

[Charismatic Renewal Marks 50 Years](#)

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April 3 marks the golden anniversary of the day Dennis Bennett told his church he'd had a 'personal Pentecost'

This month marks the 50th anniversary of what many consider to be the origins of the modern charismatic movement.

On April 3, 1960, the late Father Dennis Bennett told his 2,600-member Episcopal congregation at St. Mark's church in Van Nuys, Calif., that he had experienced a "personal Pentecost." While attending a prayer meeting, the Britain-born minister had been baptized in the Holy Spirit and began to speak in an unknown language.

"My tongue tripped, just as it might when you are trying to recite a tongue twister, and I began to speak in a new language," Bennett recalled. "Right away I recognized several things. First it was not some kind of psychological trick or compulsion. There was nothing compulsive about it. ... It was a new language, not some kind of 'baby talk.' It had grammar and syntax, it had inflection and expression—and it was rather beautiful."

The revelation angered some church leaders, who eventually asked Bennett to resign. "His experience was explosive because the Episcopal Church is known to be a very proper, intellectual and historic church," said Rita Bennett, the rector's widow and president of the Christian Renewal Association in Edmonds, Wash. "Some people were happy and said they wanted to be prayed over too. But others were not happy at all. They didn't understand."

Rather than fight about charismatic renewal, Bennett stepped down and was soon invited to "bring the fire" to St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Seattle. He served as the pastor of St. Luke's for two decades, ran Holy Spirit workshops and wrote the best-selling book, *Nine O'clock in the Morning*, in which Bennett shares his testimony and tells of how the charismatic movement spread throughout the nation.

Although Bennett wasn't the first mainline denominational pastor to experience the baptism in the Holy Spirit, he was the first to openly share his testimony. The news of Bennett's Pentecostal experience even made the newspapers and wire services, and was featured in *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines.

The membership at St. Luke's quadrupled as renewal began to spread across the U.S. Within just a few years, people in virtually every major Protestant tradition—Baptists, Lutherans, Mennonites, Methodists, Presbyterians—were receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Charismatic renewal has since swept the globe, though Pentecostal scholars say its growth has slowed in the U.S. "The movement began to wane in America by the mid-1990s, but it continued to grow all over the world tremendously, especially Africa, Asia and South America," said Pentecostal historian Vinson Synan, dean emeritus of the Regent University School of Divinity. "Today there are 640 million Pentecostals and charismatics. It's still the fastest-growing part of Christianity."

Stanley M. Burgess, a professor of Christian history at Regent University and editor of *The Encyclopedia of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, says one-third of the world's 2 billion Christians are charismatic or Pentecostal. "The greatest explosion is now occurring in China," Burgess said. "It's a combination of Pentecostal and charismatic. Within 10 years, we expect that China will be the most Christian nation on Earth, and that's just stunning."

This year, several events are being planned to celebrate Bennett's legacy and the 50th anniversary of the movement, including Empowered21: Global Congress on Holy Spirit Empowerment in the 21st Century, which is being held April 8-10 in Tulsa, Okla. The Rev. Billy Wilson, executive director of the International Center for Spiritual Renewal and chair of Empowered21, says the event will explore what's on the horizon for the "Spirit-empowered" movement.

Wilson said charismatic leaders worldwide have told him there is a growing need for authentic leaders with integrity. Pastors also say there is a huge need to teach younger generations about the gifts of the Holy Spirit and to answer their "heart cry" for spiritual fathers and mothers, Wilson noted.

"They have a huge desire for what I call primitive Christianity—New Testament Christianity in its purest form," Wilson said. "They want the miraculous. They want the gifts of the Spirit, but they don't want to make a show of it. I think this generation is positioned to not only see the movement grow, but really experience the Holy Spirit in a totally new dimension."

In early March, the Regent University School of Divinity planned to celebrate Bennett's legacy by archiving his papers in their library. Meanwhile, St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Seattle will honor Bennett, who died in 1991, with a series of events July 26-31, marking the month when Bennett was assigned to the Seattle church. Rita Bennett, author

of *You Can Be Emotionally Free*, also will honor her husband's legacy during her annual Emotionally Free seminar July 19-24.

Bennett said she recently found some of her husband's unpublished papers that shed light on how he learned to "pray from the Spirit." She said the message is still relevant. "The reason for speaking and praying in the Spirit as often as possible is to keep in touch with your Friend, not just to fulfill a process," the late Episcopal minister wrote. "The experiencing of gifts fulfilled is very important, but the feeling of fellowship with Jesus is far more so."

—**Troy Anderson**

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