

[HamptonRoads.com](#) >> [auctions](#) / [autos](#) / [homes](#) / [jobs](#) / [shop](#) / [yellow pages](#) <<
[PilotOnline.com](#)



[Search Tips](#)
[Setup account](#)
[Service Fees](#)
[Copyright notice](#)
[FAQ](#)

The Virginian-Pilot NewsLibrary Archives
 Search the print edition

CHARISMATIC CHURCHES TURN INTO FASTEST-GROWING FAITH \

Published: September 27, 1999

Section: LOCAL, page B1

Source: LIZ SZABO, STAFF WRITER

© 1999- **Landmark** Communications Inc.

[**Part** one of a two-part series.]

She covers her face with her hands.

Her eyes are closed, her head tilted toward the floor.

This woman in a blue denim jumper is standing before the altar. at Rock Church in Virginia Beach, rapt in prayer. She and more than a dozen others are pacing, swaying and rocking. Some warble softly to themselves, their improvised songs recalling Native American chants. Others call out to God, both in English and a language of the spirit:

Oh la la ra sha na. . . . Oh thank you, thank God for the gift of this day. . . . Ooh shanda lilly lilly. . . .

The woman in the jumper begins to tremble.

"Thank you, Jesus!" she cries. "**Thank** you, Jesus!"

She collapses to the ground, twitching all over and laughing. She lies on her back, undisturbed, on the mauve sanctuary carpet. A fellow church member calmly lifts a pink cloth from a pile on the side of the altar and covers the woman's legs.

She is helped to a seat as senior pastor Anne Girminez enters the sanctuary and leads the congregation in praise and song. Within 40 minutes, the woman is dancing in the aisles.

This is Wednesday night worship at Hampton Roads' largest charismatic church, a congregation of more than 4,000 with over 300 churches around the world. Believers here, like other charismatics, open themselves to "gifts of the spirit" such as speaking in tongues, faith healing and prophecy.

Around the country, and around the world, people can't get

enough.

Charismatic churches such as Rock Church, in fact, are the fastest growing branch of Christianity in the world today, according to Vinson **Synan**, dean of the School of Divinity at Regent University. Charismatics number about 20 million in the United States and half a billion worldwide.

More than 3,000 members of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians of North America will convene at Bethel Temple in Hampton today, praying for racial unity in a diverse movement that is gaining 50,000 adherents a day. Charismatics are found in nearly all Christian denominations, particularly traditional Pentecostal churches, as well as independent houses of worship.

The largest Pentecostal denominations have grown more than 180 percent since 1965, according to professor David Roozen, who studies church demographics at Hartford Seminary in Connecticut.

The rapid rise of such "spirit-filled" churches, however, is not welcomed by all. For some Christians, charismatic worship is hard to understand at best, and **frightening** or irrational at worst.

No matter how they feel, however, Christians will have to get used to it. The charismatic movement **isn't** going away. In fact, scholars estimate that in only a few years, the faith will claim one in every three Christians on the planet.

Rhonda E. Coles knows it's not easy to understand what goes on at her church.

She was raised a Baptist but first spoke in tongues - a sign of the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" - many years ago.

"You're not going to ever understand it unless it happens to you," said Coles, a choir member at Rock Church. "Once it happens to you, can't nobody tell you it's not real. But if you don't feel it yourself, it just looks foolish."

For many, "spirit-led worship" is a movement of the heart, not the head. The sensation is so powerful, they say, it shakes their bodies to the core.

"The flesh can't handle it, so the body goes down," said Nancy Duncan, a Rock Church member who says she has been driven to her knees by the Holy Spirit. "It's just the weight of God. You don't want to resist it."

Indeed, charismatic worship "is about experience, not doctrine,"

according to the Rev. Jerry Qualls.

"Instead of just talking about God, there's an aliveness to knowing God," said **Qualls**, pastor of Glad Tidings Church and an organizer of the Hampton conference. "There's a priesthood of the believer. It's not just the priest who's **talking** to God, but the idea that I can talk to God."

Charismatics come from many backgrounds but agree on key points. They're typically conservative on moral issues and evangelical in spirit, dedicated to spreading their faith.

They enjoy lively - make that loud - praise music and dramatic preaching styles. All embrace gifts of the spirit. Some Pentecostal denominations actually require a second "baptism in the spirit," something most other charismatic churches don't demand, said John Green, a professor at the University of Akron and a leading expert on evangelical Christians.

Charismatics base their practices on the biblical story of Pentecost and descriptions of the Holy Spirit in Acts of the Apostles and First Corinthians.

The greatest growth today among charismatics is not in traditional Pentecostal denominations, experts say, but from the ranks of those who previously didn't go to church, as well as in the black and Hispanic communities.

The movement also is fueled by enormous revivals - from Smithton, Mo., to Toronto - that attract visitors from around the world, said Margaret **Poloma** of Vanguard University of Southern California. People flock to hear animated sermons and see dramatic manifestations credited to the Holy Spirit. More than **2** million, in fact, have visited a Brownsville, Fla., Assemblies of God church that launched the "**Brownsville Revival**" in **1995**. Such revivals often lead to the creation of many new churches.

Pentecostalism itself was born from a revival.

The movement, which has spawned such denominations as the **2.5** million-member Assemblies of God and the **5.5** million-member Church of God in Christ, began at the **Azusa Street Revival** in **Los Angeles** from **1906** to **1909**.

The charismatic renewal began in the 1960s as a way to restore emotion and enthusiasm. This movement reaches beyond traditional Pentecostal churches into mainline denominations such as the Presbyterians and Episcopalians.

Charismatics share a strong belief in angels, devils and the Second Coming, which many predict will arrive quite soon. In spite of such dire forecasts, however, they are profoundly optimistic and find great joy in the promise of salvation, said Stanley Burgess, professor of religious studies at Southwest Missouri State University.

That passion overflows **from** the altar at Rock Church.

"**Everything** that God gave Jesus, you have," the Rev. John **Giminez**, bishop of Rock Church International, told the congregation at Wednesday's service, comparing personal spiritual gifts to a bottle of oil. "You have the power to heal the sick, to drive out devils. Break that bottle! Why **are** you keeping it hidden away?"

Beyond theology, charismatic services simply are exciting to watch, Burgess said. Preachers specialize in colorful metaphors. They lay hands on congregation members, who collapse on the altar. John Giminez, in counseling people with burdens, advised a group of a dozen worshippers to visualize their problems.

"Whatever is giving you pain, put it in your right hand," he said. "Now, in your left hand, you take that oil, and you pour it out over Jesus' head. He'll take it. He'll take your pain."

As the world becomes more modernized and our lives enmeshed in routines, however, people become more fascinated with the mystical, **said David Yamane**, an assistant professor who studies the sociology of religion at the University of Notre Dame.

"If our everyday home life becomes so rationalized, we may look for other outlets," Yamane said. "They feel a need for something beyond themselves. You see people today engaging in all **kinds** of extreme sports, like rock climbing. This is a risky form of religion."

The charismatic movement has stretched into just about every denomination.

A large number of local churches blend gifts of the spirit with traditional worship services, **from** the Tidewater Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement to the Episcopal Church of the Messiah in Chesapeake, Kempsville Presbyterian Church in Virginia, and Level Green Baptist Church and **Bayview** Baptist Church in Norfolk, to name only a few.

Some charismatic Baptists have even taken to describing

themselves as "Baptecotal."

New denominations are taking shape, too, such as the Charismatic Episcopal Church, founded in 1992, and the Full Gospel Baptist Fellowship, formed in 1993.

Even churches that reject Pentecostal theology are appropriating the dramatic worship styles, said Glad Tidings' **Jerry Qualls**. Pentecostal churches always have given worshippers the freedom to express their faith as they like - by clapping, shouting, singing or dancing. That exuberance is appealing to Christians of all stripes.

A large proportion of new churches use modern music, with elaborate light shows and sound systems.

Indeed, many Christians use the word "charismatic" simply to describe an animated church service, said the University of Akron's John Green. Only about half of white Pentecostals and a third of black Pentecostals actually speak in tongues, according to his 1995 telephone survey.

The Rev. **Marty O'Rourke**, rector at Messiah Episcopal, says charismatic worship has invigorated his congregation with the spirit of the first century church. The church blends the traditional Episcopal liturgy with animated praise and speaking in tongues.

"There's a sense of excitement and enthusiasm," O'Rourke said.

John **Giminez's** sermon, while stern in places, likewise was filled with hope.

"He's not in the tomb," he told the church, referring to the risen Christ. "So you don't have to be, either."

Description of illustration(s):

Color Photo

GARY C. KNAPP

A member of Glad Tidings Church in Norfolk raises her arms while singing during Sunday night's service. Charismatic churches are growing rapidly.

This article is © 1999- Landmark Communications Inc. and **may not be** republished without permission.

For Virginian-Pilot related archive billing questions, call News Library at 1-800-896-5587.

For search questions, [e-mail us](mailto:),
HarnptonRoads.com and Pilot Online