

Maria Goretti Network

For those affected by abuse



Participant Guide

www.mgoretti.org

July 2019

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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: _____

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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

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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.*

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.

Principles of the Maria Goretti Network:

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 work for 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 of healing the scars of abuse.*
6. *MGN feels division and bitterness 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 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