

The
María Goretti Network
MGN

An Overview and Introduction



Miguel Prats

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**To Delicia and Gavin
to whom I am forever indebted.**

The Maria Goretti Network/MGN

An Overview and Introduction

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Introduction

I am a survivor of clergy and non-clergy abuse with a message of love and hope to offer. Abuse left a deep hurt in my life. It affected everything I did. My heart was so guarded. It shut out the love I needed to heal. Worst of all, my defenses also shut out God's love. I thought "How could God, love me anyway?" Like many victims, abuse left me feeling like somehow it was my fault. I was left with little self-esteem and full of shame. I was hiding from God. In different ways, many affected by abuse hide behind walls that create isolation and darkness.

I felt so alone. A thousand questions swirled around in my head but there were no answers. The dark side had me. I couldn't break away from that emotional prison. Then I heard about a little girl named Maria Goretti and it changed my life. She helped me draw closer to Jesus.

Maria Goretti was born in 1890 into an impoverished family in Italy. She was a devout Christian. Even as a little child, Maria made it known her greatest wish was to receive Jesus in communion. She was not quite twelve years old when in 1902 a young neighbor, Alessandro Serenelli, attempted to abuse her. In escaping him, she was mortally wounded. Before she died she expressed to a priest she forgave Alessandro and wanted him to be in heaven with her. St. Maria prayed for her murderer.

Alessandro remained unrepentant for years raging against the verdict that he should serve 30 years at hard labor. After eleven years in prison, Alessandro fell into a deep despair, until one night, he had a vision of Maria in a dream. She made it known to him she forgave him by handing him 14 white lilies. He woke his guards and begged for a priest. Previously when a priest visited him he was surly and rude. Now he was begging for a priest and confession. He reconciled with Jesus and with the Church. He became a model prisoner from that moment on. When his prison term was served, after 28 years, Alessandro took up residence as a gardener at a Capuchin monastery. There, he continued his life of penance, helping many people until he died in 1971. He is a model for sinners who think they cannot be forgiven and prisoners.

All of us who are abused die somehow, on some level. Parts of me died. My innocence died. Parts of my heart fell into dark despair. I have found healing in the example of Maria and in the love of Jesus. The more I make spiritual progress in forgiving my abuser and those who enabled him and forgiving everyone, including myself, the more my heart has been opened to God's abundant love. Through pursuing forgiveness I have been blessed and freed from the past.

Feeling the call to share this path toward recovering from abuse with fellow survivors,

Fr. Gavin and I, with Bishop Alvaro Corrada del Rio's blessing, started the Maria Goretti Network (MGN) in Longview, Texas, in 2004. It is a 501 (3) (C) organization that serves as a self-help support network for those affected by abuse. Our network is open to all those affected by abuse, no matter who your abuser was or what form of abuse you have suffered or are suffering. While the Maria Goretti Network is a Lay Apostolate within the Roman Catholic Church, being religious is not required to attend meetings or to assume leadership positions. The holy example of Maria Goretti can help all those abused find grace, healing, blessings and freedom.

Once you join the Maria Goretti Network you are part of a family of survivors, and you are no longer isolated by the abuse. Forgiveness frees us to become a survivor as you realize you are not alone and you have support to help you accept that the abuse was not your fault. Our mission is to support your recovery through growing more open to God's love and being more able to forgive. We heed God's commandment to forgive so that we may be forgiven.

Forgiveness is the key! Jesus is the way!

Purpose of This Book

I have written this book in response to many requests for more information about the Maria Goretti Network/MGN and how to form and lead a local Chapter. Here you will read about our Principles and Practices and be able to understand how to lead and facilitate Chapters and meetings in compliance with our organization's policies. I've also enclosed a copy of our Leadership Agreement for anyone who feels drawn to possibly lead a Chapter. I hope many fellow survivors will!

I hope you will be inspired by our work no matter what reason you may be reading this book. I hope that if you are in any role to help those affected by of abuse, you will pray for our work and encourage people affected by abuse to consider forming a Chapter of the Maria Goretti Network. I also hope and pray that, if you have been affected by abuse and are drawn to be a vessel of the Holy Spirit promoting healing among fellow survivors of abuse, you will be inspired to join us as a Chapter leader.

Please feel free to contact me or the Spiritual Director and Vice President of the Maria Goretti Network, Fr. Gavin Vaverek, with any questions you may have. Contact information may be found at the end of this book and on the Maria Goretti Network website at mgoretti.org.

We are praying for you, whoever you are reading this book, that your heart and life will be touched by our dear patron St. Maria Goretti and that with God's help you will find the grace and inspiration to forgive whatever hurt or wound holds your heart hostage today.

When we unite our wounds to Christ's we heal

This prayer I found tremendously helpful as I started my healing journey.

The Anima Christi

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.
Body of Christ, save me.
Blood of Christ, inebriate me.
Water from the side of Christ, wash me.
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.
O good Jesus, hear me.
Within your wounds conceal me.
Do not permit me to be parted from you.
From the evil foe protect me.
At the hour of my death call me.
And bid me come to you,
to praise you with all your saints
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Focus

The Maria Goretti Network places a special and very gentle focus on forgiveness and its role in our recovery from abuse. We are radicals in our approach to healing.

The love of Jesus is a radical concept. Maria Goretti's capacity to forgive the man who killed her was radical. Following in her footsteps, the Maria Goretti Network is radical too. We know forgiveness is very difficult. We choose this difficult path for good reasons. Let me explain our focus on forgiveness and its importance.

Our focus on forgiveness does not minimize the evil of abuse. *No one* has the right to gratify themselves at the expense of another human being. *No one* has the right to exploit another human being. We are *not* to blame for what happened to us.

Each person is created in the sacred image of God and deserves to be respected and protected. We are all children of God and are bestowed with inherent dignity. The Maria Goretti Network believes in the dignity of every human person. We serve each person affected by abuse as a precious child of God.

The Maria Goretti Network does *not* believe that when a person forgives their abuser the abuse is excused in any way. Our forgiveness does not make the abuser somehow less responsible. Just as Maria Goretti's abuser was subject to judgment under the law, we believe that every perpetrator should receive justice under the law. We emphasize that anyone with authority should take steps to ensure abusers are not free to abuse children.

In the end abusers carry the weight of their own sin and crimes. They must never victimize anyone again. Victims cannot carry that burden for the abuser. Victims are not the cause of abuser's abusive actions or impulses no matter what an abuser in your life may say. Abusers are responsible for turning their lives around and making sincere amends. Forgiveness from a person harmed by abuse does *not* reduce in any way the burden of responsibility that lies on the shoulders of abusers.

Members of the Maria Goretti Network pray for our own abusers and perpetrators. We pray for them to be under the constraint of the proper authorities (including to turn themselves in where that is needed), to seek competent professional help, and to make amends in appropriate ways to those affected by their abuse. We pray they make true peace with God. Our prayer is that abusers find a way to apologize for their actions in an appropriate manner that will not be upsetting to those they harmed by their abuse.

The Maria Goretti Network also encourages society at large to help law enforcement and civil authorities bring perpetrators to justice and to support those affected by abuse in the difficult path to healing in their life.

As you read here about our focus on forgiveness, you may wonder where is information about those affected by the abuse? Our focus is on becoming survivors and thrivers. We reject the label “victim”. We focus on forgiveness in the most gentle and patient of ways always respecting boundaries. We promote healing by sharing experiences we’ve had that helped us recover in the hopes someone else will hear something that helps them. Giving and asking for advice is not allowed.

None of us are experts and none of us know what’s best for another. We know from first-hand experience when those affected by abuse forgive, they are freed from the chains of victimhood. Life definitely improves.

We also know that many people say they can’t forgive. What was done to them was unforgivable. If those people make a sincere request of Jesus that He help them to forgive, progress is made. Simply having the desire to forgive sets in motion a chain of events where The Holy Spirit enters and changes lives.

Forgiveness is the focus of the Maria Goretti Network. It is the goal of our shared spiritual journey. It is the key to recovery. But our work is just that, a journey. This is a difficult path with the goal of restoring peace, love and joy in our lives. We walk together in meetings and friendship with each other always focusing on Jesus’s wounds, for we know we must bind ours to His. We look to the examples of the saints for ways to forgive the unforgivable. And with God’s help, we experience healing and the love of Jesus.

Leadership

Every leader of the Maria Goretti Network has gone through a personal process of prayer and discernment to confirm their own willingness to become a vessel for the Holy Spirit in the healing ministry of Jesus Christ. From there, all leaders agree to comply with the guidelines which we summarize here. Leaders are to follow our common practices, such as the meeting plan. Before starting a Chapter, leaders also submit a Leadership Agreement for approval by the Maria Goretti Network Board.

Executive Leadership

As mentioned, I founded the Maria Goretti Network (also called “MGN”) in Longview, Texas in 2004. I did so in response to guidelines and reforms adopted by the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops who wrote and accepted new changes for protecting children and youth, dealing with accusations of abuse and abusers, and ministering to survivors of abuse.¹

Fr. Gavin Vaverek, of the Diocese of Tyler, TX started the Maria Goretti Network with me, and he serves as the Spiritual Director and VP. MGN wouldn’t exist without Fr. Gavin Vaverek, for him I give eternal thanks to God.

Chapter Leadership

Maria Goretti Network/MGN is working to establish chapters in the United States and around the world. Each chapter requires two lay chapter leaders to run monthly meetings and a spiritual director.

Chapter leaders minimally need to:

1. Have survived abuse and be well along their road of recovery and healing
2. Discern a holy desire to minister to those affected by abuse
3. Maintain an active relationship with Jesus Christ
4. Gain basic familiarity with our mission, are free to abide by our Principles and Practices, respecting the focus and honoring the terms outlined in the Leadership Agreement

Two leaders need to attend all monthly meetings. Sometimes an emergency arises that may require one leader to run a meeting alone, but at least one well prepared leader should be present at every meeting. **One or both chapter leaders may meet with a member or small groups outside the monthly meeting as long as these interactions are clearly not part of MGN and leaders always foster a healthy fellowship and build on the progress being supported during monthly meetings.**

¹ 1. The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and the Essential Norms were adopted by the USCCB in its conference in Dallas, Texas, in 2002. It has been updated as practices evolved, and copies are available without charge on the USCCB website (usccb.org)

Spiritual Directors

1. Must be an ordained Catholic priest or deacon
2. Has discerned a holy desire to minister to those affected by abuse
3. Can support a chapter in his parish or similar setting
4. Commits to daily prayer for this chapter
5. Is available to offer spiritual counsel and pastoral care to the chapter's lay leaders
6. providing opportunities outside of the meeting for Anointing of the Sick when needed

The Spiritual Director is not required to attend monthly meetings or to provide spiritual counseling or pastoral care to any members of the Maria Goretti Network chapter.

Having Confessions and Anointing of the Sick available to those in MGN who wish to celebrate the Sacraments, can be a great help to healing of those affected by abuse. The benefits of frequent Confession are well known. The Anointing can be helpful for healing the deep wounds suffered by the person when they have been abused.

Starting a Chapter

After reading this book, you may find, in prayer, that you feel called to start a Maria Goretti Network chapter in your parish, on your campus or in a similar Catholic setting. Here are the next steps you need to take to establish and lead a chapter.

1. Study this book. Can you represent these principles and follow these guidelines to help fellow survivors find peace?
2. Study the Leadership Agreement on the next page. Can you abide with the Maria Goretti Network's spiritual guidance, by what is expected of a leader?
3. Reach out to me at the Maria Goretti Network using the contact information at the end of this book. We can get to know each other.
4. After this introduction, your next step will be to find the right co-leader and spiritual director. They will want to read this book and consider the same questions in discernment. When all three of you have agreed, then you are ready for the next step.
5. The last step is for you to receive final approval. Sign the Leadership Agreement to confirm that you agree to assume the role as leader and representative of the Maria Goretti Network.
6. Submit the forms to us for final approval.
7. MGN will provide help on outreach and starting a Chapter.

MARIA GORETTI NETWORK/MGN LEADERSHIP/REPRESENTATIVE AGREEMENT

As a Leader or representative of a Maria Goretti Network chapter, I commit myself to work as a volunteer, to reach out in Christian love to anyone affected by abuse, and to offer help to them in accordance with the principles and practices of MGN. I commit myself to act with ethics and integrity with all people and in particular with my dealings connected with MGN.

MGN Principles

1. MGN finds in Jesus Christ the source of true healing and forgiveness.
2. MGN recognizes that any form of abuse is evil.
3. MGN is a group committed to healing of individuals.
4. MGN encourages reporting all crimes of abuse to appropriate authorities.
5. MGN seeks to network all people of good will that can help in the process healing the scars of abuse.
6. MGN feels bitterness and division is a fruit of sin, which can only be healed through love, and so we work with love to promote collaboration and respect with others who work to help the healing process.
7. MGN believes that forgiveness does not excuse the wrongdoer but invites them to accept responsibility and to change their life.
8. MGN is an apostolate of committed Christian men and women, is independently directed by its Board of Directors, and is committed to fostering Christian life in harmony with the Catholic Tradition.
9. MGN is non-political.
10. MGN recognizes that the Church is established by Christ as His instrument for carrying the Good News to all people. This is a mission that belongs to all the people of God.

MGN Practices for MGN Leaders

1. I will report at least monthly to MGN on my activities on behalf of MGN.
2. I will refrain from making referrals for any professional services. MGN does not endorse individual professionals. If passing on a list of professionals from another source, I will be clear that the list is not approved by MGN.
3. I understand that no expenses or expenditures will be reimbursed by MGN without prior approval from an officer.
4. If I receive any donations, I will send them to MGN and prior to soliciting any funds, I will first seek approval from the MGN Board of Directors.

5. As a representative of MGN, I will always be respectful, dignified and nonviolent. When speaking publicly I will be clear that I represent MGN as an organization but am not authorized to speak officially.
6. I will always respect the work of the Holy Spirit in guiding people toward their individual healing. I will offer my prayer and support as a brother or sister in the Lord. I will, when appropriate, encourage people to turn to God for healing through Jesus Christ and encourage them toward encountering Christ in the Sacraments. I recognize that healing is a process that takes time, the help of God's grace and the support of other people.
7. When a crime has been committed the matter must be turned over to the proper authorities. While I will always respect the privacy of all persons affected by abuse, I will do all that I can to be sure no person is abused in the future. I will observe all state laws requiring disclosure of the abuse of a child or adult. I will be supportive of people seeking help and healing in any legitimate manner. In particular I will not encourage or discourage civil actions. The choice of such actions is best left to the individual.

I freely and willingly commit myself to the above:

AGREED TO BY:

Signature

Print full name

Address (street, city, state, zip)

E-mail address

Phone Number's

ALL communications are confidential. For snail mail address, call me at 713-851-3708.
send to Miguel at miguel@mgoreti.org or Fr. Gavin at fatherg@mgoretti.org

Spiritual Care

It's the responsibility of Maria Goretti Network chapter leaders to ensure that all meetings comply with Principles, Focus and Guidelines in this book and in future revisions of organizational policies.

Our operating guidelines have evolved over the past years to create the best environment in which God's healing graces may be welcomed into each survivor's life. The environment is very important to help support a survivor in his or her road to healing and forgiveness. Safety and confidentiality is paramount.

In the Appendix of this book is a Leadership Manual, the handbook for running meetings. Every meeting include the Maria Goretti Network Ground Rules which are read aloud. Meetings also includes a reading about paths toward forgiveness. There is a second appendix which is a Participants guide, for those attending the meetings.

This tested process has worked for us in establishing a culture of safety and confidentiality in each meeting and in each chapter. For all who attend meetings, safety and confidentiality is paramount. Establishing safety and confidentiality is a critical role for all chapter leaders, but it is also the responsibility of every member of any Maria Goretti Network chapter.

Settings matter a great deal, too. Meeting rooms need to be safe, clean, quiet and also chosen for how they keep the exchanges during meetings private and the attendees coming and going private.

Usually attendance at monthly meetings is limited to survivors and their immediate support persons only, but sometimes leadership can offer open meetings. If we do, members need to know ahead of time that a meeting is open. Our schedules will have an explicit note whether a meeting is open or closed and whether it's for women only, men only or coed.

Constantly encouraging each survivor towards drawing closer to Jesus Christ, we cannot overstate how helpful Confession, the Eucharist, and Anointing of the Sick are. What was done to our bodies hurt us spiritually as well as physically, mentally and emotionally. Our souls are wounded. Spiritual care in the Maria Goretti Network is very important and it helps members move, at their own pace, toward a forgiving heart.

To keep meetings safe and confidential so that members may heal and find hope, Maria Goretti Network meetings everywhere follow the same structure and format. An overview of how meetings

proceed and the meeting guide follow. It is very important that meetings are well managed to ensure all attendees find spiritual healing and care.

The Maria Goretti Network continues to grow with trust that the Holy Spirit is directing each chapter and its leaders, members and other supporters. Be sure to proceed prayerfully, gently and respectfully. If you need guidance or to talk through a problem, we are always here at MGN, with our Board, to support your success.

I strongly recommend the book:

“My Peace I Give You, My Peace I Leave You” by Dawn Eden.

Typical Meetings

Generally speaking, MGN meetings proceed in three parts: The check-in, the breakout sessions for men and women, and the coming back together for discussion on forgiveness. The meetings last about 60-90 minutes. Since giving and asking for advice is not allowed, attendees individually may opt to meet after the meeting for further discussion if they so desire. This should be done at a different location, to be clear it is not part of the MGN activity. Of course, MGN assumes no responsibility for what people do after a meeting.

Every meeting opens with a prayer and the reading of the Welcome and the Ground Rules. People share their first name (or don't if they prefer not to), a FEW words about themselves and identify whether they are a hugger or not. This is the "check-in".

The second part consists of 30/45 minutes of small group discussion. Women and men speak more freely about abuse, life and struggle with people of the same gender. Smaller groups add a feeling of safety. This is why we separate into women and men groups. Ideally each group has one chapter leader present to lead breakout sessions but if not, the meeting leader may designate an attendee to facilitate their group.

In the third part of the meeting the two groups (women and men) get back together for discussion about forgiveness. MGN provides a basic "ways to forgive" sheet but different readings may be used at different times. Meetings close with a prayer or two.

There is a Leader's Manual included in Appendix 1.

Three Parts to a Meeting

1. Check-in, *5-15 minutes*

Invite everyone to share their first name, a quick introduction about themselves and whether they're a hugger or not. Leaders **must** encourage those in attendance to be brief during check-in and save longer shares for later in the meeting. Many times when survivors attend their first meeting, they have a difficult time being brief. It's up to the Group Leader to tactfully and with kindness remind attendees this is just the check-in and we will go into greater depth in the next part of the meeting. The Welcome and Ground Rules are then read.

2. Breakout Session, *30-45 minutes*

Women and men separate into two smaller groups for deeper discussion. If only one Leader is present, that Leader may appoint an attendee well along their path to recovery, to facilitate their gender specific group.

3. Reunite For Group Discussion on Forgiveness, *20-30 minutes*

The MGN Leader welcomes everyone back and the "Forgiveness" steps are read either by the Leader alone or with each survivor reading one on the list. After all the Forgiveness possibilities are read, individuals are invited to talk about one of the ways to forgive that really resonated with them and why. An entire meeting should take 60-90 minutes

Acknowledgments

Thank you Jesus, Mother Mary, St. Maria, my parents Miguel and Consuelo Prats, Marion & Maria Spiers, Fred & Terry Baca, J. Fiorenza, JL Morkovsky, A. Corrada del Rio SJ, D. DiNardo, P. Sartain, G. Garcia-Siller, L. Jozwiak JCL, C. Borski, E. White, C. Martins CC, J. Rodrigues SDS, G. Hayes, T. Berg, The Maryknolls, the Basilians, Dawn Eden and my MGN family.

To all the survivors I have known through the years, thank you for giving me encouragement, love, support and at times, arguments when we disagreed. Knowing such brave, courageous people has been a blessing.

As I've said many times, The Maria Goretti Network would not exist without Fr. Gavin and my niece, Delicia Thayer.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Miguel Prats lives with his niece, Delicia Thayer and two dogs, Lily and Claude, in Katy, Texas.

The Maria Goretti Network/MGN
Katy, TX

www.mgoretti.org and on Facebook

Founders:

Miguel Prats, Manager, miguel@mgoretti.org or 713-851-3708

Rev. Gavin Vaverek JCL, fatherg@mgoretti.org or 903-571-7069

Insert
Appendix 1 – Leader’s Manual
Appendix 2 – Participant’s Guide

Maria Goretti Network
For those affected by abuse

Leader's
Manual



www.mgoretti.org
July 2019

María Goretti Network
For those affected by abuse

Leaders Manual

Emergency and Resource Numbers

Emergency Abuse or criminal situations: call 911

State Agency to Report Abuse of Minors: _____

Victim Assistance Coordinator for the diocese (for victims of abuse within the Catholic Church, in addition to police): _____

MGN President, Miguel Prats: 713-851-3708

Suicide Hotline: 1-800-Suicide or locally: _____

Reminder to Leaders

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Our operating guidelines have evolved over the past years to create the best environment in which God's healing graces may be welcomed into each survivor's life. The environment is very important to help support a survivor in his or her road to healing and forgiveness.

The next portion of this book is like a "book within a book." It is the handbook for running meetings. Meetings include the Maria Goretti Network Ground Rules which are read aloud. It also includes a reading about paths toward forgiveness.

This tested process has worked for us in establishing a culture of safety and confidentiality in each meeting and in each chapter. For all who attend meetings, safety and confidentiality is paramount. Establishing safety and confidentiality is a critical role for all chapter leaders, but it is also the responsibility of every member of any Maria Goretti Network chapter.

Settings matter a great deal, too. Meeting rooms need to be safe, clean, quiet and also chosen for how they keep the exchanges during meetings private and the attendees coming and going private.

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To keep meetings safe and confidential so that members may heal and find hope, Maria Goretti Network meetings everywhere follow the same structure and format. An overview of how meetings proceed and the meeting guide follow. It is very important that meetings are well managed to ensure all attendees find spiritual healing and care.

The Maria Goretti Network continues to grow with trust that the Holy Spirit is directing each chapter and its leaders, members and other supporters. Be sure to proceed prayerfully, gently and respectfully. If you need guidance or to talk through a problem, we are always here at the home chapter to support your success.

Typical Meetings

Generally speaking, MGN meetings proceed in three parts: The check-in, the breakout sessions for men and women, and the coming back together for discussion on forgiveness. The meetings last about 90 minutes. Since giving and asking for advice is not allowed, attendees may opt to meet after the meeting for further discussion if they so desire. MGN assumes no responsibility for what people do after a meeting.

Part 1: (5-15 minutes)

Every meeting opens with a prayer and the reading of the Welcome and the Ground Rules. Then a brief “check-in”: People share their first name (or don’t if they prefer not to), a FEW words about themselves and how they are doing. They can identify whether they are a hugger or not.

Part 2: (30-45 minutes)

The second part consists of 30/45 minutes of small group discussion. Women and men speak more freely about abuse, life and struggle with people of the same gender. Smaller groups add a feeling of safety. This is why we separate into women and men groups. Ideally each group has one chapter leader present to lead breakout sessions but if not, the meeting leader may designate an attendee to lead their group.

Part 3: (20-30 minutes)

In the third part of the meeting the two groups (women and men) get back together for discussion about forgiveness. MGN provides a couple options for sharing on forgiveness, but different readings may be used at different times.

Meetings close with a prayer.

An entire meeting should take 60-90 minutes

Maria Goretti Network

For all victims of abuse

Leader: Lead the opening prayer (Participants p. 4)

Opening Prayer

Dear God, We ask you to help us find healing and peace in our lives.

Grant us hope in these times of trial.

May Maria Goretti, who was strengthened by Your grace,

Join with us in prayer for healing of all victims of abuse,

particularly those abused as children or young adults.

Fill us with Your Love so that as Maria prayed for her attacker,

We too might seek Your mercy through prayer and penance.

Loving God, pour into our hearts and lives Your healing Spirit,

That the sacredness of every human being might be respected and
protected as the precious image of God.

Help us to live in the peace which Maria Goretti found in Christ
and in His mother, Mary.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, Our Lord,
Amen.

Read the Welcome Statement on the next page

Welcome Statement

On behalf of the Maria Goretti Network, I would like to welcome all who are here and especially our newcomers and anyone attending here in great pain. We are here for you. God is with us and is here for you.

All those affected by abuse need love and support. It doesn't matter if the abuse was physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, spiritual, mental or financial or any other type of abuse. It doesn't matter who your abuser was, whether a relative, friend, spouse, minister, priest, nun, boyfriend or girlfriend, teacher, coach, commanding officer or a stranger. We welcome you!

We are survivors or friends of survivors who understand the need to experience the healing power of Jesus Christ. We are not after money. Money is irrelevant when your soul has been wounded. We are not out for revenge. We have found that the hate and anger towards those who harmed us prevents us from a full recovery. We leave vengeance to God.

Our sole interest is in helping our brothers and sisters experience healing in God's love through a gentle and loving process of accepting His abundant love and letting go of the past. We leave judgment to Him and forgive in whatever small or large steps we can take day by day.

If the group is not familiar with the Ground Rules, read them or ask people to read them going around the group (being clear that if they prefer not to read they can "Pass".)

If familiar with the Ground Rules you can skip them by saying something like:

"I think everyone is familiar with the Ground Rules, so we will proceed to the check in."

Leader: I will now read the Ground Rules which help us create an environment where people are safe to heal and to share

because what they say remains confidential. When I finish I'll pause to give you a moment to consider what you hear. If you are uncomfortable with the idea of complying with these Ground Rules, you may leave without being judged by us in this meeting, and, if you wish, you may speak with us privately about your concerns later.

Ground Rules

For MGN Chapter Meetings

These Ground Rules make our meetings prayerful and caring. We treat each other with gentility and care, and we care about everyone's comfort and security. By attending a meeting, you agree to comply with these Ground Rules.

1. We agree that we share responsibility for keeping our meetings prayerful and confidential.
2. We agree not to share with anyone else the names or stories, in detail or in general terms, which we may hear during meetings or in conversations with other attendees of this meeting we might speak to outside meetings.
3. We agree to focus on our own issues, feelings and recovery. Our commitment is to work on ourselves and avoid seeking distraction from our commitment by trying to solve the problems of others.
4. We agree to share information about only our own stories, circumstances and feelings.
5. We further agree that discussion of another person's story details or circumstances is not appropriate unless that person is present and has specifically requested input.
6. We agree to share feelings and to listen without judgment. Our feelings just are or were. There are, no right or wrong statements. There are, no right or wrong

feelings.

7. We agree that each person knows what is best for her or himself and, therefore, must take care of her or himself during sessions. People are free to leave or take a break from a meeting any time they feel the need to do so.

8. We agree that the presence of everyone is appreciated and can be a source of healing for others. No one is required to speak during the sessions.

9. We agree not to interrupt each other. We agree to listen actively to each person as she or he speaks with the idea of how this person's experience relates to her or his own healing.

10. We agree to not seek advice or give advice, even if it is solicited. **GIVING AND ASKING FOR ADVICE IS NOT PERMISSIBLE.** We agree that only by gathering ideas for ourselves through listening are we empowered and able to heal. We also understand that none of us knows what is best for another.

11. We agree that respecting each other's boundaries is critically important. We agree to respect each individual's right to set their own boundaries for physical contact with the members of the group. We will honor each person's request to not be hugged, and we agree not to pressure anyone into accepting physical contact. Similarly, we will also respect and honor each individual's emotional and spiritual boundaries.

Check-in (5-15 minutes)

Leader: Invite everyone to share their first name, a quick introduction about themselves and whether they're a hugger or not. Leaders must encourage those in attendance to be brief during check-in and save longer shares for later in the meeting.

NB: Many times when survivors attend their first meeting, they have a difficult time being brief. It's up to the Group Leader to tactfully and with kindness remind attendees this is just the check-in and we will go into greater depth in the next part of the meeting.

Part 2- Breakout Session

Leader: This concludes the Check-in. We will now separate into men's and women's groups for discussion. **(Assign an approximate time limit (30-45 minutes, unless both groups finish early))**

Women and men separate into two smaller groups for deeper discussion.

If there are too many in one group (eg more than about 8, the same sex group should likely be divided into two smaller groups, entrusting someone to facilitate the second group)

If only one Leader is present, that Leader may appoint an attendee well along their path to recovery, to facilitate their gender specific group.

If there is only one man or one woman the leader can offer to try and get someone on the phone for them to speak with when the groups are separated, or they can read or pray.

Leader: If the groups do not spontaneously finish in a timely

fashion, you will need to help them bring closure to this part of the meeting and gather everyone back together.

When the two groups come back together, lead them in the Serenity Prayer,

(Participants Guide p. 8)

Serenity Prayer

*God, grant me the serenity to accept
the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can
and the wisdom to know the difference;
living one day at a time,
accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,
taking as Jesus did,
this sinful world as it is,
not as I would have it;
trusting that You will make all things right
if I surrender to Your will,
so that I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with You forever in the next.*

Amen

Part 3: Joint discussion on forgiveness

(20-30 minutes)

The MGN Leader leads the discussion on Forgiveness: This can be done in various ways:

We offer two lists on forgiveness. (Participant Guide p. 9/10 or 11/12) The group (or leader) can choose to use the same one each meeting or can alternate between them as seems helpful.

The steps can be read, either by the Leader alone or with each survivor reading one on the list. After all the Forgiveness possibilities are read, individuals are invited to talk about one of the ways to forgive that really resonated with them and why.

For groups that are familiar with this list, the leader can give people a few minutes to look over the list and pick one that stands out to them.

The Leader can occasionally bring in something else on forgiveness to share with the group and for discussion.

Here Are Some Ways You Can Forgive Others:

- 1) Admit and confront the pain you incur when others wound you.*
- 2) Rely on God's power to forgive. Know that God will enable you to forgive anyone who has inflicted any type of wound on you, and have confidence in God's power to heal you. Realize that forgiveness will likely take time, but that it is always possible. Trust God, and expect Him to act.*
- 3) Remember how God has forgiven you. Think about what Christ did for you on the cross, and recall the times God has answered your prayers. Thank God for His great love for you, and ask Him to help you forgive through the power of His love.*
- 4) Pray about a particular hurtful incident soon after it occurs, seeking to forgive. Remember that God has warned that your own prayers will be blocked if you don't forgive others, and that evil will gain access to your life. Don't wait until you feel like forgiving; that may never happen. Instead, act out of obedience, and God will gradually send you peace.*
- 5) Surrender any plans to take revenge. Be willing to pay the cost of forgiveness to receive its priceless benefits.*
- 6) Understand that forgiving an offender doesn't mean that you endorse the offense. What happened was wrong, and your forgiveness won't change that. But it will enable you to break free of your pain and heal, and it will release the offender from any obligation incurred due to the offense.*
- 7) Strive to channel your energy when thinking of an offense in positive-rather than negative-ways. Instead of using energy to nurse resentment, use it to think of creative solutions to the problem and ways to improve your relationship with the person who hurt you.*
- 8) Don't make your forgiveness contingent on whether the offender responds positively to your efforts. He or she may even be hostile, but God still wants you to forgive, and you can still benefit greatly from doing so.*
- 9) Release your pain to God in prayer, and destroy any records of the offense so*

you won't use them to dwell on it.

- 10) If the person you need to forgive is yourself, ask God to give you a vision of how He sees you, and embrace His love. Confess any sins you haven't yet confessed to God, repent of them, and accept His forgiveness, knowing that once you do you are truly forgiven and don't need to fear that those sins will stand between you and God.*
- 11) After you forgive someone, guard your heart, since it may take a while before you're able to find emotional peace.*
- 12) Take a bit of time to isolate yourself from the person and the situation that caused the offense, but make sure that's only a temporary way to find emotional peace, not a habit to disguise festering resentment. Realize that you don't have to resume your former relationship with the person as if nothing ever happened; and in fact, sometimes reconciliation doesn't work. But recognize that peace is always possible, and that reconciliation may work if the person is willing to pursue it.*
- 13) When seeking reconciliation with someone, let him or her know of your love, emphasize the positive aspects of your relationship, discuss the offense specifically and honestly, listen to what the person has to say and consider it, challenge the person to change and commit yourself to change and be patient.*
- 14) Pray for the people who have hurt you-whether you're reconciled to them or not-and ask God to give you the grace to interact gracefully with them when you encounter them.*

Adapted from *Forgive and Love Again: Healing Wounded Relationships* copyright 1991 by John Nieder and Thomas M. Thompson. Published by Harvest House Publishers.

Stepping Stones to FORGIVENESS

The decision not to forgive is actually a decision to continue suffering. It is essential to realize that to forgive someone is not to condone or approve of a horrendous act. It does not mean that the individual is not responsible for what he or she has done. Forgiveness simply means that we have made the decision to heal our own minds by letting go of the hurtful past, a past that our anger and judgments cannot change.

Forgiveness is the bridge to love, peace, happiness and well-being. It allows us to say good-bye to guilt, blame and shame. It purifies the heart and soul and puts us in touch with all that is sacred. Through forgiveness, we connect with that which is greater than ourselves and become the person God intended us to be.

The key to forgiveness is the willingness to make the effort. How long it takes depends on your belief system. If you think it can't be done, it won't happen. If you believe it will take years, then that will be your experience. But if you are willing to believe that it can be done in an instant, then that is all it will take.

The Stepping Stones To Forgiveness

1. **Be open to the possibility of changing your beliefs about forgiveness.**

Recognize that forgiveness is an act of strength, not weakness.

2. **Be willing to let go of being a victim.**

Choose to believe that holding on to grievances and unforgiving thoughts is choosing to suffer. Find no value in self-pity.

3. **Remind yourself that your anger and judgments can't change the past or punish someone else, but they can hurt you.**

The events of the past cannot hurt you now, but your thoughts about the past can cause you immense distress and pain. Recognize that any emotional pain you feel this moment is caused only by your own thoughts.

4. **See the value of giving up, not some, but all of your judgments.**

It is no coincidence that the happiest people are those who choose not to judge and know the value of forgiveness.

5. **Recognize that holding on to anger will not bring you what you truly want.**

Ask yourself this question, "Does holding on to my justified anger really bring me peace of mind?" Anger and peace, judgment and happiness, do not occur at the same time.

6. **See that there is no value in punishing yourself.**

Once you truly recognize that your own angry, unhappy thoughts about the past are poisoning your life, you will embrace forgiveness and know the meaning of love.

7. **Believe that forgiveness means giving up all hope for a better past!**

Accept your past, forgive your past, and embrace the present and future with hope! There is no law forcing you to remain a victim of the past.

8. **Choose to be happy rather than right.**

When we stop trying to control others and focus instead on our own thoughts, we give ourselves the gift of freedom and peace.

9. **Believe that you have the power to choose the thoughts you put into your mind.** Perhaps the greatest gift we have been given is the power to choose loving thoughts rather than angry ones. Your mind is not a dumpster that will remain unaffected by the trash you put into it. Treat it like a garden and it will blossom.

10. **Be willing to make peace of mind your only goal and believe that forgiveness is the key to happiness.**

Regardless of the chaos around us, we can know peace if that is our single goal. Choose not to let outside circumstances or people decide whether you will be happy. Anger, judgments and unforgiving thoughts make us suffer, and releasing them brings us joy. It is truly that simple!

Forgivenessworks.org

From: "10 Stepping Stones to Spiritual, Physical and Emotional Health" By:
Gerald Jampolsky, M.D. and Diane V. Cirincione, Ph.D.

Closing Prayers (choose one)

Leader: Let's pray together as we close our meeting.

After a moment of silence, use any of the prayers below to close the meeting. (Participant Guide, p. 14)

*Oh Father, please accept all that we have shared together here, and all that remains in our hearts not shared, and return to us your Love and healing Providence, return beauty for our ashes, make us whole and guide us in Your ways.
Amen.*

Prayer to St. Michael

*Saint Michael Archangel, defend us in battle, be our protection
Against the wickedness and snares of the devil.
May God rebuke him we humbly pray and do thou,
O Prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, Cast into hell Satan and all
the evil spirits who prowl through the world seeking the ruin of souls.
Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name,
Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
Amen.*

Survivors Prayer

*Dear God,
We ask you to help us find healing
and Peace in our life.
Grant us hope in these times of trial.
May Maria Goretti,
who was strengthened by Your Grace,
join with us in prayer
for healing of all victims of abuse,
particularly those abused as
children or young adults.
Fill us with your Love
so that as Maria prayed for her attacker,
we too might seek Your mercy
through prayer and penance.
Loving God, pour into our hearts and
lives your healing Spirit,
that the Sacredness of every human person
might be respected and protected as the
precious image of God.
Help us to live in the peace
which Maria Goretti had found In Christ
and in the love of His mother Mary.
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ Our Lord.
Amen.*

Approved by Most Rev. Alvaro Corrada, SJ, Bishop of the Diocese of Tyler

As a reminder of your commitment:

MARIA GORETTI NETWORK/MGN LEADERSHIP/REPRESENTATIVE AGREEMENT

As a Leader or representative of a Maria Goretti Network chapter, I commit myself to work as a volunteer, to reach out in Christian love to any victim of abuse, and to offer help to them in accordance with the principles and practices of MGN. I commit myself to act with ethics and integrity with all people and in particular with my dealings connected with MGN.

MGN Principles:

1. MGN finds in Jesus Christ the source of true healing and forgiveness.
2. MGN recognizes that any form of abuse is evil.
3. MGN is a group committed to healing of individuals.
4. MGN encourages reporting all crimes of abuse to appropriate authorities.
5. MGN seeks to network all people of good will that can help in the process healing the scars of abuse.
6. MGN feels bitterness and division is a fruit of sin, which can only be healed through love, and so we work with love to promote collaboration and respect with others who work to help the healing process.
7. MGN believes that forgiveness does not excuse the wrongdoer but invites them to accept responsibility and to change their life.
8. MGN is an apostolate of committed Christian men and women, is independently directed by its Board of Directors, and is committed to fostering Christian life in harmony with the Catholic Tradition.
9. MGN is non-political.
10. MGN recognizes that the Church is established by Christ as His instrument for carrying the Good News to all people. This is a mission that belongs to all the people of God.

MGN Practices for MGN Leaders:

1. I will report at least monthly to MGN on my activities on behalf of MGN.
2. I will refrain from making referrals for any professional services. MGN does not endorse individual professionals. If passing on a list of professionals from another source, I will be clear that the list is not approved by MGN.
3. I understand that no expenses or expenditures will be reimbursed by MGN without prior approval from an officer.
4. If I receive any donations, I will send them to MGN and prior to soliciting any funds, I will first seek approval from the MGN Board of Directors.
5. As a representative of MGN, I will always be respectful, dignified and nonviolent. When speaking publicly I will be clear that I represent MGN as an organization but am not

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authorized to speak officially.

6. I will always respect the work of the Holy Spirit in guiding people toward their individual healing. I will offer my prayer and support as a brother or sister in the Lord. I will, when appropriate, encourage people to turn to God for healing through Jesus Christ and encourage them toward encountering Christ in the Sacraments. I recognize that healing is a process that takes time, the help of God's grace and the support of other people.
7. When a crime has been committed the matter must be turned over to the proper authorities. While I will always respect the privacy of victims, I will do all that I can to be sure no person is abused in the future. I will observe all state laws requiring disclosure of the abuse of a child or adult. I will be supportive of people seeking help and healing in any legitimate manner. In particular I will not encourage or discourage civil actions. The choice of such actions is best left to the individual.

I freely and willingly commit myself to the above:

AGREED TO BY:

Signature

Print full name

Address (street, city, state, zip)

E-mail address

Phone Number's

ALL communications are confidential. For snail mail address, call me at 713- 851-3708. send to Miguel at miquel@mqoreti.org or Fr. Gavin at fatherg@mqoretti.org

Maria Goretti Network

For those affected by abuse



Participant Guide

www.mgoretti.org

July 2019

María Goretti Network
For those affected by abuse

Participant Guide

Emergency and Resource Numbers

Emergency Abuse or criminal situations: call 911

State Agency to Report Abuse of Minors: _____

Victim Assistance Coordinator for the diocese (for victims of abuse within the Catholic Church, in addition to police): _____

MGN President, Miguel Prats: 713-851-3708

Suicide Hotline: 1-800-Suicide or locally: _____

Maria Goretti Network

For those affected by abuse

Meeting Plan

Chapter Meetings have three segments:

- I. Introduction and Initial Sharing
 - A. Always start the group with prayer (the Survivors Prayer is read)
 - B. Brief explanation of what the group is for (read the Welcome Statement)
 - C. Everyone is invited to accept the Ground Rules (read Ground Rules)
 - D. Everyone is invited to give their first name and share a bit about themselves, where they are tonight, and whether they are a hugger or are not a hugger.

- II. Divide into two groups, men and women, for personal sharing. Designate a time for the two groups to come back together. Close this segment with the Serenity Prayer when the groups reunite.

- III. Reunite for group discussion on forgiveness. (Read Ways to Forgive or Stepping Stones to Forgiveness) In closing stand and pray.

A 90 minute meeting may be segmented into 3 segments:

- 5-15 minutes - Introduction and Sharing
- 30-45 minutes - Men's and Women's Groups
- 20-30 minutes - Discussion on forgiveness

Maria Goretti Network
For those affected by abuse

Opening Prayer

Dear God, We ask you to help us find healing and peace in our lives.

Grant us hope in these times of trial.

May Maria Goretti, who was strengthened by Your grace.

Join with us in prayer for healing of all victims of abuse,
particularly those abused as children or young adults.

Fill us with Your Love so that as Maria prayed for her attacker,

We too might seek Your mercy through prayer and penance.

Loving God, pour into our hearts and lives Your healing Spirit,
That the sacredness of every human being might be respected and
protected as the precious image of God.

Help us to live in the peace which Maria Goretti found in Christ
and in His mother, Mary.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, Our Lord,
Amen.

Welcome Statement

On behalf of the Maria Goretti Network, I would like to welcome all who are here and especially our newcomers and anyone attending here in great pain. We are here for you. God is with us and is here for you.

All those affected by abuse need love and support. It doesn't matter if the abuse was physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, spiritual, mental or financial or any other type of abuse. It doesn't matter who your abuser was, whether a relative, friend, spouse, minister, priest, nun, boyfriend or girlfriend, teacher, coach, commanding officer or a stranger. We welcome you!

We are survivors or friends of survivors who understand the need to experience the healing power of Jesus Christ. We are not after money. Money is irrelevant when your soul has been wounded. We are not out for revenge. We have found that the hate and anger towards those who harmed us prevents us from a full recovery. We leave vengeance to God.

Our sole interest is in helping our brothers and sisters experience healing in God's love through a gentle and loving process of accepting His abundant love and letting go of the past. We leave judgment to Him and forgive in whatever small or large steps we can take day by day.

Ground Rules

For MGN Chapter Meetings

These Ground Rules make our meetings prayerful and caring. We treat each other with gentility and care, and we care about everyone's comfort and security. By attending a meeting, you agree to comply with these Ground Rules.

1. We agree that we share responsibility for keeping our meetings prayerful and confidential.
2. We agree not to share with anyone else the names or stories, in detail or in general terms, which we may hear during meetings or in conversations with other attendees of this meeting we might speak to outside meetings.
3. We agree to focus on our own issues, feelings and recovery. Our commitment is to work on ourselves and avoid seeking distraction from our commitment by trying to solve the problems of others.
4. We agree to share information about only our own stories, circumstances and feelings.
5. We further agree that discussion of another person's story details or circumstances is not appropriate unless that person is present and has specifically requested input.
6. We agree to share feelings and to listen without judgment. Our feelings just are or were. There are, no right or wrong statements. There are, no right or wrong feelings.
7. We agree that each person knows what is best for her or himself and, therefore, must take care of her or himself during sessions. People are free to leave or take a break from a meeting any time they feel the need to do so.

8. We agree that the presence of everyone is appreciated and can be a source of healing for others. No one is required to speak during the sessions.

9. We agree not to interrupt each other. We agree to listen actively to each person as she or he speaks with the idea of how this person's experience relates to her or his own healing.

10. We agree to not seek advice or give advice, even if it is solicited. **GIVING AND ASKING FOR ADVICE IS NOT PERMISSIBLE.** We agree that only by gathering ideas for ourselves through listening are we empowered and able to heal. We also understand that none of us knows what is best for another.

11. We agree that respecting each other's boundaries is critically important. We agree to respect each individual's right to set their own boundaries for physical contact with the members of the group. We will honor each person's request to not be hugged, and we agree not to pressure anyone into accepting physical contact. Similarly, we will also respect and honor each individual's emotional and spiritual boundaries.

Serenity Prayer

*God, grant me the serenity to accept
the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can
and the wisdom to know the difference;
living one day at a time,
accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,
taking as Jesus did,
this sinful world as it is,
not as I would have it;
trusting that You will make all things right
if I surrender to Your will,
so that I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with You forever in the next.*

Amen

Here Are Some Ways You Can Forgive Others:

- 1) Admit and confront the pain you incur when others wound you.*
- 2) Rely on God's power to forgive. Know that God will enable you to forgive anyone who has inflicted any type of wound on you, and have confidence in God's power to heal you. Realize that forgiveness will likely take time, but that it is always possible. Trust God, and expect Him to act.*
- 3) Remember how God has forgiven you. Think about what Christ did for you on the cross, and recall the times God has answered your prayers. Thank God for His great love for you, and ask Him to help you forgive through the power of His love.*
- 4) Pray about a particular hurtful incident soon after it occurs, seeking to forgive. Remember that God has warned that your own prayers will be blocked if you don't forgive others, and that evil will gain access to your life. Don't wait until you feel like forgiving; that may never happen. Instead, act out of obedience, and God will gradually send you peace.*
- 5) Surrender any plans to take revenge. Be willing to pay the cost of forgiveness to receive its priceless benefits.*
- 6) Understand that forgiving an offender doesn't mean that you endorse the offense. What happened was wrong, and your forgiveness won't change that. But it will enable you to break free of your pain and heal, and it will release the offender from any obligation incurred due to the offense.*
- 7) Strive to channel your energy when thinking of an offense in positive-rather than negative-ways. Instead of using energy to nurse resentment, use it to think of creative solutions to the problem and ways to improve your relationship with the person who hurt you.*
- 8) Don't make your forgiveness contingent on whether the offender responds positively to your efforts. He or she may even be hostile, but God still wants you to forgive, and you can still benefit greatly from doing so.*

- 9) *Release your pain to God in prayer, and destroy any records of the offense so you won't use them to dwell on it.*
- 10) *If the person you need to forgive is yourself, ask God to give you a vision of how He sees you, and embrace His love. Confess any sins you haven't yet confessed to God, repent of them, and accept His forgiveness, knowing that once you do you are truly forgiven and don't need to fear that those sins will stand between you and God.*
- 11) *After you forgive someone, guard your heart, since it may take a while before you're able to find emotional peace.*
- 12) *Take a bit of time to isolate yourself from the person and the situation that caused the offense, but make sure that's only a temporary way to find emotional peace, not a habit to disguise festering resentment. Realize that you don't have to resume your former relationship with the person as if nothing ever happened; and in fact, sometimes reconciliation doesn't work. But recognize that peace is always possible, and that reconciliation may work if the person is willing to pursue it.*
- 13) *When seeking reconciliation with someone, let him or her know of your love, emphasize the positive aspects of your relationship, discuss the offense specifically and honestly, listen to what the person has to say and consider it, challenge the person to change and commit yourself to change and be patient.*
- 14) *Pray for the people who have hurt you-whether you're reconciled to them or not-and ask God to give you the grace to interact gracefully with them when you encounter them.*

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Stepping Stones to FORGIVENESS

The decision not to forgive is actually a decision to continue suffering. It is essential to realize that to forgive someone is not to condone or approve of a horrendous act. It does not mean that the individual is not responsible for what he or she has done. Forgiveness simply means that we have made the decision to heal our own minds by letting go of the hurtful past, a past that our anger and judgments cannot change.

Forgiveness is the bridge to love, peace, happiness and well-being. It allows us to say good-bye to guilt, blame and shame. It purifies the heart and soul and puts us in touch with all that is sacred. Through forgiveness, we connect with that which is greater than ourselves and become the person God intended us to be.

The key to forgiveness is the willingness to make the effort. How long it takes depends on your belief system. If you think it can't be done, it won't happen. If you believe it will take years, then that will be your experience. But if you are willing to believe that it can be done in an instant, then that is all it will take.

The Stepping Stones To Forgiveness

1. Be open to the possibility of changing your beliefs about forgiveness.

Recognize that forgiveness is an act of strength, not weakness.

2. Be willing to let go of being a victim.

Choose to believe that holding on to grievances and unforgiving thoughts is choosing to suffer. Find no value in self-pity.

3. Remind yourself that your anger and judgments can't change the past or punish someone else, but they can hurt you.

The events of the past cannot hurt you now, but your thoughts about the past can cause you immense distress and pain. Recognize that any emotional pain you feel this moment is caused only by your own thoughts.

4. See the value of giving up, not some, but all of your judgments.

It is no coincidence that the happiest people are those who choose not to judge and know the value of forgiveness.

5. **Recognize that holding on to anger will not bring you what you truly want.**

Ask yourself this question, "Does holding on to my justified anger really bring me peace of mind?" Anger and peace, judgment and happiness, do not occur at the same time.

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Once you truly recognize that your own angry, unhappy thoughts about the past are poisoning your life, you will embrace forgiveness and know the meaning of love.

7. **Believe that forgiveness means giving up all hope for a better past!**

Accept your past, forgive your past, and embrace the present and future with hope! There is no law forcing you to remain a victim of the past.

8. **Choose to be happy rather than right.**

When we stop trying to control others and focus instead on our own thoughts, we give ourselves the gift of freedom and peace.

9. **Believe that you have the power to choose the thoughts you put into your mind.** Perhaps the greatest gift we have been given is the power to choose loving thoughts rather than angry ones. Your mind is not a dumpster that will remain unaffected by the trash you put into it. Treat it like a garden and it will blossom.

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Regardless of the chaos around us, we can know peace if that is our single goal. Choose not to let outside circumstances or people decide whether you will be happy. Anger, judgments and unforgiving thoughts make us suffer, and releasing them brings us joy. It is truly that simple!

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7. *MGN believes in justice for abusers. Forgiveness does not excuse the abuse, but encourages the abusers to accept responsibility for their action and to change their life.*
8. *MGN is an apostolate of committed Christian men and women and is independently directed by its board, and is committed to fostering Christian life in harmony with the Catholic tradition.*
9. *MGN is non-political and committed to transparency and accountability.*
10. *MGN recognizes that the Church is established by Christ as His instrument for carrying the Good News to all people. This is a mission that belongs to all the People of God.*

Closing Prayers (choose one)

*Oh Father, please accept all that we have shared together here, and all that remains in our hearts not shared, and return to us your Love and healing Providence, return beauty for our ashes, make us whole and guide us in Your ways.
Amen.*

Prayer to St. Michael

*Saint Michael Archangel, defend us in battle, be our protection
Against the wickedness and snares of the devil.
May God rebuke him we humbly pray and do thou,
O Prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, Cast into hell Satan and all
the evil spirits who prowl through the world seeking the ruin of souls.
Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name,
Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
Amen.*

Survivors Prayer

*Dear God,
We ask you to help us find healing
and Peace in our life.
Grant us hope in these times of trial.
May Maria Goretti,
who was strengthened by Your Grace,
join with us in prayer
for healing of all victims of abuse,
particularly those abused as
children or young adults.
Fill us with your Love
so that as Maria prayed for her attacker,
we too might seek Your mercy
through prayer and penance.
Loving God, pour into our hearts and
lives your healing Spirit,
that the Sacredness of every human person
might be respected and protected as the
precious image of God.
Help us to live in the peace
which Maria Goretti had found In Christ
and in the love of His mother Mary.
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ Our Lord.
Amen.*

Approved by Most Rev. Alvaro Corrada, SJ, Bishop of the Diocese of Tyler