



Journalist **TRIONA DOHERTY** investigates how the Charismatic Movement, fifty years old in 2017, has enlivened Church and prayer life. Based in Athlone, Triona has a Master's degree in Theology from St Patrick's College Maynooth and is a regular contributor to *Reality* magazine.

THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT: 50 YEARS ON

In February 1967 a group of students from Duquesne University in Pennsylvania, USA gathered for a retreat. The theme was 'The Holy Spirit' and at the beginning of each session the group sang 'Veni Creator Spiritus' – Come Creator Spirit. On the Saturday night, their prayers were answered: they experienced an outpouring of the Spirit, with laughter, tears and praying in tongues. The weekend is widely recognised as the birth of Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

Charismatic Renewal centres on 'baptism of the Holy Spirit'. It is seen by many as an extension of the Second Vatican Council, which spoke of the presence of 'charisms' and 'extraordinary gifts' among the faithful. By the year 2000 it was estimated that more than 100 million Catholics had been baptised in the Holy Spirit.

This past year has been special as the Church celebrated fifty years of Charismatic Renewal. In June 2017 Pope Francis issued an invitation to Rome for an international Charismatic conference to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. A large Irish contingent attended and were blown away by the sheer energy and joy of the occasion.

IRISH BEGINNINGS

It was the early 1970s before the movement really took off in Ireland, with growing numbers attending prayer meetings at Kimmage Manor, Earlsfort Terrace, Eustace Street and Dublin Airport Church. Groups soon sprang up all over Ireland, with participants attracted by the lively form of prayer and music.

Anne and Mike Loughman have been involved in Charismatic Renewal since the early 1970s. Anne first went along to a meeting while a student in UCD, and describes the experience as 'like a lightbulb going on... There was suddenly the possibility of a personal relationship with God. Scripture came alive – it wasn't a dead word, but something relevant to my life. The meetings were a fantastic experience. There was huge energy.' Her husband Mike was a primary school teacher when he started to attend prayer meetings at Eustace Street. 'It was an amazing time of new beginnings,' he says. 'Pope John XXIII had prayed for a new Pentecost, and it transformed our lives.' For young people from traditional Catholic backgrounds, this radically different expression of faith took some getting used to. Patricia Mitchell, a retired nurse, has been



A Catholic Charismatic Renewal gathering in Czestochowa, May 2016. Photo: Dyzio / Shutterstock

involved since the 1970s, including serving as national chairperson, but admits that it took her a while to warm to the Charismatic way.

'A Daughter of Charity invited me to an all-night vigil at Dublin Airport Church in 1972. I was totally put off – I thought they were all crazy,' she admits. However she tried another meeting and was soon immersed in the movement; from that day to this, she has never gone a week without attending a prayer meeting.

A GIFT FOR THE CHURCH

While the numbers actively involved now are far from the dizzy heights of the 1970s, thousands of Irish women and men continue to gather weekly to praise God and to support one another in their faith.

Jacinta from Dublin says she derives great strength from the gatherings: 'The meetings have opened my eyes to Scripture. We go along to Mass and hear the readings, but it's

nice to open the Bible yourself and reflect. I find I start the day asking God to help me; I feel God's presence all the time.' Another important aspect is the sense of community, as Patricia explains: 'We come together every week as individuals and as a community, praying together and being challenged by the Word of God. If someone is going through a dark time they have the prayers and support of the group. We see small miracles every week.'


'Renewal is very much alive. A lot of people involved in Renewal are in different ministries in parishes. Youth 2000 grew out of Charismatic Renewal and has touched so many young people.' She believes the movement is needed now more than ever, particularly in response to the call of Pope Francis to go out into the world and proclaim the gospel. One important aspect of this outreach is the Life in the Spirit Seminars which grew out of Charismatic Renewal.

This seven-week course presents the basic truths of the faith, introducing people to the person of Christ and the gifts of the Spirit, and remains hugely popular.

LISTENING TO THE SPIRIT

It is impossible to measure the influence of the Charismatic Renewal Movement on the Church in Ireland. To an extent, the emphasis that the movement placed on the gifts of the Spirit has become absorbed into the mainstream, with popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis all talking about a new evangelisation. Many of our popular Catholic hymns originated in the movement, and huge numbers of those involved in Charismatic Renewal went on to be involved in parish ministry.

Fr Pat Collins believes the Church

needs to continue to listen to the Spirit: 'Everything evolves and changes, and the old gives way to the new. The challenge is not to stay the same but to discern where the Spirit is moving at a particular time.' Anne Loughman says the Church can learn from the movement's focus on a personal experience of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. 'The Church sometimes tends to focus on structures, like parish councils, but it doesn't matter unless you are transforming people's lives and hearts,' she says. 'That's the hope I see in Charismatic Renewal. I feel there is something very powerful there, a huge gift for the church. You still find people harking back to what we had in the 70s, but I trust that the Spirit is working.' 



PETITION

The kingdom of God is near.
Lk 21:29-33
First Friday: 5 January 2018

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