

World RENEW



Send forth your spirit and renew the face of the earth

Fall/Winter 2006



In Good Hands

**Msgr. Tom Kleissler,
President,
RENEW International**

The revered St. Teresa of Avila did remarkable work in forming a community of sisters dedicated to the renewal of religious life and of the Church. She had a deep awareness of God’s providence. In her memoirs entitled, *Book of Her Life*, she wrote, “His majesty fully provides what is necessary for us.” Even when faced with great uncertainty about the future, she was wholly convinced that it was truly the Lord’s work and that as always God would provide. As St. Teresa of Avila prepared to start her religious community, she placed her entire trust in God’s caring providence. She was convinced that her sisters were about the Lord’s work and that God would guide them, support them, and provide whatever was necessary for the fulfillment of their dream.

Most of us aren’t saints like Saint Teresa. We tend to be people who throw a lot of human energy into our projects. Over time, hopefully, we realize more and more deeply what the saints realized—how God’s abiding hand has really been enabling the work.

Certainly, the work of renewing the Church is God’s will, and God has used **RENEW International**

and its many spiritual enterprises for the renewal of people and the Church. All this evolves despite our human weakness. Gradually, truth and a touch of humility help us realize that we are merely instruments of the Lord’s work. All along, God is leading us from one step to the next.

I am totally confident that God’s enabling hand will surely continue to guide **RENEW International** through the current period of transition. Michael Brough has moved on from being Director and we are deeply grateful for his dedicated service in leading us over the past five years. Michael has assumed a very important ministry with the National Leadership Roundtable for Church Management. This organization of successful Catholic lay people, religious, and clergy offers their services to bishops and dioceses throughout the country to promote best practices in management, finances, and human resources development.

The baton has been passed to Sister Theresa (Terry) Rickard, OP, who comes with equally strong credentials. Fortunately, we are able to move from excellence to excellence. For the last three and a half years, Sister Terry has been a vital member of our **RENEW International** team. She has been extremely effective as our main contact with bishops, priests, and lay leaders throughout the country.

Our reflection in this time of transition confirms for us the realization that God’s work with **RENEW International** will carry on strongly beyond us all. I am extremely grateful for the involvement, guidance, and support of you—our extended **RENEW** family. But above all, we thank God, because it is not we who make it happen. Our mission is in good hands, in the hands of our gracious God.

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RENEW in Africa

Peace-building with RENEW

How do you sum up the work or charism of **RENEW**? In the United States, we might say “faith sharing,” or “small Christian community building.” Ask the same question in Africa and the response would be “Peacebuilding” or “Reconciliation.”

Thirty years ago, Burundi (see map below) had a vibrant network of small Christian communities. In the shadow of the war and the suspicion that fell on any gatherings of people, these groups could no longer meet, not even to pray. The 12-year interruption imposed by war means sharing has to be relearned and that there are no longer any experienced leaders to guide the people in sharing.

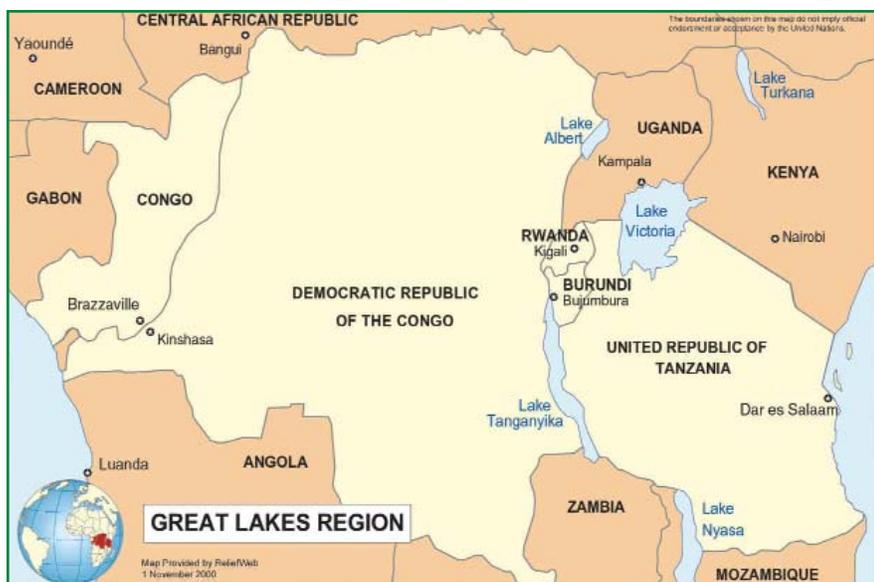
Building on our experience in South Africa during apartheid when we brought blacks, whites and coloreds together, **RENEW International** has been working in Burundi over the past two years to give sharing back to the people. The sharing that once again is taking place in the small groups is gradually cutting through the divisiveness that the genocide spawned. People of diverse cultures and education as well as ethnic background sit together and exchange experiences. At first, it may be



Boys from the Kamenge Youth Center in rural Bujumbura entertain the conference visitors.

mainly doubts and sorrows that are shared—but already this is better than silent and barely concealed hostility. Gradually, the participants learn to listen to each other, to get to know each other as people. This basic grassroots experience is what provides the surest foundation for true peacebuilding.

RENEW knows by long experience that the key to getting this sharing started, and fostering it through the first hesitant months, is to have leaders trained in basic group dynamics. In the past two years of our work in Burundi, **RENEW International** has trained approximately 200 trainers, each of whom have in turn trained about 100 small community leaders. To appreciate what this means in reality, let's take the example of Godelieve. For this young woman in a Ngozi parish outstation, training leaders means a roundtrip, on foot, of nearly 60 miles. Not content with simply instructing them in principles, she men-



Burundi, one of the world's poorest nations, is emerging from a 12-year, ethnic-based civil war.

Since independence in 1961, it has been plagued by tension between the dominant Tutsi minority and the Hutu majority and has been the scene of one of Africa's most intractable conflicts.

It is now beginning to reap the dividends of a peace process, but still faces the formidable tasks of reviving a shattered economy and of forging national unity.

Population: 7.3 million (UN, 2005)

Area: 10,740 square miles

Major religions: Christianity, indigenous beliefs

Life expectancy: 42 years (men), 44 years (women) (UN)

Main exports: coffee, tea, sugar, cotton, hides

GNI per capita: U.S. \$100 (World Bank, 2006)



Sister Marie (fourth left) with the widows group of Holy Family Parish. Close-up: The foundress and leader of the orphans' group in Holy Family Parish, describing their work to the conference participants.



Bujumbura, all from a parish that had been destroyed. They work together to raise money to ensure that orphans can continue their schooling.

Simeon told *World RENEW* how they had learned from the conference that to talk of the conflict only in terms of “Hutu versus Tutsi” is an over-simplification. In most of Burundi,

tors the leaders in their work, taking part in as many small group meetings as she can.

RENEW International is the first and, until now, only organization to offer this kind of training. All of the resources that **RENEW** offers in Burundi—and around which the small groups pray, share, and act—are on the themes of social justice, reconciliation, and peacebuilding.

Peacebuilding Conference

Recognition of **RENEW**'s pastoral outreach in international work for peacebuilding came recently when the Catholic Peacebuilding Network (CPN) invited **RENEW International** to take part in their 2006 Annual Conference (July 24-28, 2006) in Bujumbura, Burundi. Thanks to support from *Call On An Angel*, a New Jersey-based foundation, Sister Marie Cooper and Simeon Adagba of **RENEW International** were able to take an active part in this conference.

Sister Marie remarked how the conference offered both in-depth and probing lectures on key topics, and the opportunity to make visits to see how the work of peacebuilding and reconciliation is happening in concrete situations.

She described a visit to the Kamenge Youth Center as a concrete example of hope built on experience. The center serves 40,000 young people (from 12 to mid-20s) through something like 800 programs, ranging from weightlifting and physical exercise, through computer technology, and creative arts. The center has a well-stocked library where students of all ages can study and research. In the years of violence, the center was unscathed—though the parishes on either side of it were totally destroyed.

One significant feature the **RENEW** staff discovered about those places where successful grassroots peacebuilding is happening was the role and influence of women. An example was meeting with the widows, again in rural

there have been decades of inter-marriage among all tribes, so identification as uniquely Tutsi or Hutu is no longer clear. Peacebuilding efforts in Burundi—where **RENEW** has been working since 2004—have to reflect this more complex reality.

Both Sister Marie and Simeon noted how the conference confirmed that one of the greatest positive influences toward peace in the region is grassroots and parish-based peacebuilding efforts, which is precisely the central component of **RENEW International's** work in Burundi.

The healing of the ethnic and religious conflicts affecting Africa will take many years. **RENEW International** is proud to be an active participant in that process. With your support, and with God's blessing, our work will continue as long as it is necessary.



The CPN is a voluntary network of practitioners, academics, clergy, and laity that seeks to enhance the study and practice of

peacebuilding, especially at a local level. It holds annual conferences and sponsors major research on the theology and ethics of Catholic peacebuilding, and assists with peacebuilding training for Catholic leaders.

The conference in Burundi was their third, sponsored by CPN in collaboration with the Burundi Bishops' Conference, Catholic Relief Services, and support from the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies (University of Notre Dame), and the German Catholic aid agency, *Misereor*.

RENEW on Campus

“AWESOME!” Student faith-sharing groups report on Campus RENEW

In just three years since Spring 2004, when *Campus RENEW* first worked with students, the process has grown and is now present in over 50 colleges or universities.

For a flavor of how faith sharing is becoming a vibrant reality in the faith life of these young Christians on campus, we invite you to read the rest of this page, dedicated to extracts from enthusiastic messages we have received from various groups, reporting on just how well received this process is on campus.

“ We are happy to report that our RENEW group is working out beautifully. We have a large group, consistently about 22 freshmen, so we run the meetings a little differently. First we say an opening prayer together, read the Gospel, and then do the catch phrase. Once we finish that, we break apart to lead 2 smaller groups for the reflection and questions and call to action. To finish, we come back together for a closing prayer.

Every week we mix the groups, just so the freshmen get a chance to meet each other and to have a different leader.

Throughout the meetings the group has been extremely responsive and always share their excitement. Their enthusiasm for RENEW is unbelievable.

A lot of the freshmen have come up to us and said, “Hey, I knew what the priest was talking about today during the Gospel and homily because of RENEW!” It’s great. Let’s keep up the good work!

“ We are having great success with our RENEW group. We continue to gain new members.

Everyone interacts really well and I know that even if everyone is not yet participating, they will be soon. I love how well this is working out and we are really pleased with the response from all the RENEW groups. You can definitely tell something new is going on here. This is so awesome!

“ Here’s an update on our RENEW group. So far it has been really successful. Each week our number has grown and we haven’t had anyone drop after coming. I think a solid group of 12-15 will probably become covenant members.

At first, we spent some time getting to know each other. We’ve found that, after the Gospel reading, talking about phrases, etc., that stand out leads nicely into the Gospel reflection and call to action.

Our group has been so open with faith- and experience-sharing. It has really been incredible to see how different insights and experiences complement each other and lead to a call to action.

The call to action has been pretty important for us—our group talks a lot about accountability to each other, which is a great start to community-building.

We’ve also been talking about group service and fellowship outside of the RENEW hour and our group has some pretty great ideas!

“ We are having a great group so far. There are only 3 members, but they have all opened up and shared some really cool experiences. This week for our “Call to Action” we talked about ways we could learn about and be open to different religions and faiths in our lives. One of our members is Greek Orthodox and she said she could bring in some materials (prayers) and we could look at our differences and discuss them. Another one of our members said a friend of hers is Jewish and lives in the area; we hope to go over there for dinner or something sometime in the near future and discuss the Jewish religion.

Even though we are small, we are all opening to each other, and are having some amazing discussions. People are really sharing intimate things about their faith and their lives with each other, and I think that is awesome.



A Campus RENEW group at Catholic University of America, Washington D.C.

Introducing *RENEW International's* New Director, Sr. Theresa Rickard, OP

This page comes to you with a new photograph, because since June 2006, **RENEW International** has a new director. I am glad to have this opportunity to greet the readers of *World RENEW*, and for those of you who may not have met me in my previous roles at **RENEW International**, let me present myself.

The key thing for me is that I am a Dominican Sister. This is important because I believe there is an immense overlap between the vision and charism of Dominic and my vision of the charism of **RENEW International**.

Dominic lived and worked at a critical moment for the Church: it was emerging from the Dark Ages, and there was a great hunger among the people to make sense of their faith. Dominic gathered men and women around his evolving vision of founding a community who would be "preachers." But "preaching" for Dominic had a very broad and dynamic sense: it was not only to teach the Good News, but to form communities that—by the very way they operated, sharing their talents and gifts—would become what he called "holy preaching."

Doesn't that sound like **RENEW** to you? Some 800 or so years after Dominic, we too stand at a critical moment in Church history. What we Christians need today is a sense of who we are, a sense of our mission, and—most significantly—what will equip us to fulfill that mission.

RENEW offers a way to rediscover the Church and its traditions, not in some heady and academic way, but by inviting people to *be* Church. We help bring new spiritual life to parishes and dioceses. We work to stimulate, nurture, and foster small communities as places where the many varied talents and gifts of the participants, can make the Word of God come alive. This not only renews the participants individually, but energizes their commitment to the Church's mission of working to shape a better world.

I really do believe that we stand at a new moment. A great challenge! I am encouraged by all the warm welcome messages I have received since June. I know I can depend on the active support of the **RENEW**

staff, and on the **RENEW** extended "family" of participants and benefactors.

I come to this task of director equipped with pastoral training and experience. My studies took me first to Fordham, for a degree in Religious Education; then onto a Masters in Divinity from Union Theological Seminary; and I am currently working with Aquinas Institute of Theology on a thesis on preaching for a Doctorate in Ministry. My pastoral ministry began in multi-cultural parishes in the South Bronx, which is why I have a special commitment to **RENEW International's** outreach to the Latino communities. I worked actively in several parish ministerial roles, as well as being a member of the Parish Mission Team for the Archdiocese of New York. Within my Dominican Congregation, I served as Director of Vocations and Formation.

Of course, all of this stems from a more informal but no less rich "training": a faith-filled upbringing as one of six children in a happy Catholic family. In fact, my Mom was a dynamic **RENEW** coordinator at Holy Name Parish, Otisville, New York.

As I write this, I am very conscious of two things: where we have come from; and where we need to be going. I warmly thank all those who helped me on my spiritual journey in the past—not least, Michael Brough, my predecessor as director here at **RENEW**. Father Tom Kleissler, **RENEW's** founder and president, continues to be the driving force behind **RENEW International**, and my mentor. And I look forward to working with you all, with all your gifts and talents, so that the parishes we serve and the small communities we help shape and form will indeed be the places of "holy preaching" that today's world so hungers for.



Donor Corner

You can help us in our work by supporting our immediate needs:

Scholarships for *Why Catholic?*

- Scholarships for rural and inner city parishes @ \$1800 each
- Partial scholarship @ \$100-\$900 each
- Faith-sharing books @ \$9.95 each

Our small rural parishes and our inner city parishes often lack financial resources to participate in our *Why Catholic?* process. Although **RENEW International** never refuses to serve a parish because of this, it still incurs expenses in travel and providing materials, workshops, and retreats. Your help will buoy the spirits of our English and Spanish speaking parishioners and enable them to deepen their Catholic faith and bring it more concretely to their everyday lives.

A HEARTFELT THANK YOU



Dakota Sioux Seek Hope in RENEW

- Four RENEW Parish Kits for Lakota Sioux Native Americans on reservations in South Dakota @ \$165 each
- Faith-sharing booklets for 200 participants—\$500

Our impoverished Native American sisters and brothers in rural South Dakota suffer the ravages of the diseases of alcoholism and diabetes. A high degree of unemployment on the reservations adds to the existing depressing situation. The Lakota Sioux long to support one another and share faith in small communities. **RENEW's** small Christian communities can do much to benefit the lives not only of participants, but also the community at large. Purchase a leadership kit or contribute money for faith-sharing booklets so leaders have the resources to implement RENEW.

PILAMAYA YE PILAMAYA YELO



Burundi Peacekeeping and Evangelization Efforts

- Roundtrip airline tickets to Burundi for two staff @ \$2400 each
- Faith sharing Workbooks on Social Justice, for small communities @ \$3.50 each
- Internal transportation/room/board for one person for 2-day workshops—\$100
- Leadership training materials in 3 locations—\$250 for each location

Over 300,000 have died in ethnic conflict between the Hutu and Tutsi people. After decades of mistrust and inter-ethnic violence, **RENEW International** was brought in to show the way at the grassroots level to seek reconciliation and live in harmony. Where economic stability and social structures are in shambles, the **RENEW** process is one of the unifying force between these two groups. We need you in this effort to bring Christ's reconciliation and healing.

MURAKOZE



Rescuing and Rehabilitating Youth from Gangs in El Salvador

- Support a **RENEW** staff member to work with gang members—\$600

RENEW staff members rescue and rehabilitate gang members in El Salvador. Former gang members meet weekly in small communities to share with one another their faith and friendship as well as their trust. Through their small communities they come to a new realization of "what it means to belong." They connect their faith sharing to the circumstances of their lives in ways that change them forever. \$600 will cover the cost of materials and travel for staff for three months.

¡GRACIAS!



If you would like to help us answer any of these needs, please use the envelope enclosed with this Newsletter, on which you can indicate how you would like your gift to be used.

MSGR. THOMAS KLEISSLER
PRESIDENT



SR. TERESA RICKARD, OP
DIRECTOR

Dear Friends of RENEW,

In the world of RENEW, a little goes a long way.

When Ricky Fuentes was only nine years old, he joined a gang in his native El Salvador. His gang, "Mara 18" was notorious, even in a locale where gang violence is a daily occurrence. The gang initially gave Ricky a sense of belonging, but put him on a path of self destruction.

For almost all gang members there are only two options: jail or death. Fortunately for Ricky, through a series of coincidences, he met Dr. Irma Chavez, the director of *RENEW El Salvador*, RENEW's ministry in that country. Dr. Chavez offered him an opportunity to participate in her small Christian community as well as a way out of gang life. Painstakingly, Ricky had his gang tattoos removed, a sign of his new way of life, a sign of his accepting Christ and being a part of the Christian community.

Subsequently, Ricky was able to complete high school and is now a student nurse, he is on the path to a constructive, positive life and is becoming a contributing member of his community, and his parish. This was made possible by *RENEW El Salvador*—which itself is only able to fulfill its vital mission through the support of RENEW donors such as you.

In our daily lives, dealing with ever-increasing demands on our resources and in an economy where expenses seem to be outdistancing income, we must never forget our sisters and brothers in Christ. They have the same spiritual needs for themselves and their families as we do, but with little or no resources to support many of their goals.

In our **Donor Corner**, we see needs that by all standards are most modest. RENEW materials that will be used by Native Americans at \$2.50 each or faith-sharing resources on reconciliation and social justice for our many participants in Burundi at \$3.50. Small gifts can accomplish wonderful things.

Through your support of RENEW International over the years, thousands have become stronger in their Catholic faith and have helped to strengthen family, parish, civic community, and Church. Perhaps not as dramatic as Ricky's transformation, but just as important in leading each individual toward a stronger faith and a more rewarding spiritual life.

Every contribution we receive makes a tremendous difference. Please consider making a donation, and giving another member of the Body of Christ a spiritual gift that will not only benefit the people involved but also the community and the Church of which we are all a part.

As always, know that you and your intentions are in our prayers.

Sr. Theresa Rickard, OP



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In this issue of *World RENEW*, meet Sr. Terry, our new Director; come with us on a visit to Burundi in Africa, where **RENEW International** was invited to take part in an International Peacebuilding Conference; listen to the enthusiasm of campus students for the faith sharing that has been brought to them by **Campus RENEW**; check out some of the ways you can further the work of **RENEW International**, both in the USA and elsewhere in the world.

RENEW Website

RENEWing the Web

- Are you looking for the latest trends in parish ministry?
 - Do you want to know about great events for Catholics in their 20s and 30s?
 - Want to browse for a good book on spirituality?
- If so, please come visit **RENEW International's** completely new web site in the new year at:

www.renewintl.org

Visitors can sign up to receive an electronic version of *World RENEW*, or other special interest emails.

We know that an increasing number of people are using the Internet for learning, shopping, and even spiritual development. And we want to be sure that you can find the relevant resources that you need as Catholics. So we are completely redesigning the **RENEW International** website, to better serve the needs of parishes and their people.

Our newly updated site will have special features for parish leaders and participants, including discussion forums, calendars of interesting events, a secure bookstore filled with faith-sharing materials, and parish resources for download.

No matter what you're looking for, there will be plenty to meet your needs.

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