Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I want to keep my letter short this month so we can publish an article by Kristina Cooper, a dedicated single woman from England, whom I’ve met several times over the years. She’s the editor of Good News Magazine (www.ccr.org.uk) which serves the Catholic charismatic renewal throughout the British Isles and Ireland. In this article she shares a very personal discovery which I think perfectly illustrates how to respond to the gentle inspirations of the Spirit to make ourselves more fully available to God, who wants to be so fully available to us. “Detachment” is never an end in itself but a means to receive more fully the presence of God which brings with it the fullness of joy, freedom and love.

This Easter season provides us all with an opportunity to open ourselves more and more to “the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way” (Eph. 1:23).

I’d like to draw your attention also to the article by Peter Herbeck which fulfills our promise in last month’s newsletter to provide a fuller report on an important consultation which we participated in with Cardinal Turkson in Ghana.

Also, in this month’s newsletter we are advertising two upcoming Renewal Ministries’ events that are great opportunities for spiritual growth. Our annual Gathering will take place the first weekend in May and is a wonderful time of fellowship with other members of the Renewal Ministries “family” as well as a chance to receive a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit as we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Our 4th annual Renewal Ministries Institute will also resume this summer with The School of Spirituality and The School of Catholic Bible Study. I encourage you all to try to attend one or both of these schools and to take advantage of the practical tools offered for growth in holiness.

Recently, we’ve received an increasing number of responses to our two five days a week radio programs, Food for the Journey, hosted by Sr. Ann Shields and Fire on the Earth, hosted by Peter Herbeck. If you’re not able to listen to them on a local Catholic radio station you can always hear them on our website: www.renewalministries.net.

Thank you for your ongoing support which makes so many good things possible. Happy Easter!

Your brother in Christ,

Ralph Martin
Evangelization Consultation in Africa

In early January, Renewal Ministries co-sponsored with Cardinal Peter Turkson, a leaders’ meeting in Cape Coast, Ghana that we called the “Evangelization Consultation.” We convened the meeting in order to address a challenging problem the Church in Africa is now facing. Following the funeral of Pope John Paul II, Cardinal Turkson was interviewed by a Catholic news agency in Italy. In the interview he said there is a great need for deeper conversion in the lives of Catholics in Africa. He pointed out that the African Church is indeed growing quickly, and that there are real signs of encouragement and hope in this young Church, but that there is also great need for a much deeper, more permanent conversion of the faithful.

He explained that many in the Church have been “catechized” and “sacramentalized” but that they have not yet been adequately evangelized. Too often the assumption is made that because people have gone through a process of education, they have actually met the Lord, and that they have made a deep, personal and conscious decision to become his disciples. That assumption leaves many people essentially unchanged. That is, they go through an education process—take classes, pass exams, participate in various sacramental rites, but have not gone through a deep, thorough process of self-examination in light of the demands of the Gospel. Many remain in habit patterns of sin; they participate in cultural and religious practices that are inconsistent with being a disciple. As a result, their faith is often immature, incomplete, and to put it starkly, they remain essentially unconverted.

Our meeting sought to address this problem, one that is by no means unique to Africa, by bringing together key leaders from around the African continent who have been involved with direct evangelization for many years. They have all experienced a genuine measure of success in their work in addressing this fundamental problem. Our country coordinators who work in Africa also attended: Tom Edwards, Peter Thompson, Brent Heiser and Lloyd and Nancy Greenhaw, as well as Deacon Alex Jones who has ministered with us on previous trips to Africa.

One of the most helpful contributions came from a special guest invited by Cardinal Turkson and Bishop Anthony with the Renewal Ministries team (l to r): Nancy and Lloyd Greenhaw, Peter Herbeck, Brent Heiser, Peter Thompson and Tom Edwards.
By Peter Herbeck, Missions Director

Turkson. Bishop Anthony Okonkwo Gbuji from Nigeria is an inspiring, colorful, and wise pastor, who spoke from his own experience in Nigeria and distilled the essential elements needed to confront and overcome this basic problem. We were all stuck by his honesty, conviction and humility.

A New Era of Evangelization

He said that in 1982 Pope John Paul II came to Nigeria and challenged the bishops to a “new era of evangelization.” Bishop Anthony was selected by the Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, along with one other bishop, to propose a strategic evangelistic plan for the Church in Nigeria. He told us that the first thing that needed to happen was, “I had to be converted as a bishop.” He admitted that although he was a bishop, he knew very little about evangelization. He needed a whole new vision of what it meant to be an evangelizing bishop, and what it meant to lead his people in becoming an evangelizing diocese.

With the help of Fr. Tom Forrest, Fr. Jim Birmingham of Evangelization 2000 and a number of dynamic lay leaders from Europe, he discovered that evangelization begins with personal conversion. Before any of us can be willing and interested in evangelization, we need to undergo a more radical conversion, one which puts us in touch with Jesus’ passion for those who don’t know him. The Bishop reminded us that this passion comes only from the gift of the Holy Spirit. The first agent of evangelization is the Holy Spirit. He said, the Spirit “sets the soul on fire” for evangelization, and that the Holy Spirit is ready to give us the passion and power to fulfill the Great Commission, we just need to “seek the Holy Spirit” more explicitly in our lives. We were all deeply touched by his humility when he admitted, “I really needed more of the Holy Spirit in my life.”

Conversion, Proclamation and Community

With the help of Fr. Tom and others, Bishop Anthony presented a simple plan to the Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, with a “spirituality of evangelization” as the foundation. It had three parts, built on the witness of the early Church in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles: conversion, proclamation and community.

Conversion is focused on encountering the person of Jesus, and entering into an intimate relationship with him. It means helping people understand what it means to make Jesus the Lord of their lives. He reminded us that it includes a willingness to make a break with anything in our lives that is inconsistent with living for Jesus.

The next element is proclamation and simply put, it means speaking about Jesus to others.

The Consultation brought together key leaders from around the African continent who have been involved with direct evangelization for years. Cardinal Turkson from Ghana (middle row, center) and Bishop Anthony from Nigeria (next to the Cardinal) spearheaded our fruitful discussions.

“We were all deeply touched by his humility when he admitted, ‘I really needed more of the Holy Spirit in my life.’”

continued on page 4
He quoted Pope Paul VI, “to evangelize is first of all to bear witness in a simple and direct way…a clear proclamation that in Jesus Christ the Son of God made man who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all men as a gift of God’s grace and mercy…this gift which, above all, is liberation from sin and the Evil One” (Evangelii Nuntiandi #26 & #27).

The final part is community, the concrete experience of being brothers and sisters in the Lord together. We all need a place where we can speak about Jesus together, to share our lives, to be accountable before the Lord, to pray together. From this experience as believers we become an evangelizing community, a body of people living together in Jesus, conscious of his personal call to each one of us to “make disciples of all nations,” and to be guided by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit.

Making these elements of a “spirituality of evangelization” explicit is, essentially what all the participants in the consultation pointed to. Some expressed it in slightly different terms, but all were in agreement that a set of false assumptions currently undermine a full and effective initiation process into the life of the Church. Three assumptions in particular seem almost universal.

1) It is often assumed that the catechized person has made a conscious, personal, informed decision to make Jesus the Lord of his life, including making a conscious break with habit patterns of sin.

2) It is often assumed that the catechized person has come into a living, vital relationship with the Holy Spirit and is experiencing the gifts and power of the Spirit active in their life.

3) It is often assumed that this person is living in a concrete experience of committed relationships with others in the Lord. The fact is that these assumptions are operative in much of the Church throughout the world today, not just in Africa.

Implementing the Plan

After describing the key elements of the evangelistic strategy for the Church in Nigeria, Bishop Anthony went on to tell us that concrete implementation of the plan started from the top down. He required, as did other bishops, that each of his three hundred seminarians and all the priests of the diocese go through a month long “evangelization training school.” The first week was a Life in the Spirit Seminar, the second week focused on practical tools for evangelization, and during the final two weeks the students were sent out in small groups, to the highways and byways to share the Gospel. Over the past ten years or so, the Church in Nigeria has held over 130 evangelization schools across the country for clergy and laity. The Bishop said the schools have been and continue to be a key in the formation of an “evangelizing diocese.” With a surprising degree of honesty and directness, he said that the diocese will not take up its evangelistic calling unless the Bishop and priests have embraced it with all their hearts and are taking the lead in helping others concretely engage the mission.

He underlined many times that without genuine conversion, real life in the Holy Spirit, and authentic community life, evangelization won’t happen. For evangelization to grow, leaders must be trained, and the laity need to take up their place in the mission, sharing their time, talent and treasure for the salvation of souls.

For our part, we pledged the ongoing support of Renewal Ministries to Cardinal Turkson, Bishop Anthony and all the leaders gathered for the consultation. It is a great privilege for us to be able to stand with these brothers and sisters who are radically committed to the mission of the Church.
Seek a Fresh Outpouring of the Holy Spirit!

In this 40th anniversary year of the Charismatic Renewal we invite you to join us for our annual Renewal Ministries Gathering May 4-6, 2007 at St. John Center for Youth and Family in Plymouth, MI (halfway between Ann Arbor and Detroit).

A Weekend of Thanksgiving
- Praise and worship
- Daily Mass

A Weekend of Prayer
- A fresh outpouring of charisms
- Healing
- Continued anointing for the ongoing work of Renewal Ministries

A Weekend of Teaching & Preaching

A Weekend of Fellowship
- Friday golf outing
- Missions updates
- Meet other members of the “Renewal Ministries family”

For more information or to register contact Jessica Sherwood at 734-662-1730, ext 32 or jsherwood@renewalministries.net or download and print out the registration form at www.renewalministries.net.

Renewal Ministries Institute 2007
At St. John Center for Youth and Family in Plymouth, MI

School of Spirituality
July 6–July 8
Join Sr. Ann Shields and Sr. Sarah Burdick as they develop the theme: Extraordinary Grace in Ordinary Time, based on the wisdom of St. Francis De Sales.

School of Catholic Bible Study
July 19–22
Make Scripture study a more active and fruitful part of your life and service to the Lord as we study the Gospel of John and Moses and the Torah.

For more information contact Jessica Sherwood at jsherwood@renewalministries.net or call 734-662-1730 ext 32
I still can’t quite believe that I have done it. I’ve decided not to watch television anymore. I know there are wonderful nature programmes, and stimulating news reports, as well as life affirming material of various kinds, but I’ve realised, for me anyway, television is an obstacle to my relationship with God.

I suppose I’ve realised this for some time now, but have never had the grace, because that is what it is, to actually give it up completely. But even now, I feel a bit like an alcoholic on the wagon, a little fragile about making such an inner commitment. Will I be able to keep it up when it means never watching another late night black and white movie again? Like any addict I have to simply say that at least for today I’m going to do without it.

It probably sounds a bit extreme to others, particularly as it wasn’t as if I watched that much TV in the first place. My life is simply too busy for that. But it’s the place that TV has occupied in my life. Slowly I began to realise that although I worked for God, my satisfaction and pleasure were actually coming from other things. I wasn’t giving God a chance. He was being edged out by television, chocolate and goodies from shopping.

And of all of these, television has probably been the most destructive to my relationship with God. Not because it’s intrinsically evil but because of the way I have used it. When you live alone and work a lot, all too easily TV can become your friend in a way that isn’t healthy. It can soothe and entertain in such a way that it airbrushes away all your little pains and difficulties, but in doing so it also displaces your need for God. Why turn to him when you have a multi-channel possibility of delights before you? When there is so little silence in our lives is it any wonder we can’t hear him speak?

I have been working up to this for some time now. It began several years ago during Lent, when I managed to give up watching videos. I did this not through will power, of which I have none, but by making a commitment to say the rosary before watching any videos. Without much effort, this little trick stopped me from watching any at all.

Then, because I wanted to stop the teenagers who come into my house from automatically tuning into the TV, I removed the set from the living room, saying it was an Advent discipline leading up to Christmas. This meant I didn’t watch it either. It turned out to be a great blessing and was the first time I actually got anything out of Advent. I thought I didn’t watch much TV, but having no TV at all, I discovered all those little bits of time that it had sucked away without me realising it. A bit like a Russian Vine in a garden, TV has the ability to take over every little crack of time which is not specifically allocated for anything else. I suddenly found the time for all kinds of things I always said I didn’t have.

Thus for the last couple of years, I have given up television for both Advent and Lent. I still, however, blanched at the idea of total cold turkey. There’s always something that is too good to miss—like the Pope’s funeral or whatever—and before long I find I’m back on the circuit of too many late night detective shows.

It was this summer that changed things. Every August I go home to my mom’s for two weeks of R&R. I go for nice walks in the countryside, chat with my mom, sleep late and…watch too much television. And I hadn’t really connected it before but I also stop praying. It’s as if I not only take a holiday from my work, but I take a holiday from God too. This shows itself in all kinds of subtle ways. I regress and become like a child, allowing my mother, who’s in her late 70’s, to look after me without thinking of her needs. She hates the feature films I like, but because I’m home for such a short time, uncomplainingly she lets me have my way and goes to bed early rather than doing what she would prefer, like playing a word game. Watching TV, however, makes me selfish and helps me to blank out anybody else’s desires—after all this is my holiday.

This year, however, I agreed to give a retreat shortly after my holidays. As a result, over my holiday break I had to prepare. This involved listening to talks on John of the Cross by Ralph Martin, reading some of John’s writings and praying about it. I hardly watched any television and I felt so much better for it. Indeed at the end of this year’s annual break I felt refreshed in a way I usually don’t. It was St Ignatius who first discovered when he was holed up recovering from a battle wound, that although he enjoyed equally the tales of gallant knights and battles and those of the great saints and their endeavours for God, it was the joy of the latter that lasted.
So I found that although it might be easier and even more agreeable to watch TV on one level, it was doing the godly things that actually made me feel happier afterwards. John’s teaching on attachment also challenged me. I am very quick to point out the deficiencies in our culture, but conveniently neglect to see the way I too am a victim of them.

In the West we often ponder why it is that God doesn’t seem so manifest here as he does in Africa or India or other developing world countries. Rather than looking at society in general over which we have little influence or control, it might perhaps be better to start with ourselves.

I do have God in my life. He’s very important to me, central even, but I like my comforts too. I want God and...and that’s the problem. In doing this I think I’m very lucky. I’m having it all unlike those poor people in Africa. A nice relationship with God and a nice life too. But am I?

I began to reflect on my own life. Perhaps I wasn’t having it all. Maybe my attachments to the TV and to the other ways I was good to myself, kept me comfortable, but stopped me from finding God in a deeper way in my life and seeing him work more around me. How could God really speak to me when there was no silence and I was always busy working, or entertaining myself?

What the Church needs most of all today, said Pope John Paul II in his prophetic pastoral letter “Novo Millennio Ineunte” is not new programmes but saints. We can imagine that saints are perfect people, but as those who have known any beatified ones will say, this is not the case. A saint is simply someone who has given their whole life to God for the Kingdom, not holding anything back but putting their total trust in Him.

Luke 8:14 describes our situation. “As for the seed that fell among thorns, they are the one who have heard, but as they go along, they are choked by the anxieties, and riches and pleasures of life, and they fail to produce mature fruit.” What a suitable description of the Church in the Western World!

I felt God was giving me a challenge. Are you prepared to give up some of your comforts, your attachments, your luxuries, and give me a chance to fulfil you instead in my way? But it is a risk. By giving up our “riches”, our worldly pleasures, we make ourselves vulnerable. We uncover the void that lurks beneath our busy lives. What if God doesn’t show up? What if we end up being miserable without the TV? Will we cope? Asceticism has always been part of the Christian life, but it is an area that we in the West today have conveniently forgotten about. We just don’t like denying ourselves and don’t see the point. It’s only in doing it that the benefits emerge.

Maybe it’s only my imagination, but since my new regime I’m noticing things around me more. Maybe it’s because I have less sensory overload. It seems easier to pray. Maybe that’s God’s little encouragement to me to carry on? Deep down I am more at peace in a way I can’t explain, in spite of the usual crises around me which continue as before. The days seem brighter too—but that’s probably global warming!

Denying ourselves good things in life is not about masochism, but to create a space for something better—for God. Where this can lead, should encourage us all.

"A bit like a Russian Vine in a garden, TV has the ability to take over every little crack of time which is not specifically allocated for anything else."

"Are you prepared to give up some of your comforts, your attachments, your luxuries, and give me a chance to fulfil you instead in my way?"

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**Please Pray...**

+ for continued growth of the Church in Africa and for deeper, more permanent conversion in the lives of the faithful.

+ that the worldwide Church will continue to seek out and utilize effective means of evangelization.

+ that the upcoming Renewal Ministries’ Gathering would be a time of spiritual empowerment and refreshment for all the participants.

+ for all the intentions of our supporters and their family members.

*Thank you for your continued support through prayer as we labor together for the Gospel and the renewal of the Church.*
On the Road

“Grief, make way!
Fear, depart!
Sin, you must flee!
Death has fallen,
life has revived,
and Christ has called
us to the stars.”

St. Paulinus of Nola

April 2007

Mexico City, Mexico
High School Mission Trip
April 6–14
Debbie Herbeck, Jim Murphy

Toronto, Lift Jesus Higher Rally
April 14
Ralph Martin, Sr. Ann Shields, Peter Herbeck, Fr. Groeschel, Fr. Stan Fortuna, Dana Scallon
Contact Sadie at 905-270-2510
or www.lift-jesus-higher-rally.org

Ann Arbor, MI
Ave Maria Founders Club Bible Study
April 17
Peter and Debbie Herbeck

Ottawa, ON
Catholic Christian Outreach Retreat
April 20–22
Ralph Martin
Contact: brett.powell@cco.ca

Windsor, ON, Women of the Vine
April 26
Debbie Herbeck
Contact Lorraine Samrah at his@mdirect.net

Diocese of Houma-Thibodeaux, LA
School of Evangelization Part 2
April 26–29
Peter Herbeck, Dcn Steve Thomashefski
Contact: doug@houma.com

May 2007

Plymouth, MI, Renewal Ministries Gathering
May 4–6
Contact Jessica Sherwood at 734-662-1730 x 32
or jsherwood@renewalministries.net

Dublin, Ireland, Catholic Leaders Retreat
May 11–13
Ralph Martin
Contact: rob@kteams.org

Ann Arbor, MI
Ave Maria Founders Club Bible Study
May 15
Peter and Debbie Herbeck

Toledo, OH, Men’s Retreat
May 19
Ralph Martin, Peter Herbeck
Contact Roy Handy at 419-699-4310

June 2007

Tijuana, Mexico
Catholic Charismatic Renewal Conference
June 1–3
Ralph Martin
Contact Pablo Murillo at pablitojh@hotmail.com

Plymouth, MI, National Catholic Leaders Conference
June 8–10
Peter Herbeck
Contact: MBlumberg@aol.com

Enjoy full color newsletters, an extended schedule of events, videos of The Choices We Face television programs hosted by Ralph Martin, audio for Sr. Ann Shields’ radio program Food for the Journey and Peter Herbeck’s Fire on the Earth, a bookstore and much more...

www.renewalministries.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.

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