

A background history of Friends in the Holy Spirit (FitHS) CCR prayer group

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2014-2016 - Birth and first steps

Friends in the Holy Spirit Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) prayer group has its roots in a Life in the Spirit Seminar organised and delivered by **Soul Food** CCR prayer group (based at St Charles Borromeo in central London) in our parish St Peter's the Apostle in Woolwich. The programme ran from 10th October to 28th November 2014. When the seminar ended, those of us who had shared that amazing journey, wanted more of the Holy Spirit. Our hearts desire was exactly as we had read in **Acts 4:20** which said: **"we cannot stop speaking of what we ourselves have seen and heard"** (Good News Bible).

So, in January 2015 we began studying 'Rediscover Catholicism', the famous book by Matthew Kelly founder of Dynamic Catholic, following the reflection guide provided, with homework for every Friday, when we came together to share and pray to the Holy Spirit for discernment on what He wanted us to do for our parish. This challenging times and book sharing were such a life-changing experience for us! In May 2015 our weekly gathering could begin to take place in the parish premises. We understood then that the Holy Spirit had a plan for our parish and that He was really working on us to make us ready for whatever was coming. We now decided to choose a suitable name for the group through prayer and agreed that **"Friends in the Holy Spirit" (FitHS)** truly represented our identity. We were then able to advertise it in the parish newsletter as a group on **"a journey of exploration and discovery, aiming to strengthen, expand and deepen our understanding of our faith"** with our motto being **'Catholicism, this is our Faith'**. It was decided that all meetings were to start and end with a beautiful prayer to consecrate ourselves to the Holy Spirit and to ask for His gifts and it became our FitHS group prayer.

In June 2016, after sharing a summary of a book about **'Baptism in the Holy Spirit'** by **Robert de Grandis**, we began to realise how the Holy Spirit was awaking in us a greater desire to know and understand what He could do through us. We respected the group schedule and our prayer time gradually increased as it was added to our meetings. A co-ordinator's role requires constant searching for ideas to keep the group active, which is what led us to speak to a lady with a 20+ year experience in the CCR to find out how her group operated, with the hope of learning something new. So this led to a proposal of a fellowship structure which we could use as a group to keep growing. It was a structure that upheld prayer as we had already begun to do with the help of the Holy Spirit. We were now ready to enter into our next leg of our journey.

2017-2018 - Change and Challenge: becoming a CCR prayer group

On Friday 13th January 2017 four members gathered in front of Our Lady's statue to pray and ask for guidance with our future choices. At some point we were joined by a Nigerian assistant priest, Rev. Fr. Anthony Uche, who suggested that we think of the possibility of becoming a CCR prayer group, and that if we decided to do so, he would invite **Fountain of Life CCR prayer group** from **St David's parish in Abbey Wood**, to be our mother group. They were to provide support to us through their guidance as well as accompany us in that process up to a point where they felt we were mature enough to fly with our own wings. Our first meeting with both the Fountain of Life Co-ordinator and their Prayer Ministry leader was on the 20th of January 2017. The group faithfully and very generously allocated members from their serving team, every Friday evening in pairs, for teaching and prayer so we could learn the ropes of how to manage a CCR prayer group. Fountain of Life helped us organise the launch of our group in the parish at the beginning of December 2017. This very inspiring and encouraging experience strengthened us and our bond as servants of Christ.

The year 2018 started with Fountain of Life's plan to withdraw little by little from our Friday fellowship in order to give us room to put into practice the knowledge we had acquired from them and to help us grow in all areas. They then attended in order to observe and to give us constructive feedback. We then drafted what has become the structure for our Friday fellowships up to this day.

Start Time	Activity	Duration	Leader	Transition Sign
6.40-7.00pm	The Holy Rosary	20 mins	As assigned	Praise the Lord!
7.00-7.15pm	Praise and Worship	15 mins		
7.15-7.20pm	Opening Prayer	5 mins		
7.20-8.20pm	Options:			
	1) Teaching			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching 40 mins • Comments/Questions 15 mins 			
	2) Word of Exhortation			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word of Exhortation 15-20 mins • Intercessory Prayers 30 mins • Thanksgiving/Testimonies 10-15 mins 			
	3) Bible Sharing/Study	60 mins		
8.20-8.30pm	Closing Prayer Announcements and The Grace	As needed		

As we were still learning anyone of us could be assigned one of those tasks mentioned above, as it gave us the opportunity to test our gifts. This way of working awakened great confidence in us to move forward, despite challenges. We were only eight regular attendees with our numbers fluctuating with people coming and going for various reasons such as job change, lack of employment, job schedules and so on but we never felt discouraged or ceased meeting except for holiday periods (Easter period or Christmas). In April 2018, we finally formed a core team of eight members and met on Mondays on a weekly basis, to structure and prepare for our Friday fellowship and to organise possible events like Pentecost and other revival events. A strong bond formed among members, and we were no longer individuals but brothers and sisters belonging to and working for the same community. This was a very challenging time because of our different temperaments and cultural backgrounds. However, we kept praying for our group and let ourselves in God's hands trusting that 'iron sharpens iron' (Proverbs 27:17). It was those challenges we faced together that made it possible for us to reach a better understanding and acceptance of each other and of the group as it was at the time. This helped us to have a common vision of FitHS while serving our parish.

2019 to date - Walking in the Spirit

Our greatest achievement this year was to run our first Life in the Spirit Seminar in our parish from May to July, under the observation and guidance of Fountain of Life, and strongly supported by our parish priest **Rev. Fr. Michael Branch** with a call for parishioners to join us in the seminar. The result of the experience attracted new members to FitHS. The seminar also facilitated the creation of our three ministries namely Prayer, Praise & Worship and Teaching ministry.

With the sudden announcement of a pandemic at the start of 2020, our gatherings for our Friday fellowship ground to a halt due to UK government official lockdown which began on March 23rd. Through the use of Zoom in our fellowships during this ongoing pandemic shows our commitment to moving FitHS forwards. We also advertise our FitHS Zoom link for Friday fellowship in the parish newsletter as the return to normal is delayed. We have to say that during the pandemic new members joined us and more people have shown

interest by joining the group on Friday. Currently we are 16 regular members and others attend our Friday fellowship intermittently due to various reasons.

We started a FitHS **'Prayer in agreement'** scheduled for 10pm on Wednesday evenings involving all members on our main FitHS WhatsApp platform. Our intercessors post prayers that evening and the content includes different prayer points with references from Scripture and a couple of praise and worship videos. No postings are allowed until the following morning. Everyone can start praying after 10pm as their schedules permit. It is a way to involve all FitHS members and other brethren on our platform who do not desire to attend fellowship but want to belong to our group due to content shared. We take it as a way of evangelising as FitHS is always open to accept anyone who wants to join in thanking and praising our loving and merciful God.

Our intercessors, since May 2020, have been meeting for **"Monday midnight prayer"** every Monday for one hour between midnight and 1am to pray and intercede for the many needs of FitHS members and their families, our parish, the Church and the world.

Both our Praise and Worship and Teaching ministries also meet regularly.

Currently in FitHS we have brothers and sisters from African (Cameroon, Ghana, Ivory Cost, Nigeria, Uganda), Caribbean and European (Portuguese, Spanish) background and would be delighted to welcome many more. It is great to be from different nationalities so that we can be heaven on earth! FitHS are also longing to be part of the greater network of CCR as well as to interact with other groups.

Signed: Maria Caballero-Blaya on behalf of FitHS
Co-ordinator

Date: 6th November 2021