

# Catholic Charismatic Renewal helps renew spiritual energy of its followers

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The aura inside the ball room of the Copeland Tower Suites in Metairie was charged with spiritual electricity as more than 600 individuals gathered for the 43rd annual Southern Regional Conference of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

“This conference renews everything within me,” said Sharron Lowe, who lives in Long Beach, Mississippi. “I’ve been coming to it for at least 20 years. I’m a lay leader in my church, and I’m always praying for people. I come here to get refilled. This is where I come to be spiritually fed.”

The event was held March 29-31 and drew participants from several states, including Montana, Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, California, South Carolina and New York, as well as Louisiana. Speakers included Archbishop Gregory Aymond and several leaders in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

Speakers included:

- **Mary Healy**, scripture professor at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit.
- The **Rev. Mathias Thelen**, pastor of St. Patrick Church in Brighton, Michigan.
- **Barbara Heil**, who heads up From His Heart Ministry, which is based in Iowa.

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal began in 1967. It’s a spiritual movement within the Catholic Church that places an emphasis on having a personal relationship with Jesus, being baptized in the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. Participants lift their hands while singing and often speak in tongues.

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal exists in almost every country in the world and by some estimates has more than 125 million members, said Al Mansfield, director of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of New Orleans and chairman of the Southern Regional Conference.

“Every year in the conference people have a real experience with God,” Mansfield said. “It’s a time when hundreds of people can come together to praise and worship.”

Said Deregall Burbank, who lives in Algiers: “The conference is a time when we can gather as a community of believers and share God’s love and then go forth and share that love with others.”

Added Covington’s Sue Lynch: “It’s a contagious spirit when you are surrounded by so many people who love the Lord.”

The Southern Regional Conference kindles the fire from within.

“The conference lights a spiritual fire in us to do the will of God,” said St. Rose’s Gerard Gautrau, who served as clergy liaison for the event. “People are encouraged when they leave the conference to return to their communities and be Christ’s presence.”

Brian and Sarah Pierce from Larose are regular participants in the yearly event.

“We come here to get our spiritual battery charged,” Brian Pierce said. “We look forward to it, and as soon as we know what the date is, we make our reservations.”

Added Sarah Pierce: “The conference encourages you to use your spiritual gifts to help other people.”

Beth Molbert and Shayna Eyrich, lay missionaries with the Catholic Family Missions Company, came from Abbeville to participate in the conference.

“This is an amazing experience,” Molbert said. “Often we can become complacent, but this is a way to renew our spiritual gifts.”

Said Eyrich: “The conference reminds me of how I grew up when there was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.”

For Chauvin’s Susie Boudeaux, the annual Southern Regional Conference of the Charismatic Renewal is “like getting my battery charged.

“Each day is filled with so much pressure and stress when you are working and have a family. You get pulled in so many directions; you need to get spiritually refreshed and get a new outlook.”

The conference served as a family reunion for some.

Sean Tobin, 33, and his mother, Janice Tobin, live almost 3,000 miles from each other. They used the conference as a time to not only renew their faith but also renew family ties.

“There is a strong feeling for our families, and the Holy Spirit helps bind us together,” said Janice Tobin, who lives in Plattsburgh, New York. “I was so excited about this conference I could only sleep three hours last night. I’m visiting with Sean and also meeting brothers and sisters in Christ.”

Added Sean Tobin, who lives in Los Angeles: “You go to church every Sunday and sometimes you forget how alive and vibrant your faith is until you come to a conference like this. This reminds us that God is in our midst.”

Harvey’s Dan Caskey served as an usher at the conference.

“People from all walks of life and all ages come to the conference to reinforce themselves spiritually,” he said. “I call it celebrating the Lord in overdrive.”

As Caskey spoke, a group of teenagers passed by to enter the ball room.

“This is an incredible experience,” said Abby Reames, 16, and a junior at Archbishop Chapelle High School. “It’s amazing to see so many people coming together and sharing their faith in such a dynamic way.”

Added Grace Snakenberg, also 16 and a junior at Chapelle: “This is so cool to see all generations coming together. We all have something in common — the Holy Spirit.”

*Article written by Earl Hodges. He writes about people and events in East Jefferson. He can be contacted at [earlhodges@msn.com](mailto:earlhodges@msn.com).*