

*Maria Goretti Network*  
*For those affected by abuse*

*Leader's  
Manual*



[www.mgoretti.org](http://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

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.

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.

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 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:**

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Signature

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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](mailto:miquel@mqoreti.org) or Fr. Gavin at [fatherg@mqoretti.org](mailto:fatherg@mqoretti.org)