

I first heard of Fr. Sean Conaty when I read his Testimony about his introduction to Renewal, among a collection of similar accounts by others. At the time I was looking for any Catholic Charismatic Prayer Group in the Tyneside area, when some very strange events that had occurred in my life. I was driven as never before to find out more about a vibrant Spirit filled spirituality, which I had heard about, glimpsed, and was eager to learn more.

I traced him to Longbenton, and knowing little about Renewal, arranged to meet him within a week. That first meeting was for me the start of a new and broader context to my life. Sean's conversations with me lead me to start a deeper study of scripture, a regular prayer life, and he invited me to join the SS. Peter & Paul prayer group at Longbenton. That explored every aspect of the Christian life over many years until he moved to Chester-le-Street. His teaching was thoughtful, insightful and delivered with humour as well as passion in Life in the Spirit Seminars, Conferences and Retreats. To me the example of his own life was probably the most striking thing. He was a man of prayer, more hours a day than anyone I have met before or since. He gave me books on prayer and encouraged everyone to establish this basic routine on which their spiritual life would be based, in whatever way worked for them.

He was widely read, and he directed me to many authors, some I had found myself, others were new to me – and helpful. His teachings at our prayer group meetings were recorded, and I began a collection of those I appreciated the most. He clearly expected me to learn more about myself as well as more about God and the World; meaning has always been important to me, and he did his best to see that I understood what I read or experienced. His anecdotes were always compelling and to the point he made. He understood the variety in people, and what energised them; his approach to spirituality and religion was never the one size fits all kind. He approached people in a way they understood, and could respond to; difference was to him an opportunity to engage with others in a personal relationship. From this he led them on in their development to a meaningful personal relationship with God.

His knowledge was experience based, he had encountered God in his life and it had changed him when he least expected it. Now he expected to see that pattern in others, in me. He led me to see God's one world, and recognised in everyone their relationship with God that was personally unique to them and also one with all people. He was emphatic that my spiritual journey involved me in work that only I could do, and continual persistence would be required lifelong. He was whole hearted himself and could not abide the half-hearted. The only other trait that angered him was negativity, and he did his best to dispel it where he found it.

The growth that he nurtured in me led to a self assurance, a willingness to walk on and take responsibility for my actions. Provided this was based on a regular prayer life, he trusted in the power of grace. He empowered me – and others – and he invited me tacitly to follow his own example. He followed Jesus, and the Good News was his basis for Faith and a Hope that inspired an attitude of generous love in his life, reflecting what he received from God to those around him. He embodied the Christian life.

I shall always be grateful for his part in my life, he impressed me and I hold him in great respect. He helped me grow, and understand more about my life. He showed me a meaning to my earthly life above and beyond what anyone else had ever done.

He nurtured an expectant faith in me, after that, it was all God's work. He reminded me of a racing car mechanic; having trained the driver and worked on the car to achieve maximum performance, he was happy to see me drive off and do my best on the track. The result depended on my God given talents, my attention, and grace on the day.

I once asked him how he remembered all those who like me had asked for his prayers. His answer was unexpectedly simple: "I place them in my heart when they ask; each day I remember before God all those I have placed in my heart, and I ask God's blessing on them that day." I have done the same every day since that conversation.