

# The Maria Goretti Network/MGN

## Principles and Practices



by Miguel Prats

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

# Table of Contents

- Foreword
- 1. Introduction
- 3. Anima Christi
- 4. Focus
- 6. Leadership
- 8. Starting an MGN Chapter
- 9. Leadership Agreement
- 11. Spiritual Care
- 12. Typical Meetings
- 15. Meeting Guide
- 16. Meeting Welcome
- 17. Ground Rules
- 20. Ways to Forgive
- 22. Closing Prayers
- 23. Serenity Prayer & Survivor's Prayer
- 24. Emergency Numbers
- 27. Scripture Reading for Survivors
- 28. Acknowledgements
- 29. About the Author
- Appendix 1 - Participant Guide

# Foreword

The Maria Goretti Network is an organization that addresses the needs of those who are victims of sexual abuse, domestic violence and other forms of violence. It is based on the experience of the Founder, Miguel Prats, a survivor of clergy abuse and his search for spiritual, emotional and mental wholeness after the abuse he suffered.

To assist the healing process, he appealed to St. Maria Goretti, a young girl who was sexually abused by a neighbor. Before Maria died, she forgave the man who abused her. Maria Goretti's example of forgiveness in a very tragic situation motivated Miguel to discover in forgiveness the healing he desired.

The Maria Goretti Network and its ability to foster healing for victims of all types of abuse is fundamentally based on the gospel message of forgiveness. It is an organization which is structured to promote healing without lessening the harm done to victims or the grave immorality of those who perpetrate any form of abuse on others.

Arising from the teaching of forgiveness proclaimed by Jesus, MGN is suited for a parish organization or for several parishes located near each other. The victims of violence of all types will find the support needed to recover, in an atmosphere of understanding and compassion.

The Maria Goretti Network has offered parishes a wonderful means of healing for victims. It is my hope that the Maria Goretti Network will become as well-known as other organizations which assist victims.

Most Reverend Joseph A. Fiorenza  
Archbishop Emeritus of Galveston-Houston

# Introduction

I am a survivor of 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 all victims, abuse left me feeling like I was at fault. It left me full of shame. I was hiding from God. In different ways, many victims hide behind walls that create isolation and darkness. I felt so alone. I could feel such darkness overcoming me. Yet I couldn't break away from that emotional prison. All that changed as I found help, healing and hope in the examples of St. Maria Goretti & Alessandro Serenelli.

Maria Goretti was born into a poor sharecropper's family in Italy in 1890. She was only 11 years old when a young neighbor, Alessandro Serenelli, attempted to abuse her. In escaping him, she was mortally wounded, dying after almost a day of terrible suffering. St. Maria prayed for her murderer to have a change of heart and eventually he did, even being present at Maria's canonization ceremony in 1950.

Alessandro remained unrepentant for years, raging against the trial verdict that he should serve 30 years at hard labor. After 11 years in prison, Alessandro fell into a deep despair, until one night, Maria appeared in his cell and begged him to repent of his life and repent of his evil ways, which he did. When his prison term was served, Alessandro took up residence as a gardener at a monastery. There, he continued his life of penance, helping many people until he died in 1971.

All of us who are abused die someday, 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. 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.

I have felt the call to share this path toward recovering from abuse with fellow survivors. That is why I founded 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 victims of abuse. Our network is open to all victims, 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 a Catholic is not required to attend meetings or to assume leadership positions. The holy example of Maria Goretti can help all victims find grace, healing, blessings and freedom.

Once you join the Maria Goretti Network you are part of a family, and you are no longer a victim. You become a survivor because now you know 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 from abuse through growing more open to God's love and being more able to forgive. We believe that forgiveness is the key to our healing and to our recovery. We have experienced its healing power in our lives.

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 parish 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 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 victims of abuse, you will pray for our work and encourage victims to consider forming a Chapter of the Maria Goretti Network. I also hope and pray that, if you are a victim drawn to be a vessel of the Holy Spirit promoting healing among fellow victims of abuse, you will be inspired to join us as a Chapter leader.

Please feel free to contact me or the Spiritual Director 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](http://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 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.

## 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 thy wounds hide me.

Suffer me not to be separated from Thee.

From the malicious enemy defend me.

In the hour of my death, call me.

And bid me come unto thee

That I may praise Thee with Thy saints

And with Thy angels

Soul of Christ, sanctify me

Forever 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 abused her was radical. Following in her footsteps, the Maria Goretti Network is radical too. We know forgiveness is very difficult. We chose that 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 victim as a precious child of God.

The Maria Goretti Network does *not* believe that when a victim 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 victim 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 victims. Our prayer is that abusers find a way to apologize for their actions in an appropriate manner that will not be upsetting to the victim.

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

As you read here about our focus on forgiveness, you may wonder where is all the information about victims? The Maria Goretti Network is entirely by, for and about victims. This is why we focus on forgiveness in the most gentle and patient of ways, because we promote healing among victims of abuse and we know, from first- hand experience, that when victims can forgive, victims can be free.

Forgiveness is the focus of membership in 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 work with a holy goal. 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.

## 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 Home Chapter.

## 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 and radical changes for protecting children and youth, dealing with accusations of abuse and abusers, and ministering to survivors of abuse. <sup>1</sup>

Fr. Gavin Vaverek, of the Diocese of Tyler, TX started the Maria Goretti Network with me, and he serves as the Spiritual Director. MGN wouldn’t exist without Fr. Gavin Vaverek, for him we 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 are well along their road of recovery and healing
2. Discern a holy desire to minister to victims of abuse
3. Maintain an active relationship with Jesus Christ
4. Gain basic familiarity with our mission, are free to abide by our Principles, Practices, focus and terms outlined in the Leadership Agreement

Both these 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 lay leader must 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 part of the fellowship and build on the progress being supported during monthly meetings.

Chapter leaders need the benefit of guidance from a spiritual director who:

1. Must be an ordained Catholic priest or deacon
2. Has discerned a holy desire to minister to victims
3. Can support a chapter in his parish or similar setting
4. Commits to daily prayer for this chapter
5. Can be used and is available to offer spiritual counsel and pastoral care to the chapter's lay leaders

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.

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](http://usccb.org))

# Starting an MGN 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.

# 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 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

---

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

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.

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 lead 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.

# 3 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 lead their gender specific group.

## 3. Reunite For Group Discussion on Forgiveness, 30-45"

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**

**The Following MGN Meeting Guide  
Is to be Photocopied and Distributed  
to All Attendees at Every Meeting.**

Leaders are responsible for providing a photocopy of the Participant which can be found at the end of this document, or is available on the [www.mgoretti.org](http://www.mgoretti.org) website.

**(Survivors May Take a Copy Home for Further Study)**

# Maria Goretti Network/MGN Meeting Guide

(Follow Order, Read Text on Pages 14 through 24)

Distribute copies of the Participant Guide

## 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.

*Which prayer is used at various points in meetings is up to the leader conducting the meeting. The above is a suggestion but any prayer can be used.*

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.

# WELCOME

The Maria Goretti Network Welcome is read. This reminds us why we are gathering together and how to participate in this meeting in a way that supports a safe and caring environment for each other.

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 victims of 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

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.

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.

## Ground Rules Page 2

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.

**This concludes the Check-in and part 1.**

**We now separate into women and men  
for more in-depth discussion  
(part2)**

*After 30-45 minutes, when both groups have finished....*

**Now, Men and Women Come Back Together  
for Discussion on Forgiveness**

## Part 3, Ways to Forgive

We find inspiration for forgiving in Jesus Christ and in the lives of saints like our patron, St. Maria Goretti, St. Josephine Bakhita and St. Maximilian Kolbe. We find more examples of ways to forgive in reading Scripture, Christian thinkers and other sage writings. As an exercise for our meetings, we also read these very practical ideas for finding ways to forgive. 2

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. 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. 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 the offender doesn't mean you endorse the offense. What happened was wrong and your forgiveness won't change that. 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. 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. 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 to being patient and mindful.
14. Pray for the people who have hurt you whether you're reconciled to them or not. Ask God to give you the grace to interact gracefully with them when you encounter them.

2 Adapted from *Forgive and Love Again: Healing Wounded Relationships*, by John Nieder and Thomas Thompson, Harvest House Publishers.

# Closing Prayers

Let's pray together as we close our meeting.

After a moment of silence, use any of the prayers below to close the meeting.

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 Serenity Prayer *(page 8 in participant packet)*

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.

## Survivor's Prayer *(page 13 in participant packet)*

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 have the courage to pray for the true conversion of our abusers, that they 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 found in Christ and in the love of His mother, Mary.

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

# Emergency Numbers

## Chapter Leaders Contact Information:

Name:

Phone:

Email (confidential):

Name:

Phone:

Email (confidential):

## Spiritual Director

Name:

Phone:

Email (optional):

# To Report Emergencies, Abuse or Criminal Situations dial 911.

To reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline for help for  
yourself or someone else considering suicide call:

1-800-273-TALK (8255).

To reach local police (non-emergency number):

Call \_\_\_\_\_

To report abuse of minors, elderly or vulnerable person  
To our City or County, Parish (LA) or Borough (AK):

Call \_\_\_\_\_

To report abuse of minors, elderly or vulnerable person  
To our State Agency:

Call \_\_\_\_\_

To contact the local Catholic Diocesan Victims' Assistance Coordinator or Assistance Office regarding abuse by clergy or others with authority in the Catholic Church:

Call \_\_\_\_\_

To contact the Local Chapter Leaders:

Call \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Call \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Important Numbers:

Call: \_\_\_\_\_

Call: \_\_\_\_\_

Please photocopy these pages and keep them close at hand for when you or a friend may need help

## Jeremiah 29:11-14

For I know well the plans I have in mind for you,  
says the LORD, plans for your welfare, not for woe!  
plans to give you a future full of hope.

When you call me, when you go to pray to me,  
I will listen to you.

When you look for me, you will find me.  
Yes, when you seek me with all your heart,  
you will find me with you, says the LORD,  
and I will change your lot.

# Acknowledgments

Many thanks to my mother, Maria Consuelo Menendez Prats.  
As Honorary Consul of Guatemala for 13 years in Houston  
I learned diplomacy from her. This has served me well dealing with the  
challenges of life. I'm also grateful to my father, Michael "Miguel" Prats,  
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and my brother, Fred Baca, for never giving up on me.  
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Rev. Gavin Vaverek JCL, Rev. Lawrence Jozwiak JCL, Msgr. Chester Borski,  
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Rogers, who are gone, but not forgotten.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

The Maria Goretti Network/MGN

Katy, TX

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

and on Facebook

## FOUNDERS

Miguel Prats, Manager, [miguel@mgoretti.org](mailto:miguel@mgoretti.org)

or 713-851-3708

Rev. Gavin Vaverek JCL, [fatherg@mgoretti.org](mailto:fatherg@mgoretti.org)

or 903-571-7069

# Appendix 1 – Participant Guide

# *Maria Goretti Network*

*For all victims of abuse*



## *Participant Guide*

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

*December 2018*

# *María Goretti Network*

*For all victims of 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: -----*

# *María Goretti Network*

*For all victims of 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.
  
- III. Reunite for group discussion on forgiveness. (Read Ways to Forgive.) In closing all stand and say “The Lord’s Prayer”.

A 90 minute meeting may be segmented into 3, 30 minute segments:

15 minutes - Introduction and Sharing

30-45 minutes - Men’s and Women’s Groups

30 minutes - Discussion on forgiveness

# *Maria Goretti Network*

*For all victims of 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 victims of 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 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.

## *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*