life and death. Jesus says, “Enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and it is easy that leads to destruction. And those who enter by it are many, for the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and few there are who are finding it” (Mt 7:13-14).

Jesus loves us and wants us to know the truth. St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas thought a majority of the human race would be lost because of what happened in the Garden of Eden. The narrow way—Jesus—is the only option.

Jesus first mentions sexuality in Matthew 5:27, when He says lust is the same as adultery, one of the Ten Commandments. And not abiding by the commandments means choosing death. We probably have friends who live in persistent sexual sin, and we just go, “Meh.” Considering what Jesus says, what an unloving response that is!

Sexual purity involves eternity. A Christian is a temple of the Holy Spirit; what we do with our bodies deeply affects God. To be with God, you must covenant yourself to Him. And woe to the person who defiles what is God’s, even if it’s him or herself. Matthew 15:19 lists adultery and fornication in the same list as murder. That’s pretty striking.
This could be the whole talk:

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” (1 Cor 6:9).

People often think only Hitler’s going to hell. This tempting heresy, called universalism, is everywhere, but it can’t withstand Scripture:

“Neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:9-10).

This means those who engage in this behavior in a consistent, unrepentant way—but that’s still a lot of people! We all struggle, but do we repent? Do we want to walk differently; are we willing to make changes so we can?

God never tires of forgiving. But to live as someone who partakes in homosexual acts, as an adulterer, or in unrepentant sexual immorality brings destruction if we don’t repent and get up again. Conversion means getting rid of this stuff—not seeing how I can follow God while bending rules and dancing on the line.

Jesus wants to rid our heart of the disease and affliction of sin, including sexual sin:

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two shall become one.” But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him . . . Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Cor 6:15-20)

“YOU ARE NOT YOUR OWN.”

How often does our world not understand that? You have been made one spirit with Christ; therefore, when you become one flesh with someone, Christ is implicated in that. That is why sexual sin matters. Your body does not belong to you; your body belongs to God, just like everything else about you. And that’s actually fantastically good news! Jesus shows us how we stay healthy and how we escape eternal judgment and damnation forever.

If anyone hearing this message experiences condemnation, beware. That is the devil. We should feel convicted. Those are two very different things: God convicts; the devil condemns. If you’re experiencing condemnation, make the sign of the cross over yourself, say Jesus’ name, and tell the devil to go back where he belongs. We all face this struggle. It takes time, and we have to be patient.

Paul teaches in Ephesians that walking in sexual impurity is typical before coming to Jesus, but that we must allow our new life in Jesus to throw off that old cloak. The Church has always been radically different in this. Coming out of that way of thinking is part of Christian growth. Therefore, we ought not to excuse it when we encounter it in fellow Christians.

And he who sat upon the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new . . . As for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rv 21: 5-8).

What a passage! The cowardly are in the lake of fire, as well as fornicators—and how easy it is to not live up to things sexually because you are a coward? Praise God for the Theology of the Body and the way it breaks open Scripture to show the immensely beautiful things about sexuality, but may we never forget how high the stakes are! May we hear the warning that our eternal salvation is at stake, and that living in unrepentant sexual sin sends you to hell.

In conclusion, let’s find encouragement from St. Theresa of Avila, who says,

“Even if you are committing mortal sins, keep on praying, and I guarantee you that you will reach the harbor of salvation.”

Never give up hope! Never stop clinging to Christ! Never stop praying!

“Without the fear of God the soul is like a ship without ballast; even if she is richly laden with virtue, she is in continual danger of being wrecked on the rocks of temptation, if she is not steadied by this ballast of the fear of God.”

Venerable Louis of Grenada
The bishop has been so happy with the results of our visits with his university students that he asked us to give them another weekend session. Each year, we have some returnees and newly enrolled students as well.

Eighty students attended; the bishop was happy. Lloyd began his talks on knowing and defending the faith with an in-depth talk on Mary, going through biblical typology and that the Ark of the Covenant is Mary. He taught all day, going through talks on the Eucharist, confession, idols, and more. The youth were amazed by everything the Church teaches and believes is in the Bible!

The next day, I taught on “Growing in Prayer” and on St. Therese of Lisieux and the “Audacity of Faith.” Bishop Lesanu interpreted for us. He greatly enjoys being with the young people. He explained that these kids experience many problems and hopelessness. Choosing to stay Catholic means choosing the more difficult path—including less education and fewer job opportunities. He said our time with the students always strengthens their faith. One young man chose this university based on reports he had heard about us from prior students. After the session, he said he was not disappointed in his decision!

Lloyd answered the young people’s many questions on faith, marriage, and what being a true Christian means in their lives. I then taught them how to share their testimonies—which they had never done before. Then they practiced giving their testimonies. One young man stood up and said that in his church, a thief stole the Blessed Sacrament and threw the hosts on the floor. Suddenly, the thief was paralyzed. He remained that way all night until morning Mass-goers found him and the police were called; he then was set free of the paralysis, and they took him to jail!
a prayer to accept Jesus. Then, Father, Lloyd, and I asked everyone interested to come forward for prayer. All responded. We laid hands on several hundred people, children included, and asked for God’s blessing and healing. Lloyd, with Father’s blessing, blessed them with a large Benedictine Cross. The people couldn’t take their eyes off Jesus!

Afterward, we were invited to the chief’s hut. The wide-eyed children rarely see “Fraenges,” know as whites, and they stared and pressed around me as I took photos. So cute! It was around noon and very hot. We walked several miles back to the truck, and many kids walked with us. We drove back to Father’s house, and we all ate and rested. Then, around 4 p.m., Father took us on another adventure. He took us to another Gumuz village about thirty minutes away. None of these people have been baptized, and few have heard the Gospel. They practice traditional religion, and Father has gained their trust. Father thought that Lloyd’s “Genesis to Jesus” story was perfect to share with them. Again, we drove as far as we could. This time, we only had to walk uphill about a half mile to a set of mud huts with people sitting on logs in a half circle, with men on the right and women and most children on the left. The people were in no hurry and sat very attentively as Lloyd preached. Afterward, as in the other camp, he asked if they wanted to ask Jesus into their hearts. They did. It was a beautiful experience.

Coming from America, it is still amazing that there are places where the Gospel has not been preached. What a fantastic privilege!

At dark, we started back. Many young boys ran after us. They ran faster than we could drive and tried to grab hold of our vehicle. The driver finally stopped and sent them away, but they still followed a long distance, waving and laughing.

### TESTIMONIES FROM TWO UNIVERSITY STUDENTS:

1. **I have received many things in my life from the beginning of last year, when Bishop Scott McCaig taught us about the Mass. I was converted by the teaching Bishop Scott. Most of the time, even if you’re a singer in the choir, after Mass, you begin to look at bad photos on your phone. After hearing Bishop Scott, I completely stopped. I started to read the Bible, and I learned how to pray and to read the Bible and understand it.**

   In Lloyd and Nancy’s testimony, they had been rich and they had many things, but they had to leave that for Christ, for the service of the Lord. Now, I don’t think I will go into government work. I want to do what Lloyd and Nancy are doing. I will do that next year. I have to pay back. I have to do something for the Lord, because I learned from them, from you. After finishing the University, I would like to do evangelization work for the diocese.

2. **When I was in grade eleven, I heard Americans brought teaching and told us what was wrong about masturbation. I longed for an opportunity to listen to these people. I chose the Bahir Dar University so that I could meet you. I knew that such an opportunity from Lloyd and Nancy could only be found in the Bahir Dar diocese.**

   When you spoke about Mary, I had never thought about this before. I am now fully convinced that Mary intercedes for us. During my final exam, I prayed to Mary to help me to pass the exam. I made an “F.” I had already prepared my luggage to move back home. But the teacher called me and offered to help, and he helped me bring my grade up. So, it was a chance for me! I realized Mary really is an intercessor, and when you pray to her, she responds. Also, I was surprised that abortions are not allowed. I thought, how are you going to keep the population from becoming too big, it will be difficult. I now know that God has us for a purpose. Your teachings opened my eyes. We cannot be against the will of God. Only the Catholic Church is against divorce. It makes me love my Catholicism, because Catholicism is still firm in the teaching and continues its mission.

All of the Gumuz people came forward to receive a blessing after hearing Lloyd’s teachings.
Bishop Lesanu with Peter Herbeck and Gary Seromik at the Renewal Ministries’ office during the bishop’s recent trip to the United States.

DeSales Center, Brooklyn, MI
i.d.9:16 Summit
Aug. 23-24
Ralph Martin, Peter Herbeck, and Pete Burak
Contact: intentionaldisciples916@gmail.com

Panamá City, Panamá Healing Conference
Aug. 23-25
Dr. Mary Healy
Contact: miquelhoracio@gmail.com

* Not open to the public.
For a complete listing, visit: RenewalMinistries.net/Events

Please Pray...

That the hearts of our leaders to whom the Lord is directing this time of “severe mercy” may respond with “zealous repentance,” and that we may respond similarly in areas of our own lives that need repentance.

For Bishop Lesanu and others who bring the Gospel into large areas with few resources. May the Lord magnify all they do, bless them with the people and resources to make their work fruitful, and prepare hearts to receive His Word.

For the prayer intentions of all our supporters and their family members, especially as they face the challenges of illness and economic uncertainty.

R E N E W A L M I N I S T R I E S

In the United States

Episcopal Advisor
Archbishop Robert J. Carlson, St. Louis, MO

Chairman of the Board
Deacon Dan Foley

President
Ralph Martin

In Canada

Episcopal Advisor
Cardinal Thomas Collins, Toronto, ON

Chairman of the Board
Monsignor Gregory Smith, Vancouver, BC

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, conferences, retreats, and other international evangelistic events.

Visit our website—www.renewalministries.net for programs, blog, contact info, resources, & more!

Download the Renewal Ministries’ App for easy access to all of the above Renewal Ministries’ content and so much more!

Editor Heather Schultz Design Emily Bachelor © 2019 by Renewal Ministries

www.renewalministries.net P.O. Box 1426 Ann Arbor, MI 48106 phone 734-662-1730 In Canada P.O. Box 400 Station U Toronto, ON M8Z 5Y8 phone 416-251-4255