Dear Friends in Christ,

A letter from Ralph Martin

We’re in the midst of editing the new season of The Choices We Face television programs and they’re looking good. We’ll give you a full report of what the new programs will be like as we normally do in our February newsletter. What I’d like to do this month though is tell you about two encouraging visits I’ve had with bishops in two different dioceses.

I had a chance to visit with Bishop Thomas Olmsted in Phoenix, Arizona in connection with some talks I was asked to give for diocesan staff, heads of various offices, and volunteers. I was very impressed with what is happening there. The bishop is concerned that his people receive the best Catholic teaching and is hiring people from places where this is the emphasis. I met a number of people who had studied at the John Paul II Institute in Washington, D.C. and from Franciscan University of Steubenville, both places that are solid and dynamic and are turning out graduates that are beginning to make an impact in many different places. Among the diocesan staff are a group of dynamic young men and women who are working together to implement a “dynamic orthodoxy” in their various areas of responsibility. While the diocese faces great challenges with a growing population and less priests per capita than many other dioceses to serve them, I am sure that God will bless this leadership and the dedicated group of men and women who are supporting the bishop in his work. While I was there Bishop Olmsted was in the midst of publishing a series of articles on the Curé of Ars’ (St. John Vianney) struggle with the evil one in his great ministry of reconciling sinners to the Lord. We have received the bishop’s permission to post these articles on our website (renewalministries.net) and I think you will find them of interest as St. John Vianney is the Patron of priests and we are in the middle of the year that Benedict XVI has particularly devoted to honoring and praying for our priests. I also had a chance to visit with Bishop Robert Finn of the Diocese of Kansas City/St. Joseph, Missouri in connection with some talks and I am sometimes amazed at the casual manner with which Christians, Catholics included, take up our life within what Pope John Paul II rightly called the ‘culture of death’.

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Country coordinator Brent Heiser had the opportunity to visit with Bishop Afrifa of Koforidua, and discuss plans for future collaboration. The bishop was thrilled to receive his own Renewal Ministries t-shirt!
Dear Friends in Christ,

I gave to those working in the RCIA programs of the diocese as well as others interested in the topics. In the course I taught at Francisican University of Steubenville this past summer I had a student who is the Vice-Chancellor of the Diocese responsible for evangelization and catechesis. He thought that some of the things I taught in the course would be useful for people in the diocese to hear. I was particularly happy to come to this diocese and have a chance to visit with Bishop Finn since an article he had written just before last year’s elections had really struck me. I want to share some of this article, entitled “Warriors with Our Eyes Fixed on Heaven” from The Catholic Key (catholickey.org).

I am sometimes amazed at the casual manner with which Christians, Catholics included, take up our life within what Pope John Paul II rightly called the “culture of death.” The Church, by comparison, reminds us that we are engaged—by reason of our Baptism and Confirmation—in a battle, ”not with flesh and blood, but with the principalities and powers, with the rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in heaven.”(Eph 6:12) Jesus Christ has won the ultimate battle, but we, in the course of our human life must make our choice, determining on whose side we will live and die. Whose side will you choose?!

What is at stake in this battle is our immortal soul, our salvation. My responsibility as bishop is with the eternal destiny of those entrusted to my care. My total energies must be directed to the well being of those who otherwise may come under the spell of a radically flawed and fundamentally distorted moral sense, at odds with what our Mother the Church teaches. There are objective and transcendent truths. There is such a thing as right and wrong. There is a legitimate hierarchy of moral evils, and the direct willful destruction of human life can never be justified; it can never be supported. Do you believe this firm teaching of the Church?

Did you know that in Canada priests and Christian ministers have already been brought before tribunals for preaching and teaching in support of marriage? They are charged with ‘hate speech’ against homosexuality. In light of the tyranny of choice growing each day in our own beloved country, we ought to be ready for similar attacks on religious freedom. We must not fail to preach the Gospel. We cannot withhold the truth of our faith. That is why I will never be silent about human life. It is why I am proud of so many others—bishops, priests, deacons, religious and lay— who are not afraid to speak out about the values that matter most. What about you?

Our Lord told His apostles that they would be hated by the world, just as He was. Nearly all of them died a martyr’s death. As warriors of the Church militant, we must never resort to violence. But we must stand up fearlessly against the agents of death, the enemies of human life. Human beings are not Satan, but we know too well that they can come under his spell. They can become willing agents of death, numbed and poisoned in the culture of death. What about you?

I discovered during my time in the diocese that Bishop Finn is not only a man of strong and true words but is also a man whom God has given the wisdom to actually implement programs and plans in the diocese to insure that his people receive solid teaching and leadership. Last month I shared with you some of the “signs of a new springtime” that Anne and I had encountered in France. They are here in our midst, in North America, as well. Thanks be to God.

We here at Renewal Ministries continue to try to make the contribution God has asked us to make to this new springtime, and as usual, so much is happening that once again we can’t fit it all in this newsletter! We are now going to post additional “mission reports” on our website that we can’t fit into our printed newsletter for those who are interested. But in this newsletter you’ll read inspiring accounts of recent missions to Slovenia and Ghana.

Thank you for your steadfast support that makes all this possible. As the year begins to draw to a close please consider remembering Renewal Ministries in your end of the year giving.

Your brother in Christ,

Ralph Martin

“Did you know that in Canada priests and Christian ministers have already been brought before tribunals for preaching and teaching in support of marriage? They are charged with ‘hate speech’ against homosexuality. In light of the tyranny of choice growing each day in our own beloved country, we ought to be ready for similar attacks on religious freedom. We must not fail to preach the Gospel. We cannot withhold the truth of our faith. That is why I will never be silent about human life. It is why I am proud of so many others—bishops, priests, deacons, religious and lay—who are not afraid to speak out about the values that matter most. What about you?”
Our recent mission trip to Slovenia confirmed what we had experienced in previous trips there—the Charismatic Renewal is growing in Slovenia. Life in the Spirit Seminars are conducted in all six dioceses and in the Celje diocese last month 500 people attended one class, and in Ljubljana they had a class of 200. During our two week visit we had the opportunity to preach at thirteen different parishes and two conferences to more than 2500 people and each night we prayed over people for two to three hours.

We were blessed in our relationships with the priests in every parish. In Ljubljana the priest responsible for the prayer group in the Franciscan church is also the head of the Theology department in the Catholic University. Fr. Mio Kekic, S.J. is a Jesuit priest and has the full-time responsibility for the Charismatic Renewal for Slovenia. Pat and I have worked with him before, but this year on the leaders’ retreat I felt we became true friends. All of the priests may not be directly involved in the renewal but a good many are and the numbers are growing.

We were also interviewed for a half hour show on Catholic radio and had two TV interviews, one on a national TV station and a second on a Catholic TV station. Bishop Andrea Glaban of the Celje diocese spent an hour with Pat and I and he encouraged us to come back to his diocese next year.

It is always inspiring to hear directly from people we minister to about how God is at work in their lives.

* One older couple came to Pat very excited because one year ago we prayed over the husband for deliverance from alcohol and he has been totally free ever since.
* A young man considering the priesthood came to us for prayer asking for the courage to be able to witness about Jesus Christ. After we prayed over him he came forward and said that he actually felt courage come into his heart and for the first time was free to get up publically and share what Jesus did for him.
* During our retreat weekend for the leaders of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, our translator Leon told us about a physical healing concerning someone Pat and I prayed over earlier in the week. A man broke his arm and the doctor told him it would never heal properly and that he would be crippled in that arm permanently. He asked for prayer for three or four things and never mentioned his injured arm which was in a cast. I asked him, “Don’t you want healing for your arm?” He said yes, and we prayed over him. A few days later the cast was removed and the arm x-rayed. To the doctor’s surprise it was totally healed and he couldn’t even see any breaks in the bone. His arm was completely healed. This same man told us that in 2008 we prayed over him in Medjugorje for the Baptism in the Holy Spirit and ever since that time he has been going to church every day.
* Pat and I met a seventeen year old young man in the music ministry in the Koper diocese who was playing the trumpet during our praise and worship service. His mother told us that seven years ago we prayed over her for his immune system. At the time, when he was only ten, he was always very sick. She shared with us that he was healed of all the symptoms he had and is now a healthy young man playing his trumpet for the Lord. We actually had the opportunity to pray over him that evening.
* Pat was struck with excruciating back pain two days into our mission trip. She couldn’t move on her own. I had to help her just to get out of bed. Two other leaders and I prayed over her on our way to speak at a parish—it was the feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. Almost instantly she was free from the pain and was able to sit and stand for long periods of time without any pain. Previous to this trip she was in physical therapy for weeks for sciatic pain and was going home after the mission to Slovenia and return to therapy. All of the pain is gone!
Learning from the Saints

In Romans 2:12 St. Paul exhorts us, “Do not be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” I’ve read this passage many times over the years and have been both inspired and challenged by it. I go back to it often in my own battle to “not be conformed to this world.”

What does a renewed mind look like for someone who was once conformed to the world, but by the grace of God has experienced genuine transformation and renewal of mind? The Scriptures give us many concrete examples. Recently, another great source for me has been the lives of the saints. The saints are amazing; each of them, in their own unique way underwent a radical interior change, one that began with a renewal “in the spirit of their minds.” (Ephesians 4:23)

Two things always strike me about the saints that stand out as foundational elements of a renewed mind. First, all of them lived with an eternal perspective. Their minds were rooted in the biblical worldview and the fundamental truth that life here on earth is short. Their eyes were set on heaven. Heaven was the concrete goal of their lives. More than anyone else they lived by the perspective popularized in the contemporary best seller, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*—to always “begin with the end in view.” Heaven was their starting point and their desire for it guided their every decision. This eternal perspective provided them a new interior calculus, an ability to evaluate everything in this life in light of eternity.

The mind that is “conformed to this world” operates very differently. It is time bound. The ends and goals it sees and pursues are only of this world. This perspective can see only as far as retirement. A great deal of planning and sacrifice goes into securing the most comfortable and desirable retirement possible, but little attention is paid to heaven as a final goal. That perspective makes sense for someone who has decided there is no life after death, no God in heaven, no eternal home. Unfortunately, though many Christians today would say they believe in God and life after death, for all practical purposes they live as if the final goal of their lives is to be found here on earth. Heaven as the final goal of life is obscured or even ignored; it gets crowded out by the passionate pursuit of prizes yet to be gained in this life.

The saints took a radically different approach. They simply were not interested in the goals most moderns, and maybe even some of us, pursue with passion. We may be preoccupied by the question, “What do I have to do to secure my ideal retirement?” Their fundamental question was, “What must I do to gain heaven, to wear the crown, to enter into glory?”

To exclusively or primarily set one’s mind on this world’s goals made no sense to them. They knew everything that could be gained here was temporary, fleeting. For the saints it was foolish to invest one’s time, talent and treasure to secure something that would not last. They also knew that the passionate pursuit of this world’s ends often leaves little time to wisely pursue the things that can never be lost and will last forever. To ensure they reached their ultimate goal, the saints traveled light during their brief sojourn here on earth. They cultivated a healthy detachment from the things of this world, no matter how good they might have been. Their advice to us, so clearly proclaimed in their lives was: travel light, take only what you need for the journey, keep your eyes fixed on the ultimate prize, and invest whatever time, talent and treasure you have to attain your ultimate end. The saints understood and lived Psalm 90: “Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom,” and they received the gift of knowing how to live in a way that would make it possible for them to enter into the glory of heaven. These are the habits of history’s most highly effective people.

The second fundamental characteristic of a renewed mind manifested in the lives of the saints was their attitude toward suffering. Many of them welcomed suffering, rejoiced over it, understood it to be a gift from God and at times even prayed for it. I’m hard pressed to find a pattern of thinking more radically opposed to the modern mind than this.

In our contemporary world suffering is meaningless and is to be avoided at all costs. Nothing good can possibly come from suffering that couldn’t be learned in a more pleasant manner. Many who battle against various forms of suffering see it as a kind of curse which produces fear, sadness, depression, and even despair.
To a mind conformed to the world, the attitude of the saints is crazy, delusional, masochistic, and impossible to understand. It seems to go against our basic instincts for survival, comfort and the pursuit of personal happiness.

Did the saints have some kind of morbid fascination with pain or were they on to something? Did their “renewed minds” enable them to evaluate suffering according to an entirely new internal calculus and actually find value in it? They were able to view suffering in light of these fundamental truths of faith:

1. They knew God loved them, they belonged to Him and that He would never abandon nor forsake them because He is a loving Father who is utterly trustworthy.
2. They believed His plans for them were for good and not for woe.
3. They understood that God desired that they all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth; salvation meaning the whole person, body and soul with God in heaven forever.
4. They accepted that to enter into the life of God required purification—a purging of ego and the habit patterns of sin that stood in the way of their entering into that salvation.

They knew Jesus Christ is Lord and they were confident that nothing could happen to them without their loving Father permitting it. In the midst of their pain, humiliation, loss of control, temptations to anger, and feelings of abandonment, Jesus came to them in their weakness. They knew He was present, acting on their behalf, preparing them through their circumstances to enter into the communion of love with the Holy Trinity.

The vision of God was the fundamental goal of the saint. They discovered firsthand that suffering borne well is a powerful means to accelerate their preparation for heaven. So St. Bernard could say with confidence: “Present sorrow and suffering is the way to glory, the way to the kingdom.” St. Padre Pio said, “The more you are afflicted, the more you ought to rejoice, because in the fire of tribulation the soul will become pure gold, worthy to be placed and to shine in the heavenly palace.”

Suffering for the saints was profoundly meaningful. It was a gift from God Himself and it allowed them to share in the sufferings of Jesus, and further, to our great shock and surprise, it enabled them to “make up for what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ.” That is, in their suffering, the saints shared in Christ’s redemptive power. This is a divine paradox—that at the point of our greatest weakness, of near powerlessness, God acts on our behalf to allow us to share in His power for the redemption of the human race.

The saints walked the road less traveled, yet it’s the path Jesus invites us all to travel—it’s the way to heaven. The journey begins in the heart, but the battle to press on toward our ultimate destiny is fought and won in our minds, as they are touched and transformed by the Holy Spirit. The same grace that was present in the saints has also been given to us. Let us ask Jesus to stir up that grace so that our hearts and minds and the whole of our lives might be set on heaven.

To learn more about the spirituality of the Saints, go to our Book Store at renewalministries.net for DVDs, CDs and The Fulfillment of All Desire, a book by Ralph Martin.

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“Did the saints have some kind of morbid fascination with pain or were they on to something?”
Gary Seromik, administrator for Renewal Ministries, spent a week in Kumasi with the team on his first mission trip. Afterwards, he traveled to Benin to spend time with his son Sebastian who has been living and serving the poor there for the past two years.

Even though I’ve been working for Renewal Ministries since its inception back in 1980, this summer I did something I had never done before: I went on my first Renewal Ministries mission trip! For the most part, my work as administrator keeps me here in the background at the office, keeping things going, overseeing our fundraising efforts, and vigilantly watching over our budget. A few months ago, however, I noticed that Brent Heiser would be leading a team on a mission trip to Ghana, and proposed to Ralph that I join them. He readily agreed.

(Here I have to admit, though, that I did have an ulterior motive. My son Sebastian has been working with the Peace Corps in Benin for the past two years. Since last Christmas, after successfully raising the necessary funds from family and friends, he has been engaged in building an orphanage in the town of Ouèssè where he is posted, deep in the interior some 20 miles off the main highway. The inauguration was scheduled for the end of August and he was really hoping a family member might be there, particularly his father. Benin is a day’s trip by land from Ghana, so it was the perfect opportunity for me!)

I’m no stranger to this type of work. I’ve been involved in the Catholic charismatic renewal since its beginning in 1967, working and traveling with the International Communication Office for the Catholic charismatic renewal first in Ann Arbor and later in Belgium. (Now known as ICCRS, the office is located in Rome.) Back then I was always amazed at how the Lord would awaken within me gifts that I never thought I had when called upon in different situations. Nevertheless, I felt a certain amount of trepidation as the trip approached. Would I experience the same thing so many years later?

Needless to say, the Lord came through as always. At the same time, I found that He stretched me at times to meet both spiritual and physical challenges along the way. Fortunately, He provided me with the support and encouragement of some amazing team members whose boundless enthusiasm for mission work was contagious! Brent’s unlimited energy and flexibility were the perfect combination of gifts for his work as a country coordinator—attending not only to the needs of our hosts in Ghana but making sure that each team member had a sufficient supply of bottled water as well!

The purpose of the trip was to provide training to leaders of the charismatic renewal in Ghana in praying with people for deliverance, particularly the method that Neal Lozano maps out in his book, Unbound. We were fortunate to have Neal and Janet Lozano on the trip to give the teachings, along with their son, Matt, and their longtime friends Joe and Marty Marchese, who have accompanied them on trips to faraway places like Rwanda and the Sudan. The team was rounded out by Miriam Wright and Ann Heffernan, two Canadians with ample prayer experience and a deep love for the people of Ghana.

Although I had read Unbound when it first appeared I was the only one with no direct experience, so I had to learn quickly—along with the 500 people at the five day national conference held at the campus of Christian Village owned by the Archdiocese of Kumasi. To my delight and amazement, the Lord came through just as he had many years before. On Thursday 100 catechists from the Archdiocese arrived for two days of formation centered on “St. Paul, an Example for the Ghanaian Catechist”. Brent Heiser conducted the training while the rest of our team focused on Unbound. This was the first training session for Renewal Ministries in the Archdiocese and according to the feedback received, the sessions were very encouraging and we have been invited back for more formation work.

The training went extremely well. There was much joy and excitement among the leaders about learning a new method of healing and deliverance. Within an afternoon, I was able to pray with confidence for people. Toward the end of the week, sixty five teams appeared I was the only one with no direct experience, so I had to learn quickly—along with the 500 people at the five day national conference held at the campus of Christian Village owned by the Archdiocese of Kumasi. To my delight and amazement, the Lord came through just as he had many years before. On Thursday 100 catechists from the Archdiocese arrived for two days of formation centered on “St. Paul, an Example for the Ghanaian Catechist”. Brent Heiser conducted the training while the rest of our team focused on Unbound. This was the first training session for Renewal Ministries in the Archdiocese and according to the feedback received, the sessions were very encouraging and we have been invited back for more formation work.

The training went extremely well. There was much joy and excitement among the leaders about learning a new method of healing and deliverance. Within an afternoon, I was able to pray with confidence for people. Toward the end of the week, sixty five teams were formed to put into practice what they had learned at two city-wide rallies on Friday and Saturday nights and I teamed up with a final-year seminarian from Kumasi to pray with people. Attendance at the rallies was larger than expected with 2500+ the first night and 3000+ the second night. Neal began the evenings with exhortations and afterwards the
teams moved out to minister to the crowds. The Lord moved powerfully in many lives as we watched the tears flow as sadness and struggles were transformed into peace and joy.

At the end of our time in Kumasi, my son, Sebastian, met me in Accra and we travelled together to Benin, where I spent a week with him and attended the inauguration of CAEES, a center that will serve children who have escaped from child-traffickers as well as children who find themselves in difficult or abusive situations. I felt tremendous pride to see what he has been able to do in Ouèssè during the past two years, all the while sharing in the poor and simple life of the people in his town and growing by leaps and bounds in his own faith. The deep love and respect of the people for him increased my own love and respect for him.

Needless to say, the experience gave me a new appreciation for the work Renewal Ministries is doing—not only in Ghana but in many other countries around the world—as well as a renewed appreciation how the Lord is able to use us, his disciples and servants, as his instruments if we let him.

Editor’s Note: While Gary visited his son, remaining members of the team traveled six hours to the Jasikan Diocese to conduct a two day national catechist formation retreat. Below is Brent’s brief report on the second week.

Our schedule in Jasikan was full. We conducted formation sessions for 70 catechists from the 19 different dioceses in Ghana. We also used several sessions to teach Unbound to the catechists as well. We were invited to the home of Bishop Gabriel Mante who officially welcomed us to the diocese and expressed a desire for future collaboration. The team also conducted a session one evening at the diocesan cathedral.

On Thursday we boarded our van for the trip back to Accra. That night we conducted a healing service at the parish which drew a full church of over 1,000. On Saturday the team met with 120 diocesan service team leaders from the renewal for all day training. The Sunday schedule included a city-wide prayer meeting in the afternoon where the teams who were trained on Saturday had an opportunity to pray with others for healing and deliverance. There were testimonies of people being freed from years of bondage to fear, oppression and memories of abuse.

In conclusion, God provided the 2009 Ghana mission trip with an incredibly gifted ministry team and blessed our efforts beyond expectation. The response to Unbound, both from the teams who were trained and those who received ministry was truly astounding. Our collaboration with Anthony Assibey and Emmanuel Tamakloe at the National Charismatic Center continues to bear much fruit. Doors continue to open for further service in Ghana, particularly with the formation of catechists, who play such an important role in the Church in Africa. Renewal Ministries has been asked to play a major role in the 40th anniversary of the Charismatic Renewal in Ghana during 2010 including invitations from five dioceses to conduct formation for their catechists.

More than five hundred renewal leaders gathered for four days of intense training in healing prayer and deliverance.

There was much joy and excitement in Kumasi as more than 500 leaders in the diocese were trained in healing and deliverance prayer. Leaders gathered in small groups to pray for and empower one another in this ministry.
November 2009

Plymouth, MI
Christ the King Women’s Retreat
November 6–8
Sr. Ann Shields, Debbie Herbeck
Contact: 734-665-5040

Covington, Kentucky
Charismatic Conference Follow Up
November 7
Peter Herbeck
Contact Joe Bessler 859-341-5339

West Hartford, CT
Catholic Charismatic Conference
November 13–15
Ralph Martin
Contact number: 413-547-0118

Fremont, OH
Magnificat Women’s Breakfast
November 14
Sr. Ann Shields
Contact: magnificatinfo@catholic.org
or 419-433-4835

Trinidad, Priests Retreat
November 15–20
Peter Herbeck

Detroit, MI, Sacred Heart Major Seminary
Talk Sponsored by Office of Evangelization,
Archdiocese of Detroit
November 21
Ralph Martin
Contact: evangelization@aod.org
or 313-237-5778

Springfield, MA
Priests’ and Deacons’ Day of Renewal
November 23–24
Ralph Martin

December 2009

Lexington, KY, Magnificat Women’s Breakfast
December 5
Sr. Ann Shields, SGL
Contact Sue Sopala at 859-224-4908 or
lexington.omgr@championfactorydirect.com

Toronto, Ontario
Renewal Ministries Canadian Board Meeting
December 6–7
Ralph Martin, Peter Herbeck, Sr. Ann Shields,
Gary Seromik

O Jesus, our great High Priest, hear our humble prayers on behalf of your priests. Give them a bright faith, a firm and loving hope and a love which will increase during the course of their priestly life. Comfort them when they are lonely, strengthen them in times of sorrow and frustration; may they realize that the soul is purified through suffering. O loving Mother Mary, Mother of Priests, be their comfort, their joy, and their strength, and especially help them to live the ideals of their consecrated celibacy.


Please Pray...

+ that the Lord will give wisdom, strength and courage to bishops as they shepherd their dioceses and stand up for Truth.

+ that the Lord raises up dedicated men and women who can work together to implement a dynamic orthodoxy in their dioceses.

+ 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.