

## Recalling origins, RENEW offers prayers, tribute to its 'visionary father'

BY SISTER THERESA RICKARD  
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In our prayers at RENEW International, we thank God for those who have gone before us. We stand on the shoulders of giants. But if one name comes first in our prayers, it's Archbishop Emeritus Peter L. Gerety, aptly called "the father of RENEW."

In the wake of the Second Vatican Council, Archbishop Gerety was eager for the Archdiocese of Newark to undertake a formation process of spiritual renewal that would inspire Catholic men and women to act on their faith through works of charity and justice. This coincided with the vision of Father Thomas Kleissler and Father Thomas Ivory, who were working at the Newark chancery to create a program of parish renewal focused on the faith formation of the laity, through the vehicle of small Christian communities. The idea, at the time, was unprecedented in its scope and Archbishop Gerety heartily endorsed it.

On Sept. 26, 1976, then-Fathers Kleissler and Ivory, along with 60 priests, Religious, and lay leaders, brainstormed what this renewal process would entail. Twenty of those people continued to pray and work together for two years, giving birth to what has become known as RENEW. At that first meeting, Fr. Kleissler was appointed coordinator. Fr. Kleissler, now monsignor, led RENEW as president until his retirement in 2009.

Since it was launched in the Archdiocese of Newark in 1978, RENEW has reached 25 million people in more than 200 dioceses across the United States and 23 other countries. At present, the organization is working in 40 dioceses and engaging more than 400,000 people in the North America, Latin America, and South Africa.

"Archbishop Gerety is well named as the 'father of RENEW,' Msgr. Ivory said. "It took a leader as tremendous as he is to see the profound possibilities this spiritual renewal effort could make in the lives of the people. He exercised his leadership to initiate a diocese-wide program totally different from what any other diocese had undertaken. I treasure my many years of working with him as well as my personal friendship with him."

Msgr. Ivory recalled the 1970s were not the most opportune time for the archbishop to devote his attention to a new undertaking. "Given the fiscal pressures in the diocese and the racial tensions in our cities, Archbishop Gerety still enthusiastically supported a spiritual renewal process to build up the people of God. He is a man of great vision."

Archbishop Gerety's leadership style was highly effective, according to Sister Mary C. McGuinness, O.P., who devoted three decades to leading small Christian community efforts and to developing RENEW's faith-sharing resources. "He believed in and promoted a collegial processes," Sr. Mary said, adding he was "deeply respected" by lay people.

I became executive director of RENEW in 2006, long after Archbishop Gerety had retired, but I have been grateful for his continued support of RENEW's work. The RENEW family thanks Archbishop Gerety for all he has done and wishes him a happy and peaceful 100th birthday.

*(Editor's note: Sister Theresa Rickard, O.P., D.Min., is the president and executive director of RENEW International, a Catholic ministry organization based in Plainfield, operating under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Newark.)*



Advocate photo - M. Gabriele

Archbishop Emeritus Peter L. Gerety (right), assisted by Rev. Msgr. Francis R. Seymour, delivers the invocation at RENEW International's 13th annual dinner and awards gala, which was held June 7 at the Pleasantdale Chateau in West Orange.