Message from the Holy Father to the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships on the 25th anniversary of its Pontifical approval

Dear brothers and sisters,

Happy birthday! May the Lord bless you especially on this Silver Jubilee of the pontifical approval of the Catholic Fraternity. ²

I remember that the desire of the founders, Brian Smith and Bob Cavnar, was to link themselves in a more direct and filial way with Peter’s successor, under the guidance of the Pontifical Council for the Laity. These 25 years have borne fruit of growth in a number of communities as well as in the diversity of charisms and in relationships of fraternal communion. That is why, let us thank God!

Last year, during the meeting with the Charismatic Renewal on the 1st of June at the Olympic Stadium, you were already preparing a step forward which became true a few months later: the CF and ICCRS, the two institutions serving the Renewal in the world, share the same office, giving thus the testimony of one only current of grace manifested in the great diversity created by the Holy Spirit. ⁴

This decision of deepening the communion between both institutions is already a reality, which has made me very happy. ⁵ Changes are always difficult, and it is hard to leave our securities and places to follow the path the Lord inspires us. ⁶ We also need the courage that comes from the Spirit, and I thank you. At the same time, you have been able to confirm that neither you, CF, nor ICCRS have lost your own characteristics, but

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¹ This English text is an unofficial translation of the Holy Father’s Spanish original and was done by Lourdes Martin White during the Conference and distributed by the Catholic Fraternity President. Footnotes were added by David Peterman (Sr.) to help interested readers understand and appreciate the fuller context and provide reference links to some of the mentioned documents. For further information or copies of non-internet documents send a request to drdavidpeterman@gmail.com.
² Cf. 1990 Decree of Pontifical Council for the Laity establishing the Catholic Fraternity as a private association of Papal Right.
³ The Pope's 2014 Olympic Stadium address to a meeting of the Italian Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) addresses the CCR internationally. This meeting was jointly sponsored by International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services (ICCRS) and by the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships (CFCCCF).
⁴ Following the CFCCCF’s election meeting in 2013, the decision was made to combine the offices of CFCCCF with those of ICCRS to better unify their joint efforts in support of the CCR and to reduce the financial burden of keeping separate offices.
⁵ Pope Francis’ approval and encouragement was evident in his Private Audience Address to the CFCCCF during the 2014 Conference.
⁶ While there was grief over loss of the separate CFCCCF office in the Vatican due to the significant effort invested in its establishment a few years earlier, a closer collaboration was desired and is bearing fruit.
you have been enriched in communion, because communion is the work of the Holy Spirit.

As you know, following the opinion of the Council of Cardinals, created to help me in the government of the Church and the reform of the Roman Curia, I have instituted the Congregation for the Laity and the Family, to which the Pontifical Academy for Life will be linked.⁷

In this spirit of keeping what is essential and reforming what is accidental for a better service of the men and women of this time in which the Church is engaged, I believe now is the time to discern together, Catholic Fraternity and ICCRS, in light of the experience of communion you have started to live, the need to continue deepening in this communion constituting one single Service to the worldwide Charismatic Renewal, which represents the single current of grace, without losing each one’s own characteristics.⁸

This means that both, CF and ICCRS, can offer the experience they have lived to a multiple variety of expressions that the Holy Spirit has wanted to stir up all over the world. I ask you, CF and ICCRS, to go forward in this path of communion. To deepen and “widen the tent” (Is 54, 2-4) of this communion would be the best way to celebrate the Jubilee. All are strengthened in this communion and nobody loses its identity,⁹ otherwise it would be uniformity, which certainly does not come from the Spirit. Communion in the diversity He stirs up.

I still wait for the answer to my personal letter handed to the Presidents of CF and ICCRS during my visit to the III World Priests Retreat, last June 12th, where I spoke in this sense.¹⁰

On Pentecost 2017, it will be 50 years since the irruption of this current of grace in the Catholic Church. I have invited you to celebrate this Golden Jubilee with the Bishop of Rome at St. Peter’s Square.¹¹ Let it not be the celebration of a “movement”, which you are not!¹² Let it be the renewal of Pentecost for the Church and the world, together with

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⁷ See CNA News report for details.

⁸ The Holy Father is urging the CF and ICCRS to work seamlessly together as a single service activity and fully collaborate on its own and collective missions. His text also emphasizes his strong insistence that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) that they both serve is not a movement (as historically expressed) but rather a single current of grace meant for the entire Church.

⁹ The Holy Father is proactively addressing the possible concern that the two entities might be merged into one by calling both to collaborate with no fear of losing its own identity.

¹⁰ Existence of these letters were acknowledged by the two presidents and they formulated a general response letter during the meeting, which was endorsed by the CF Council at its 2015 Rome meeting.

¹¹ This is a clear call or invitation by the Holy Father for all participants in the worldwide CCR to join him in celebrating the 50th Jubilee of the CCR during celebrations on Pentecost of 2017 in St. Peter’s Square during the period 5/31-6/4/2017.

¹² Pope Francis’ insistence that CCR is a stream of grace and NOT a movement affirms his conviction that it is meant for everyone in the Church, not a special group. The Holy Father’s referral to Cardinal Suenens and the Malines documents makes this clear. He clearly wants everyone in the Church to receive the grace of Baptism in the Holy Spirit.
all the Christians who have lived the experience of “being born anew” Jesus spoke about with Nicodemus (Jn 3: 3-6). The Church and the world need, today more than ever, the Holy Spirit! They need more than ever the announcement of the Kerygma proclaimed by Peter on the morning of Pentecost! And in order to do that, Christians should be united, as the Lord asks (Jn 17: 21-23), to give witness together to the Father’s merciful love, which does not make any preference among people, love which is made known to us in Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour!

I am happy that two people who have worked with me for years in my previous diocese, working for a better understanding and unity in the current of grace, as well as in the ecumenical task towards the unity of the Body of Christ, be today within the CF. Their knowledge and experience can be of great help for the launching of the two great challenges before you.

I finish by confirming the mission I gave you last year. Share with each one in the Church the Baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Do not forget your background, the Charismatic Renewal was born ecumenical! Ecumenism of the encounter in fraternal prayer, in the service to your neighbour, and in the prayer of intercession through our common martyrs.

Work to alleviate the needs of the weakest and of those victims of all human suffering. Reach out to them and touch in them the wounds of Jesus himself. Share with them also the Baptism in the Holy Spirit!

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13 Note a clear mention of an “experience of ‘being born anew’” as Jesus said was necessary. Using this passage the Holy Father suggests that an authentic experience of a new life in the Spirit is necessary.

14 Here we have another major point connecting this letter to the Holy Father’s emphasis on the New Evangelization. The necessity of preaching the basic kerygma of the gospel and the expected experiential result of Baptism in the Holy Spirit, repeating for all mankind the experience of the disciples in the upper room on Pentecost (cf. Acts 2). Here we have a specific challenge that the Pope is giving to the Fraternity and the CCR to follow Peter and Jesus’ other disciples in proclaiming the message of Jesus and preach the kerygma of the Gospel to all they come in contact with.

15 The Holy Father immediately follows this up by pointing to the importance of unity, and thus ecumenism, quoting Jesus’ prayer in John 17:21 “that they also may be (one) in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me”. This reference to a call to ecumenism is specified in a later paragraph as a specific charge to all CCR participants.

16 Referring probably to Julia Torres (long term assistant of Matteo Calisi in Rome and personal friend of Pope Francis while a Cardinal in Argentina) and (VP of CF) Pino Scafuro from Argentina community in Buenos Aires. They have long been part of a CF outreach to ecumenical Christian leaders.

17 Note that he has given us a major mission to bring the Baptism of the Holy Spirit to the whole Church. He spoke on three occasions in past year on this subject: 1) Pope’s 2014 Olympic Stadium address, 2) 2014 Address to Catholic Fraternity, and 3) Pope Francis’ Meditation at 3rd World Retreat of Priests in Rome in June of 2015 (in two parts, link to Part II provide link to Part I).

18 This is another significant reminder that the CCR was born in an ecumenical environment and should to remain open and active in spiritual ecumenism.

19 Having said that the grace of the renewal and thus the Baptism in the Holy Spirit is for all members, the Holy Father reminds us to be sure and include the marginalized as well. All Christians should have the fullness of the Holy Spirit experientially present in their lives.
These issues are dealt with in depth in the three first documents of Malines, about which I have spoken to you in other occasions as a safe guide for your action.\textsuperscript{20}

In this Year of Mercy that is about to begin, be merciful amongst you, and with your neighbour. Know how to distinguish between the sin and the sinner! To the sinner, mercy like Jesus’, towards sin, rejection and asking for forgiveness.\textsuperscript{21}

In order to do so, strengthen yourself daily with the prayer of praise, a gift from the Holy Spirit which you have rediscovered for the Church, and which takes us to an increasingly intimacy with the Trinitarian God.\textsuperscript{22}

I give you my blessing, with all my affection. May Jesus bless you and the Holy Virgin Mary take care of you! And I ask you, please, that you continue praying for me!

Francisco

Vatican City, October 30\textsuperscript{th}, 2015

\textsuperscript{20} The Holy Father refers all CCR participants to the three “Malines documents” as sure guides. “In the Malines Documents, you have a guide, a reliable path to keep you from going astray. The first document is \textit{Theological and Pastoral Orientations} written by an international team of theologians and lay leaders. The second is \textit{Ecumenism and Charismatic Renewal}, written personally by Cardinal Suenens. The third is \textit{Charismatic Renewal and Social Action}, written by Cardinal Suenens and Bishop Helder Camara.”

\textsuperscript{21} Direct encouragement to participate in the \textit{Jubilee Year of Mercy} beginning November 29, 2015 by being merciful while distinguishing between sinner and sin as Jesus taught.

\textsuperscript{22} Finally the Holy Father encourages us to make daily use of the strengthening power of the gift of praise as a powerful means of prayer leading the whole Church into full communion with the Father through submission to the Lordship of the Son, Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.