

The Beginnings of the Life in the Spirit Seminars

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The Life in the Spirit Seminars (LSS) began to develop about 7 months after the beginning of the charismatic renewal. Like most of the early leaders of the Charismatic Renewal, we had worked in the Cursillo movement. We were now working at the Catholic student center at the University of Michigan and began a charismatic prayer meeting.

In the middle of one of the first meetings, someone asked to be baptized in the Spirit, so we prayed for her then and there. The next two meetings something similar happened. So we decided to establish a time when people could ask questions and receive prayer in order not to interrupt the prayer meeting itself. First we set up a prayer room after the prayer meeting where people could come to be baptized in the Spirit. Then we added a preparation room. Then we added an explanation session before the prayer meeting. With each addition a higher percentage of the people got baptized in the Spirit.

We then packaged all this together and extended the time of initiation to six weekly sessions. In the course of those sessions we gave a fuller understanding of the gift of the Spirit and how to persevere after being baptized in the Spirit. We now put the focus on ongoing living of the life in the Spirit and decided to use the name “The Life in the Spirit Seminars”. We also formed a team of people who would work on the LSS and who could keep contact with the new people and bring them into the prayer group, subsequently the community.

This was where our Cursillo experience had been most helpful. It helped us to see that a powerful initiatory experience needed a follow-up and that an orientation to the follow-up needed to be built into the LSS. It also helped us to see that the follow-up needed to be an environment of committed people, and in addition that the weekend (and the follow-up) needed a trained team of leaders who did personal contact work with those in the LSS – both during and after the seminars. This was only one of the ways the wisdom of the Cursillo movement on how to put together an effective movement served the Charismatic Renewal.

We then realized that we needed to add more of an evangelistic focus. We needed to preach the gospel in the seminars and make the message more personally pointed. We made use of the Four Spiritual Laws in the explanation session, and we used the second session to preach the gospel message. In a new fourth session we presented the scriptural steps of response to the gospel: repent, believe and be baptized. That meant we included repentance and obedience to God more prominently in the seminars and made an effort to get the new people to ascertain what they needed to repent for.

The result was the 1971 and subsequent editions of the LSS. Other versions have been developed, but the original is still available from Tabor House in a Catholic and an ecumenical edition and is very effective when done correctly. It is, of course, not everything people need for Christian maturity.

– Steve Clark