

Bread of Life Community? What Is That?

When God's chosen people were wandering in the desert with Moses, God's Spirit was with them. When they worshipped in the temple the cloud of God's glory would fall and the Spirit would envelop them. They were led by a cloud of His Spirit by day and a pillar of Holy Spirit fire by night. From Bread of Life's earliest days, that is who we were. We felt and experienced God's Holy Spirit and presence powerfully with us. We felt as if we were just a continuation of the Book of Acts. Bread of Life has persevered with faith and it is still the same. We still know His power and intimacy, and that He is in our midst.

Bread of Life is a Catholic charismatic community that was established by Bishop Donald Troutman in 1991. At that time, the diocese of Erie was enjoying the wave of Holy Spirit revival that originated with a group of Duquesne college students and professors while on retreat at the Ark and the Dove in Pittsburgh. They wanted what people in the book of Acts experienced. So, they asked for it (Luke 11:13)! And Jesus answered that prayer in a mighty way. One by one as they prayed in front of the Blessed Sacrament, they all sovereignly experienced an overwhelming wave of the Holy Spirit and they were forever changed. Some started speaking in tongues; some prophesied; most wept; and all fell on their faces, overwhelmed by a powerful release of the Holy Spirit in their souls. They had an experience with the Living God of the universe and none of them would ever be the same.

From Pittsburgh this Holy Spirit revival spread within the world-wide Catholic Church to millions of Catholics and within some Protestant churches also. Some of the Duquesne students came directly to Erie and many in the diocese of Erie were set on fire in their Faith in a similar way. They experienced a powerful release of the Holy Spirit as expressed in 1 Corinthians 12. *The Holy Spirit works in each person in one way or another for the good of all. One person is given the gift of teaching words of wisdom. Another is given the gift of teaching what he has learned and knows. Another person receives the gift of faith. Another person receives gifts of healing. One person is given the gift of doing powerful works. Another person is given the gift of speaking God's Word. Another person to the discerning of spirits. Another person is given the gift of speaking in tongues. Another person is given the gift of interpretation of tongues. But it is the same Holy Spirit.* The charismatic renewal experiences these gifts as a normal part of our faith.

These were great days. Many active charismatic (Spirit-filled) prayer groups formed. On Monday evenings about 300 Spirit-filled Catholics would come together at St Paul's to learn and to worship Jesus together. The love of God was *thick* in these gatherings. There were no divisions among us; no women versus men, rich versus poor, professional versus blue collar, young versus old, etc. It was like in Ephesians: There is one Body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one Faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:4-6). People would sing in beautiful angelic tongues. People would prophesy. There was prayer. Some people would rest in the Spirit. There were healings and miracles. There was contagious joy. And it was never in a disorderly way because it was all guided by the amazing Holy Spirit.

In the late 1980s there was recognition that the Catholic Church in Erie was losing members to Protestant churches that invited expression of the gifts of the Holy Spirit during services and had a contemporary worship style. While these churches are wonderful and we love our brothers and sisters in Christ who attend them, about 50% of their members are Catholics who left their parishes because they were seeking places that were on fire with the passion and power of the Holy Spirit. People within the charismatic renewal in Erie recognized that there was a need for a parish or community within the diocese of Erie that exercised the charisms of the Holy Spirit during Mass and other gatherings.

In around 1990, people from the charismatic renewal approached Bishop Donald Troutman who acknowledged the issue of Catholics leaving their parishes because they were seeking places for Spirit-filled Protestant churches. Thirty-five years ago, in 1991, Bishop Troutman officially established Bread of Life Catholic Charismatic Community and appointed a Chaplain. The community celebrated Sunday Masses incorporating the charisms (gifts) of the Holy Spirit. We established several prayer groups that were alive in the love of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. We also offered prayer to receive that life-changing release of the Holy Spirit.

Our first home was St Matthew's In The Woods. Fr Ted Carter was our first Chaplain. We have many good memories of St Matthew's. We were one in the Spirit of God. We all met with joyful expectation knowing that God was walking in our midst and excited to see how He would move. Whenever we started to worship or to pray, the Spirit of God would fall on the gathering no matter how big or small.

Some of us recall that when Fr Carter would process up that narrow isle for Mass, we would not be aware that he was about to pass, but as he passed his robes would unexpectedly brush against us and the power of Holy Spirit would go out from him and people would rest in the Spirit. It did not seem unusual or disruptive because it was God touching His people. He just kept walking, the people regained their composure, and Mass proceeded.

Bread of Life has always had a deep *hunger* for more of God. No matter how much we had, we were always thirsting for more of Jesus; the Lover of our souls.

People didn't come to Bread of Life because they were seeking a God that they knew in their heads and had learned about in religious ed. People came to Bread of Life because they were seeking to meet personally and corporately with the living God of the universe; with a God who knew them and loved them and was pleased to see them seeking Him. *"You will find me when you seek me with all your heart"* (Jer 29:13). This is how we sought Him. This is how we worshipped. We held nothing back and He revealed Himself to us in marvelous ways. Our cups were overflowing (PS 23:5). Our greatest desire was for others to know this amazing love of God that we experienced.

We quickly outgrew St. Matthew's in the Woods and were moved to the large and magnificent chapel of the Villa Maria Mother House. We spent unforgettable years there and the community grew and

flourished. We essentially functioned as a parish and administered all the Sacraments. We had Sunday Masses and healing Masses with many miracles. We had prayer groups in homes that would begin at 6 and end at 7:30, except no one wanted to stop worshipping or talking about Jesus, so many would praise Him well into the night. A memory that several of us are fond of recalling is seeing the robes of Jesus moving among us late one night as we just poured out our love to Him.

From the Villa Chapel we moved to St Mark's seminary chapel for several years. We were so blessed to worship in the place where the seminarians and priests resided. We had many wonderful interactions with them. To this day we carry the seminarians, who are now priests, in our hearts as if they were family because they are.

It did not matter where we worshipped. I recall weekends in our early days when we were in gyms, but it did not matter because, just like the Israelites, the Spirit of God was with us.

Mass was never a burden to the members of Bread of Life. We couldn't wait for Mass. We never paid attention to how long Mass was because it always felt like it was only 5 minutes, not 90. When it was over we didn't want to leave. We wanted to be with God and with each other. It is a hallmark of Bread of Life that we have always carried the love of God with us. Not one of us is or was perfect, but we were immersed in that love in a way that changed us forever. We have never lost that love of God or our love for the people of God. We carried it with us when the Bishop moved our location from the Chapel of St Mark's to St Joseph.

In 2002, Bishop Troutman relocated Bread of Life Community to Saint Joseph's parish. Saint Joseph's was in danger of closing and the Bishop saw this as an opportunity to bring the life and vibrancy of Bread of Life into Saint Joseph's so that both communities could flourish. It proved to be a great partnership. The Bread of Life contemporary Mass was at 10am on Sundays and the St Joseph's Mass was on Saturday evening for many years.

Eventually, St Joseph's and Bread of Life kind of melded together. This was wonderful in many ways because Bread of Life and St. Joseph's have always had a beautiful unity. But along the way, the unique identity, mission, and charism of Bread of Life became somewhat lost. Because of this, Faith On Fire Charismatic Renewal Center and Father Steve requested that the diocese give clarification on the status of Bread of Life Catholic Charismatic Community. After prayerful consideration, Bishop Persico clarified that Bread of Life's charism, identity, and mission continue to fill an important and unique gap within the diocese of Erie.

The Bishop made the decision to re-establish Bread of Life as a formal Community of the Faithful as of August 22, 2026 (Feast of Mary Queen of the Universe). This year, 2026, is also the 35th anniversary Bread of Life Catholic Charismatic Community. The past 18 months have involved many meetings and formalities. Many people in leadership at the diocese contributed to the legal formalities involved. We are blessed and grateful to have wonderful support for Bread of Life from diocesan leadership.

I know it is difficult to relate to other people's memories. A 'word' that God has charged Bread of Life with, just as he charged the Israelites, is to *Remember*. God's anger was kindled against the Israelites when they forgot what God had done for them to bring them out of captivity and lead them through the desert. We do not forget the mighty works of God within our midst. We recall the love of Jesus, the power, the miracles, the intimacy, the Holy Spirit, and so much more.

Another word that God gave Bread of Life is from Revelation 2: *Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works.* The desire of Bread of Life is to return to our first love, which is Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, and to share this love. We sincerely desire that the entire diocese would be set on fire anew and would go forth doing *the works that Jesus does, and even greater things than these* because this was Jesus promise. So, we look back and fondly remember, but we look forward with great anticipation and excitement.

Next week I will talk about our future direction and what this means for Bread of Life Catholic Charismatic Community and St Joseph's. The charismatic renewal in Erie also has a history with St. Paul's and it is perfect that St. Paul's is a part of our family of churches. Sacred Heart is a wonderful community also. It is a beautiful church family and it is an exciting time. We know that the oneness and love that exists between Bread of Life and St. Joseph's will continue and we look forward to our interactions with the other communities.

In the magnificent love of Jesus,

Jacqueline Phillips-Sabol, PhD

Moderator, Bread Of Life Catholic Charismatic Community

