

# CHARISMATIC RENEWAL OFFICE NEWSLETTER

2719 E. 42<sup>nd</sup> Street  
Minneapolis MN 55406-3094  
E-mail: jolenecarpenter@juno.com

(612) 721-2543

Pete Fastner, Chairman of the Board  
Jolene Carpenter, Administrator  
Larry Nawrocki, Editor

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## Mission Statement:



*Our mission is to help people respond to the call to conversion to the lordship of Jesus Christ, to facilitate transformation through Baptism in the Holy Spirit, and to assist in the spiritual renewal of people and parishes.*

## Alpha

*Editor's Note: The following is a portion of an interview conducted with Margene Vessel regarding "Alpha", of which Margene is the local representative. The interview will continue in next month's edition of the Newsletter. Much interest seems to be being generated in the course both nationally and internationally. By publishing this interview, we hope to make people who are interested in the course more aware of what is involved in training for, and sponsoring, a course. Alpha conferences will be held in Duluth on May 16-17 and at Hosanna Lutheran Church in Lakeville on July 22-23. Anyone interested in obtaining more details about these conferences should contact Margene at the local Alpha Office. The telephone number is (651) 415-0349.*

CRO: Margene, tell me a little bit about your background and how you became involved in "Alpha". It originally started in England?

MARGENE: Yes. The course originated at a church called Holy Trinity which is in the center of London. It's been being utilized for over 25 years now. They had used it just within their own parish as a way of introducing new members to the basics of the Christian faith, realizing that some people, particularly in England which is a more unchurched place than America, were coming into the church and didn't have a lot of background in terms of some of the essential core values of the Christian faith. In the early 90's, a young vicar took the course over. His name was Nicky Gumbel. He was able to see the brilliance of the course and see it in a way that others had not. He

looked at the people in the small groups, and he saw that they were basically unchurched young adults. He also saw that in the course of ten weeks, every single person came to a vibrant faith in Christ.

CRO: How did you become involved?

MARGENE: I was living in England from 1991-1995, working at a small church in the Northern England. At a conference, I begin to hear more and more about this "Alpha" course. I went back to my home in Northern England, and I decided in my heart that I wanted to go and check out what was happening in London.

I went there, and I stayed for a week or two with some friends. I experienced the course, and I saw three young women get up and share their testimonies. They were in their early twenties, and I heard them say with such clarity, "Ten weeks ago I was asked to come to the Alpha course, and I laughed. There was no way I would be caught dead in a church. But after these ten weeks of being a part of the course, I now know God is my father; I know that Jesus is the one who died on the cross for me; I know the Holy Spirit has filled my life in a way that I never could have imagined." It was with such clarity and such normalness, this transformation that had happened in their hearts. And there was something very real about that conversion for them. All three of them had had no church background. They had never been baptized... even as babies. So they were having adult baptism that night with these three young women giving their testimony. It was striking to me.

I wanted to find out more about this course and perhaps use it when I came back to America. So shortly after that, I returned to the states and began looking at doing

an Alpha course with a group of young adults that I was ministering to in the northern Minneapolis suburbs, the Brooklyn Park area. And, as we began to work with this ministry called Source Ministries, I introduced Alpha. We had 50 young adults go through the first course, and most of them were kids who were hurting. They had more of an alternative outlook on life. The kids loved it. And they brought their friends, because Alpha is very relational. In 1998 I began looking into hosting a conference here in the cities.

CRO: Had Alpha made any inroads in other parts of the U.S.?

MARGENE: The very first conference was in New York, and the second conference was in Kansas City. My friends from here were a part of that second conference in Kansas City in 1996. It hadn't really broadened too much from there. And then we hosted a conference. We had 20 conferences in 1999, and now there are about 80 each year.

CRO: How has Alpha fared in the Catholic church?

MARGENE: Internationally, Alpha is very strong in certain areas in the Catholic tradition. It helped a lot when Father Cantalamesa became an enthusiastic supporter and met personally with Nicky Gumbel. From early on, he has been applauding Alpha as something to use within the Charismatic Renewal. In England, more than half of the parishes are using the course. The bishop of Hexham and a lot of very key people have been eager to see it in their parishes.

In America, I would say there are two hot spots right now where Catholic parishes are really running with it. The first one is the Boston area; the Philadelphia area, the second hot spot, also has a lot of courses that are running. Archbishop Harry Flynn was introduced to the course back in 1998. He said, "This is good. I want this in our parishes." He's been supportive. In terms of actual courses up and running, it's slower, however.

CRO: Is that because of the word getting down from the Archdiocesan level to the local parishes?

MARGENE: Yes. I think that there isn't word recognition yet. We have had three kick-off events on three days when people could come and find out about the course.

CRO: Tell me about the format.

MARGENE: With Alpha, you want to reach out and you want to make the course very nonthreatening. You want the course to be very nonjudgmental. The topic of sin comes up, and the topic of repentance comes up. What Jesus has really done for us is a focus. Hard things are brought up; there's a lot of humanity in the course. You are targeting people who aren't, at this point, church attenders.

CRO: The Life in the Spirit Seminar is a format with which I am familiar. There are talks followed by small group discussions. Is Alpha the same format?

MARGENE: The only thing that Alpha has that's different is that there's always a meal component. We eat together. It can be a very simple meal. In the small groups, it isn't like the leader has all the answers. You look to everybody to help each other out. The meal together is a real important part; we encourage people not to take the meal part out of it. The talks which are presented by videos are excellent. Most people really enjoy them, even if they've heard them two or three times. They're always fresh and have humor.

CRO: The talks are all done by Nicky Gumbel?

MARGENE: Yes. Some parishes, though, choose local speakers. A lot of churches choose to go with the videos because they are of excellent quality.

CRO: How many talks are there?

MARGENE: There are 15 talks in all. There are three given on the weekend. There can be one extra on the weekend that can be included if there is an extra overnight. Some teams do a two-night overnight; some teams do a one-night overnight. Some just do a really full one-day format. Regardless of schedule, it's basically a 15-talk course.

CRO: Can they all be given on the weekend?

MARGENE: No, it's intended to be a ten-week course. There's an introductory night where people come to see if they want to be part of the course. Then there's a ten-week course, and the course ends with a celebration. Actually, in total, it's a 12-week course.

CRO: Now, when you're talking about the weekend, is that the opening or closing?

MARGENE: It's in the middle. You start with an introductory night where people come and find out what it is about. Then there are talks on Jesus and why he died, how a person can be sure of their faith, reading the Bible, prayer and God's guidance. Those are the first six talks. Then there is a weekend away. The first talk after the weekend is how to resist evil, because often there's an encounter with evil after the foundation has been laid.

CRO: What about the weekend?

MARGENE: The three talks on the weekend deal with who the Holy Spirit is, what the Holy Spirit does and how to be filled with the Spirit.

CRO: It seems like there's focus on the Holy Spirit.

MARGENE: Those three talks are on the Holy Spirit, and there's also time for personal prayer ministry.

CRO: You say that those talks are done over a weekend with one or two nights away?

MARGENE: Yes. When you do the two nights away, the Friday night includes everybody showing up and getting to know the other people better. On Saturday morning, there are two talks: who the Holy Spirit is and what the Holy Spirit does. There is lunch and small group time. In the afternoon, you hang out together to develop friendships. This is where you really get to know people as friends, and those relationships take time to form. There is fun time for football, and you can rest if you want. Participants come back together in the early afternoon. There is a question and answer time, and then there is the last talk on how do you feel about the Spirit. There is personal prayer ministry, praying one on one for people. There is salvation in Christ. There can be prayer for other gifts or for anyone the participants would like to pray for.

*(to be continued.....)*

## Announcements

➤ **Music Ministers!** Another follow-up session to "Leading Charismatic Worship" will be held at the NET Center on Saturday morning, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 to noon. This session will include some suggestions

for prayer group structure and time to learn a few new songs to take back to your group. Anyone who is interested is invited to attend—music ministers, worship leaders, prayer group leaders, those just interested. There is no charge, but a freewill offering will be taken to cover expenses. Please call the CCRO at (612) 721-2543 for more information and to register.

➤ **Pentecost!** You are invited to attend the All-City Pentecost Mass at 5:30pm on Saturday evening, May 18<sup>th</sup> at the Church of St. Paul, Ham Lake. If you have never attended a charismatic Mass before, this is a wonderful opportunity to experience lively praise and worship as we celebrate the birthday of the Church. Are you a baker? We need your gifts of cookies and bars for a time of refreshments and fellowship after the Mass. Call Jolene at (612) 721-2543 if you can bring a dozen.

## Upcoming Events

### *Healing Masses*

**April 2 – Tuesday – St. Peter's**, North St. Paul – 7:30 pm. Contact: Bob O'Connor at (651) 777-4406 for more information.

**April 9 – Tuesday – St. Bonaventure Church**, Bloomington – 7:30 pm. Contact: Geri Meyer at (952) 881-8893 for more information.

**April 15 – Monday – St. Therese Church**, St. Paul – 7:30 pm in the lower chapel (below the Church) – Contact: Sr. Mary Anne (651) 690-1501.

**May 7 – Tuesday – St. Peter's**, North St. Paul – 7:30 pm. Contact: Bob O'Connor at (651) 777-4406 for more information.

**May 9 – Thursday – Holy Name of Jesus Church**, Wayzata – Rosary at 7:10 p.m., Mass at 7:30 pm. Contact: Teresa Walker at (763) 553-1343 for more information.

## ***Other Events***

**April 13 – Music Ministers’ Workshop** – NET Center, 110 Crusader Avenue, St. Paul. 10:00 to 12:00 noon – Call CRO for more information and directions.

**April 13 (2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of each month) – Intercessory Prayer Gathering** – St. Raphael’s Church (in conference room) – 9:00 to 11:00 am. For more information, call Pat or Joan Vogel at (763) 544-9416.

**May 3-5 – Bride of Christ Retreat with Sister Frances Clare, SSND** – Christ the King Retreat Center, 621 South First Avenue, Buffalo, Minnesota. \$125/pp – call Bill or Sandy Coleman for more details: (763) 856-4795.

**May 18 – All-City Pentecost Mass** – Saturday evening, 5:30 pm – Church of St. Paul, Ham Lake. Volunteers and donations of cookies and bars are needed. Call CCRO for more details and directions.