



New Shoots for RENEW Tree!

On the Road in South Africa with Sister Terry

As the RENEW process in South Africa was drawing to a close in 1994 (see box below) the participating parishes planted trees to symbolize their hope that the fruition of these seedling trees would mirror a vibrant faith growth, a deepening of community bonds, and a sign of the power of the just Word among them. During my recent visit there, I viewed the beauty and strength of these now tall flowering trees.

Last fall, I received a phone call from Fr. Jerry Browne of the Diocese of Port Elizabeth, urging me to consider bringing RENEW back to South Africa. I agreed to fly out and discuss it

In 1989, Archbishop Denis Hurley of Durban, sought RENEW's help in implementing the South African Church's pastoral plan: "Community Serving Humanity." During 1989-1994 RENEW ministered to nine Roman Catholic dioceses and twelve Anglican dioceses.

Talking of that experience, Archbishop Hurley said:

"I can truthfully say that the three years of RENEW in the Archdiocese of Durban were its most wonderful spiritual experience in all my recollections as priest, bishop, and archbishop."



Sister Terry with some of the children at Saint John Vianney's orphanage, Montebello, near Durban

with all those who were interested. Fr. Jerry arranged for me to meet with several bishops, with the South African Bishops' Council on Evangelization, with representatives from the Diocese of Johannesburg, and with Bishop Coleman and the clergy of his Diocese of Port Elizabeth.

During my whirlwind visit I was warmly welcomed by priests and lay leaders who shared with me the many fruits of the previous RENEW process: more vibrant parishes with livelier liturgies and more effective homilies, and the formation of liturgy committees. Most amazing was that people of different races and economic backgrounds came together to form small Christian communities—truly a radical notion in the apartheid era. In every parish, people proudly showed me their RENEW tree. The seedling trees have flourished!

Today, racial disparity still prevails, HIV infection is on the increase, violence is rampant. The need for spiritual renewal, hope, and healing exists in poverty ridden townships, AIDS hospices, and orphanages for children. Fr. Jerry and I visited and prayed with the patients at a hospice in Pretoria founded by a young priest, Fr. Kiernan. I will never forget our animated conversation on the need for the Word to be shared and lived anew in South Africa.



RENEWing Peoples' Lives

“OK, God!—but send people to help me!”

Readers of *World RENEW* may remember how the Easter 2004 edition gave news of *Obnova* (RENEW) in Slovakia. That experience is proving to have long-lasting spiritual effects. We heard recently from Michal Fratric, thanking us for offering RENEW, because it changed his life!

Michal was nearing the end of his university studies in Computer Science, not sure about what his future life would bring, but the one thing he was looking forward to was married life. In Lent, he decided to follow the RENEW process in his home town of Bratislava. It proved to be what he describes as “the best spiritual time in my life.” He admits that it was difficult to get into the rhythm of the daily Bible-reading and reflection: “On the first day I didn’t have time for the Bible-reading. Next day, I managed to find some time in the evening, but I was very tired, so I just said to God, ‘God, I’m tired, I’ll do the reading, but I can’t manage the reflection.’” There then followed what Michal describes as “a great quiet, only God and I were there. So I said, ‘OK, God, I will meditate!’” Michal added, “... and it helped me.”

The next day, Michal went to his first RENEW small community gathering. He had already been struck by Jesus’ invitation in Mark 2:14, “Come, follow me,” which seemed to pursue him whenever he thought about his future,

but which he kept brushing aside, because he planned to marry. In the course of the RENEW faith sharing, when invited to say what he thought God was challenging him to do, he decided to say “Yes” to that invitation to follow Christ as a priest. As he puts it, “I said, ‘OK, God—but please send me people who will help me!’”

And that is exactly what God provided through the RENEW small community. Michal says: “I don’t know what would have happened if RENEW hadn’t been there.” Michal is now at the seminary, studying theology and preparing to be a diocesan priest. He tells us that he prays with sincere gratitude “for God’s blessing on RENEW.”

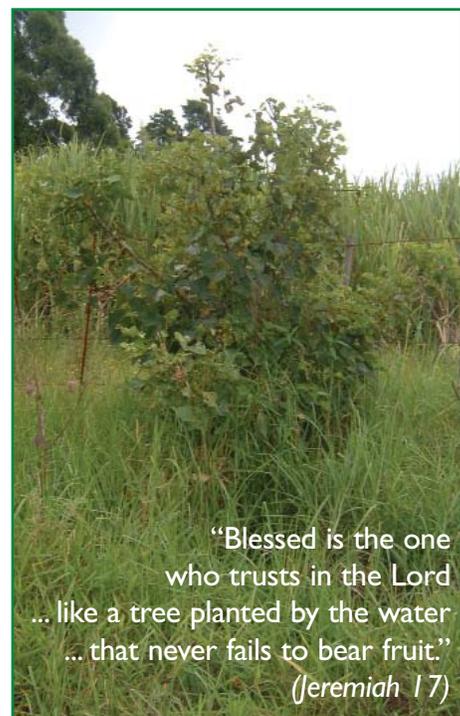


>>> RENEW in South Africa (continued)

In the Diocese of Port Elizabeth I gave an all day presentation to the clergy and the bishop on the new evangelization and the possibilities of developing an innovative process—RENEW Africa. Bishop Coleman enthusiastically addressed the priests and deacons asking them to consider partnering with RENEW to create this process specifically for Africa. To the bishop’s delight and my surprise they voted unanimously to bring RENEW back to South Africa.

I visited a community of South African Dominican Sisters far into the bush. The Sisters told me that last year their RENEW tree was cut back so severely that they thought it was dead. They were amazed that right before my visit the tree began to bear new shoots—which I read as a sign of the Holy Spirit calling us back to South Africa. The power of God’s Spirit and the support of our benefactors will enable RENEW to make a difference once again at this crucial moment in the history of the Church of South Africa. May these RENEW trees planted by the living waters of a suffering faith flourish for generations to come!

Sister Terry Rickard, OP is Director of RENEW International



“Blessed is the one
who trusts in the Lord
... like a tree planted by the water
... that never fails to bear fruit.”
(Jeremiah 17)

Launch of RENEW International's New Websites

St. Paul spent his life spreading the Good News, traveling (when he could) and writing to Christian leaders and believers around the ancient world. Like St. Paul, we are still called to spread the message of Jesus and build up the faith of the Church. But today, we have a tool that makes our job potentially easier, if we choose to harness its power for good—the world wide web.

This spring, RENEW International unveils its completely new website, www.renewintl.org, offering fresh content, desirable features, and improved technology.

A Window on RENEW's Work

Giving web visitors a “big picture perspective” on RENEW International's mission and ministries is the biggest benefit of our new site. When people visit, they can view featured stories that bring RENEW's work around the globe to life with news and images, as well as descriptions of all of our services to dioceses, parishes, and campuses.

There is a second site, designed to companion RENEW International Theology on Tap, our outreach to young adult Catholics: www.theologyontap.com This site helps web-savvy young adult Catholics and their friends find Theology on Tap events and connect with parishes.

Tools for Ministry

Just like Paul, RENEW International presenters traveling across the country or around the world need to stay connected with the people they serve in the parishes. They can now encourage ministry leaders to make use of the resources and tools available on RENEW International's website.

Participating parishes signed up to one of the RENEW International processes can log in to our site and gain



access to a wealth of documents and electronic files that will help them promote and implement their renewal process. Leaders can download publicity posters and brochures to print locally. They can share best practices with other leaders around the country on our discussion forum. They can securely order a parish kit and participants' books on-line. They can even post events and information on a custom web page, just for their parish.

Technology in Service to Mission

In the years since RENEW International first ventured onto the web, new technology has developed that makes building community more efficient. Our bookstore of great faith-sharing materials and parish leadership tools has been upgraded for smoother, more user-friendly operation. Down the road, we plan to integrate audio and video web-casting and on-line training tools into our site. Truly, space, time, and travel costs do not need to be barriers to spreading God's word!

Come and See!

Visit us at www.renewintl.org While there, please sign up to receive *World RENEW* by email, get email alerts on specific topics of interest, and browse our online store. We welcome your feedback: email us at webmaster@renewintl.org with your questions and comments.

The Acts of the Apostles is the story of how the early communities wove a web of connections that we now call “Church.” The world wide web offers us the opportunity to continue that weaving in a whole new way into the 21st century.

Honoring the “Family”

RENEWing the Family of Faith



RENEW has an annual tradition: a gala dinner, at which we recognize and honor individuals who have, in some special way, advanced the mission of evangelization, spiritual renewal, and faith formation and played a significant role in bringing those efforts to individuals, parishes, and dioceses throughout the world. Across the years we have honored a succession of people, who have, each in their own way, caught the RENEW spirit— and spread it!

This year we are honoring Mary Noel and Bill Page. Mary Noel grew up in Park Ridge. As a teenager she worked with Father Tom in small communities, as he remembers, “She was involved in the roots of what later came to be called RENEW.” Mary Noel serves on the Board of Trustees of RENEW International. Both she and her husband Bill have a long history of helping not only RENEW but Catholic educational institutions, charities, and many other programs which foster Catholic life and the work of the Church. In all these ways, they have given concrete expression to their deep-seated love of their Catholic faith.

The Pages also represent the great number of often invisible people who, over the past thirty years, have done so much to bring the RENEW process to their family, their parish, and their diocese. In honoring Bill and Mary Noel, we are offering explicit recognition and thanks to all who plant seeds of spiritual renewal.

We are also honoring Rev. Anthony Ciorra, who will receive our “Spirit of RENEW” award. His dedication to the growth of spirituality for all people, especially the laity, speaks clearly of RENEW’s fundamental values. As we think of RENEW as fostering “family,” it is also appropriate to note his tireless work for the cause of inter-religious dialogue among Jews, Christians, and Muslims, rooted in the vision that we are all God’s people—one family.

One of the traditional—and affectionate— ways in which the Church talks of the family is to call it an *ecclesiola*, a “little church,” the church in microcosm. It is in the family that children learn the most important of human attributes: love; they learn that love needs to be nurtured, sustained, protected by sensible boundaries so it can flourish. The mutual cooperation that lies at the basis of all family life is one of the best images for the sharing in the Church that is ours through baptism. It is through family life, rhythmized by anniversaries (happy and sad) that children learn what it means to “celebrate.” Here is where children learn to make prayer and the reading of Scripture part of normal, everyday life.

When Church leaders praise the RENEW process, they often say it is because the encouragement of small communities provides “a sense of family” that is all too often missing among Catholic communities in today’s vast parishes and dioceses. This indeed is the base from which RENEW’s ministries take their strength. Those who meet to participate in *Why Catholic? ¿Por qué ser católico? or RENEW: Spiritual Renewal for 21st Century*— whether in homes, or in parish meeting rooms, or in campus dorms—are families taken to the next level. Here, that “family” prays, breaks open the Scriptures, and learn how to bring the message of Christ into their everyday lives.

When we gather in June, we will certainly be recognizing the contributions that Bill and Mary Noel, and Father Ciorra have made to RENEW International and to the Church; they also represent the hundreds of thousands of families in North America, Europe, Latin America, Oceania, Asia, and Africa who are building the family of God by making the RENEW ministry a part of their life.

Would you like to know more about our Gala in June 2007?
Log on to the “Events” section of: www.renewintl.org

Bread for the World

Some reflections on Luke 9:11b-17 adapted from The WORD on Campus*

We are accustomed to interpreting this Gospel passage on the feeding of the 5,000 “sacramentally”: in so doing we affirm in faith that our deepest spiritual hungers are fed by partaking of Christ himself in the Eucharist. For a moment, though, let us linger at the first, literal level, with Jesus who breaks and shares bread with the hungry.

Bread is a simple food, the mainstay of the poor, who have asked, in simple justice, for a daily allotment. Bread in some form is basic, filling—and universal.

Angela’s Ashes, Frank McCourt’s autobiographical account of growing up poor in Ireland, describes one scene in which the young Frank is at confession, ready to atone for stealing bread for his hungry family. He expects the worst from the priest. So does the reader, who in other parts of the book is told about how the Church and the wider community were often lacking in compassion to the young McCourt and his family.

Instead the priest offers a scathing indictment of the social conditions in which a young Frank McCourt is forced to steal bread for his very survival. The boy is told he is not a sinner, but that maybe the rest of the community has something to atone for.

That priest was echoing the compassion of Jesus in this story. The Lord knew that the people who were following him were hungry. He didn’t let them go hungry or disperse them back to town where they might have found provisions. Instead, he took, broke bread and some simple fish, blessed them, and distributed them to the crowd, a fourfold act on which our eucharistic celebrations are modeled.

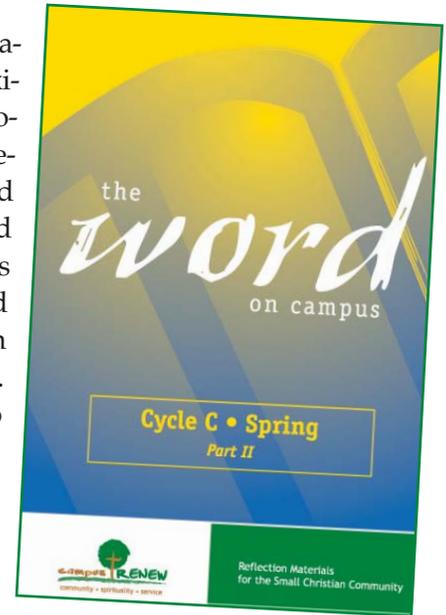
Most modern American college students don’t face the kind of hunger faced by the McCourt family or those who followed Jesus on the day recounted here. Our cafeterias are filled with all kinds of fattening food, even if we complain that the quality doesn’t match Mom’s cooking. Instead of scarcity, we face the specter of the dreaded “freshman 15” weight gain.

Yet, in our world today, there are many “Mccourt” families that are food-security challenged. According to

the latest available statistics (2004), approximately 38 million people or 13.2% of households in the United States alone were food insecure. And this number is dwarfed by the statistics in developing countries.

In response to these statistics, we can feel good about our concern for others as we reach deep into our pockets or pantries to give food to the hungry.

But Eucharist is not only about the act of feeding the hungry, it is the way in which we interact with others, it is about helping to satisfy spiritual hunger, and to bring about justice. In other words, Eucharist is about living into who we are as the Body of Christ in our world. Pope Benedict XVI affirms that we are to be a people of service, reaching out to serve in a spirit of love. In the Pope’s words, “A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented” (*Deus caritas est*, 14).



Questions for Reflection

- Does being nourished by Christ himself in the Eucharist impel me to be Christ for others?
- What other types of hunger exist where I live and/or work? What would it mean to become bread for others in these situations?

Beckoned to Action

- Take time to recognize and be thankful for the presence of Christ in the Eucharist: express this thankfulness by showing the compassion of Christ in some concrete way to those who are hungry, in every sense of “hunger.”

* *The WORD on Campus* is a resource for faith sharing on the Sunday gospel for groups on campus. Each edition covers a semester.

This reflection is from the Cycle C Spring Part II edition. Available in the Campus RENEW section of our online bookstore at www.renewintl.org Price: \$9.95

Donor Corner

You can help us in our work by supporting our immediate needs:

Pentagon Budget Changes Hamper Spiritual Growth

- Full support for one military chapel community @ \$2,500
- Partial support for one military chapel community @ \$1,250

Would you like to support military personnel and families? Across the board, funds for military chapel communities are being cut because of the war. More military bases are interested in implementing *Why Catholic?*, yet there are no funds to do so. A donation of \$2,500 would allow a chapel community on one base to attend *Why Catholic?* leadership trainings, build small communities, and share faith for 24 weeks; \$1,250 would allow the same for 12 weeks. Our hope is that those who have gone through the leadership training and are then deployed will bring the *Why Catholic?* process to our military in Iraq, Afghanistan, and wherever they are sent.

THANK YOU

Help Ponce, Puerto Rico Join RENEW

- Subsidize a Ponce parish @ \$600 each

Puerto Rico is the only Latin American country where Catholics are in a minority. In 1898, as a result of the Spanish American War, the United States took possession of Puerto Rico. Mainline Protestant churches, with the approval of the American government, divided the island and began proselytizing. However, only when evangelicals arrived in the mid-twentieth century did the Church really begin to lose many members.

Now for the first time, RENEW International has the opportunity to work in Puerto Rico. Recently, the Diocese of Ponce enthusiastically said "Yes" to implementing the *Why Catholic?* / *¿Por qué ser católico?* process. Ponce is situated in the very arid southwest portion of the island, where the land is difficult to cultivate. Unemployment runs high. Parishes lack the resources to meet the full cost of the programs. Your donation is needed to help us minister there and they will know we care.

¡GRACIAS!

Campuses Seek to Initiate RENEW

- Full sponsorship for each campus:
 - One semester of **campus RENEW** @ \$2,750
 - One year of **campus RENEW** @ \$5,500
- Partial sponsorship for each campus:
 - One semester of **campus RENEW** @ \$1,500
 - One year of **campus RENEW** @ \$3,000

Our innovative approach has been successful in creating and sustaining small Christian communities on campuses large and small, Catholic and public, commuter and residential. Many campus ministry budgets are very small. Please help us to help them. Perhaps you would like to sponsor *campus RENEW* at your alma mater. Maybe your daughter, son, granddaughter, grandson, nephew, or niece attends college and would benefit from *campus RENEW*; or, if you have no particular campus in mind, we have several campuses willing to begin *campus RENEW* who are waiting only for a generous donor.

THANK YOU SO MUCH

Prairie Farmers Suffer Eight-Year Drought

- 200 hundred faith sharing booklets @ \$2.50 each

Many of our sisters and brothers on the prairie are in desperate need. These farmers and ranchers in western South Dakota have been suffering through eight years of drought. As a result they need to purchase feed for animals and supply water needs. This drought has created a heavy toll on their finances. Five of the ten poorest counties in America are located in this area. People support one another in countless ways—from responding to the many prairie fires to assisting in calving. Spiritually, many have bonded together to share faith in small Christian communities. Please lift the spirits of your brothers and sisters in the RENEW process on the prairie lands. A purchase of booklets would be greatly appreciated!

THANK YOU and GOD BLESS YOU

If you would like to help us answer any of these needs, please use the envelope enclosed with this Newsletter, on which you can indicate how you would like your gift to be used.

MGR. THOMAS KLEISSLER
PRESIDENT



SR. THERESA RICKARD, OP
DIRECTOR

Dear Friends of RENEW,

Even those of us who fortunately never experienced World War II are familiar, from late-night television, with the soldiers finding faith in the foxhole. Faith in God's guidance is a vivid reality for Catholics serving in our armed forces, particularly those whose tour of duty takes them to Iraq or Afghanistan. Many find in their faith the strength they need to meet the challenges and risks they face on a daily basis.

It is important, then, that the faith on which our armed service personnel so depend be solid, mature, life- and spirit-giving. And not just for themselves, because a vibrant, healthy faith also impacts those with whom they serve, as well as on the families waiting for them at home.

Air Force Major Douglas Young, a *Why Catholic?* participant about to be deployed to the Middle East, told *World RENEW*: "It is great to know that my RENEW small group is supporting me. They e-mail and offer well wishes as I prepare to leave. I really do feel that I am a part of the Body of Christ, with my family lifting me up in prayer. My *Why Catholic?* experience has helped me be more confident in my faith, and more specifically in sharing what I believe. I am a better story-teller and ultimately, a better evangelizer for the Body of Christ."

It has only been a year since RENEW International launched its campaign, spearheaded by Sr. Maureen Colleary of RENEW's staff, to bring *Why Catholic?* to our men and women in the armed forces. In that short time we have managed to establish seventeen active *Why Catholic?* leadership teams on bases in the United States and Europe. RENEW's vision is to have a *Why Catholic?* group in every U.S. military base throughout the world, with the hope that these small Christian communities will be found even on the front lines.

We know we can count on Sister Maureen's energy and dedication. However, fulfilling our vision also depends on *you*. Expanding military needs has meant financial adjustments; chaplaincy budgets are being trimmed to meet accelerating costs elsewhere. Bringing *Why Catholic?* to our soldiers strengthens their faith and helps them to connect Church and God to their lives, not only in the military but when they return to civilian life. But only with your help can we continue to serve those who are risking everything in our name.

Your gift to help Military Chapel Communities implement the *Why Catholic?* process will support and deepen the faith of our service men and woman as they serve their country during these most difficult times.

As always, know that you, your families, and your intentions are in our prayers.

Gratefully,

Sr. Theresa Rickard, OP

1232 GEORGE STREET, PLAINFIELD, NJ 07062-1717 TELEPHONE: 908 769 5400 FAX: 908 769 5660 WEB: www.renewintl.org



RENEW International
1232 George Street
Plainfield, NJ 07062-1717

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In this issue of *World RENEW*, follow Sr. Terry, our Director, as she visits South Africa; come with us for a sneak preview of the new websites for RENEW International and RENEW Theology on Tap; meditate on one of the implications of the Eucharist in a faith-sharing reflection; rediscover RENEW's focus on the family; share good news stories on the difference that RENEW has made to peoples' lives; check out some of the ways you can further the work of **RENEW International**, both in the USA and elsewhere in the world.

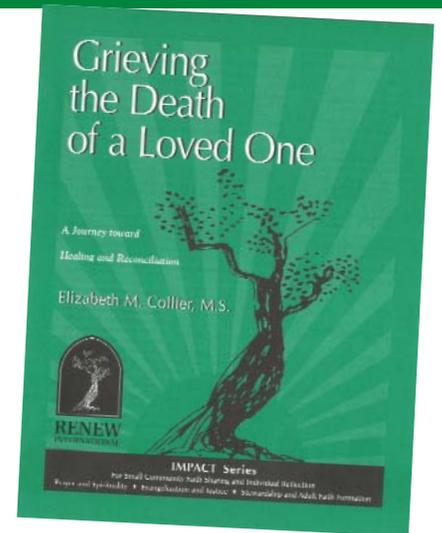
Pastoral Solidarity with Virginia Tech

As we went to press, we heard of the tragedy at Virginia Tech. Through the Richmond Diocese Offices of Justice and Peace, and Campus Ministry, we arranged to send, free of charge, 1,000 copies of *Grieving the Death of a Loved One*, to the students at Virginia Tech.

This is a faith-sharing resource from our IMPACT Series written by professional grief-counselor Elizabeth Collier, designed to offer a journey through the grieving process toward healing and reconciliation.

We also made copies available to all the campuses currently involved in our Campus RENEW process to help them organize prayer vigils in spiritual solidarity with the students at Virginia Tech.

We invite our readers to join us in praying for the victims, their families, and friends.



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President: Msgr. Thomas A. Kleissler

Director: Sr. Theresa Rickard, OP

Editorial Committee: Sr. Mary C. McGuinness, OP;
Deirdre Malacrea; Beverly O'Malley; Allan Donaldson;
Robert B. Kelly

Artwork and Layout: Eberly Designs, Inc.



RENEW International

1232 George Street, Plainfield, NJ 07062-1717

Phone: 908-769-5400

Fax: 908-769-5660

Websites: www.renewintl.org
www.WhyCatholic.org
www.theologyontap.com