

**NORTH AMERICAN SECRETARIAT FOR PARTNERSHIP IN MISSION  
INITIAL FORMATION SESSION #1  
THEME: ST ALPHONSUS MARIA LIGUORI, C.Ss.R.  
HIS LIFE, IMPACT AND LEGACY  
Time Frame: 90 minutes**

**CENTRE OF BEAUTY:**

- Mission Cross
- Prayer Cloth
- Icon or Picture of St Alphonsus
- Candle
- Bible

**HANDOUTS:**

- Prayer of St. Alphonsus to the Holy Spirit (Attached)
- Handout: "A Short Biography" (Fr. Joseph Oppitz, CSSR)
- Handout: "Friend of the Most Abandoned" (Fr. Robert Fenili, CSsR)
- Any preparatory materials for the next session

**MATERIALS:**

- Flip Chart
- Markers
- Masking Tape
- Name Tags
- Pens/pencils
- Paper

**NOTES:**

## SATURDAY MORNING OR WEEKDAY EVENING SESSION

### GATHERING WELCOME

**Experience:** Prayer of St. Alphonsus to the Holy Spirit (Attached)

**Reflection:** Ask the participants:  
What image of the Holy Spirit, presented by St Alphonsus in this prayer, spoke most powerfully to you? What images were new or startling?

**Generalization:** *Introduce St Alphonsus Maria Liguori to the participants. You might begin by asking what they know or have heard of him.*

*If possible, participants should have read the brief articles on St Alphonsus from Liguorian magazine, written by Frs Joseph Oppitz, CSsR and Robert Fenili, CSsR, in preparation for this gathering.*

*You might use words that reflect Fr. Oppitz' introduction of St Alphonsus at the beginning of his article:*

“St. Alphonsus Liguori: holder of doctoral degrees in both civil and canon law by the time he was 16 years of age, diocesan priest, founder of the Redemptorists, mission preacher, author of 111 books and pamphlets, bishop, canonized saint, Doctor of the Church, designated as “Most Zealous Doctor” and known as “The Doctor of Prayer,” patron of moral theologians, confessors and people who suffer from arthritis!  
Ask: What strikes you as you hear this introduction?

*Walk the participants through the life of St. Alphonsus Liguori. You might wish to use the Oppitz and Fenili articles as your source, or use the outline provided below. If possible, tell the story from your own perspective, striking the main points and inviting people to read and research further on their own, knowing that as their formation continues, they will be introduced to many of the aspects of St. Alphonsus' life and Redemptorist mission in much greater detail. As you move through the story, you might pause for discussion at any point you think appropriate.*

*You might also like to use a short video, such as:*

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMhiN3qUYOk>

### EARLY YEARS AND INFLUENCES

Alphonsus Maria Liguori was born September 27, 1696 in Marianella, near

Naples, Italy. His father, a nobleman, had high hopes for his son, the eldest of seven children. Alphonsus was a prodigy; he easily mastered any subject put before him. By the age of 13, he was playing the harpsichord with the perfection of a master.

Poor health kept the young Alphonsus from following his father into the navy. His father decided the best course for his son, in order to attain a position of influence within society, was to become a lawyer. He was 16 years of age when he received his doctorate in civil and canon law.

### **THE FIRST TURNING POINT**

For nearly 10 years, the future saint distinguished himself in the courtroom. Alphonsus was considered to be one of the up and coming stars of the Neapolitan bar. He never lost a case. Then, in 1723, in a lawsuit that would decide a property dispute between a nobleman and the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Alphonsus lost his first court case as a result of corruption. Disillusioned, he left the courtroom.

He would never practice law again, nor marry, a double disappointment to his father. Alphonsus spent the next several days alone and in prayer. One day, while visiting the sick at the Hospital for the Incurables, he found himself surrounded by a mysterious light. He then heard a voice say, "Leave the world and give yourself to me." Alphonsus left the hospital and went directly to the church of Our Lady of Ransom (Our Lady of Mercy). There he laid his nobleman's sword before the statue of Our Lady and, with the words "O world, I know you now!" renounced his inheritance, and made the decision to become a priest.

This decision caused a rupture in his relationship with his father that lasted roughly two years; they barely spoke to one another, even though Alphonsus was living and studying in his father's house.

### **THE YOUNG PRIEST**

Alphonsus was ordained a priest on December 21, 1726. He would spend the next several years attending to the spiritual needs of the "lazzarone", the beggars and street people of Naples. He founded a catechetical movement of seminarians, priests and lay people, which he called the "Cappelle Seratone" ("Evening Chapels"). Through weekly sessions, which took place in store fronts, in porticos, houses and piazzas, people were taught the foundations of their faith, and simple, healthy devotional practices.

## **THE SECOND TURNING POINT**

In 1730, suffering from exhaustion, Alphonsus, on the advice of his doctor, left the city for the quiet of the countryside. At the village of Scala, on the Amalfi coast, he would meet another group of people abandoned by the priests of Naples, the goat herders and shepherds tending the hills above the Amalfi coast.

Back in Naples, Alphonsus was asked by his spiritual director, Bishop Thomas Falcoia, to look into reports of a nun's vision concerning the creation of a new order of women. After speaking with Maria Celeste Crostarosa, who lived at Scala, Alphonsus determined she was doing God's will and gave her efforts his blessing. Maria Celeste would then tell Alphonsus that she had experienced another vision, one that foretold of Alphonsus himself establishing an order of religious men. This would come to pass a year later, in November of 1732, when he established the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, more popularly known as "Redemptorists," whose mission would be to follow the example of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, by preaching the Gospel to the poor (cf. Luke 4, 14-21).

## **POPULAR MISSIONS**

Alphonsus sought others who were called as he was, and adopted a style of ministry to "mission among the people." During a mission, a band of Redemptorist priests and brothers would come to an area to preach and conduct religious activities. They saturated the people with the sense of God. They lived in community in houses in the countryside so the mission revivals could be repeated regularly, giving the poor the assurance that they would not be abandoned by Alphonsus and his brothers.

St. Alphonsus was a brilliant, articulate, pragmatic preacher. He knew how to reach ordinary people who had limited education and very real needs. They followed this gifted preacher from church to church and town to town to hear him give a message of hope in Christ for all people.

Three great images, basic to the Christian faith, formed the heart of Alphonsus' preaching and teaching: Jesus an infant in the crib, Jesus crucified on the Cross, and Jesus vibrantly alive and filled with love for all in the Eucharist. To this he added the image of Mary, the Mother of the Redeemer. When other theologians were opposed to devotion to Mary, Alphonsus invoked her, using the words of the ancient hymn *Salve Regina*: "Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope." Alphonsus preached the redeeming love of God. He believed that law and the threat of punishment were not foremost in God's plan. In God the Creator, love and freedom coincide. The individual was called to

love God out of an overwhelming sense of gratitude for what God had done for him in Christ. It was not fear but love that was to characterize the Christian way of life.

### **MORAL THEOLOGY**

At this time Alphonsus found himself caught up in the debate over two warring ideas of morality. His celebrated work, *Moral Theology*, argued for a middle position between rigorism and laxity. Alphonsus updated this work regularly, and it has been published in many editions during his life and in the years since. The Church sided with him, later declaring him a Doctor of the Church and the patron of moralists and confessors.

### **OTHER WRITINGS**

Alphonsus wrote a total of 111 works, a number of which have been in publication ever since. He wrote in the areas of moral theology, prayer, sermons, devotional material, priestly formation. He also wrote biographies of some of the early Redemptorists and other holy men and women. He is sometimes credited as the originator of modern written Italian. Behind all of this was Alphonsus' love for God, and his compelling urge to communicate the love and mercy of God to all.

### **LIFE AS A BISHOP**

In March of 1762, the pope appointed Fr. Alphonsus as the bishop of St. Agatha of the Goths, a plum job in a well-to-do diocese with plenty of priests. But Alphonsus was not happy about it. Despite his petitions to be spared this appointment, he threw himself into the task, reforming abuses in the diocese, organizing general missions, and establishing social welfare programs for the poor, even opening his palace to the needy.

### **THE FINAL YEARS**

Ill health forced Alphonsus to give up the bishopric in May of 1775. He moved to the Redemptorist house at Pagani, where he spent his remaining years. He was increasingly incapacitated by arthritis, blindness and deafness.

On August 1, 1787, Alphonsus died. In 1839 he was canonized. In 1871 Pius IX declared him a Doctor of the Church, and in 1950 Pius XII declared St. Alphonsus the official patron of moralists and of confessors. He is also the patron saint of vocations and of people who suffer from arthritis.

You might wish to close with this short video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LrW2qacXk94>

**Action:** Name one thing that you will take home with you from tonight's session.

**Prayer**

**Leader:** We began this session with a prayer of St Alphonsus to the Holy Spirit. We will close with a reading from St Alphonsus' Novena to the Holy Spirit, and some intercessions.

**Reader 1:** The Church teaches us to pray: "May the Holy Spirit inflame us with that fire which Jesus came to cast on the earth and which he ardently desired to set ablaze." This was the holy fire which inflamed the saints to do great things for God, to love their enemies, to be unconcerned with reputation, to embrace any discomfort-- and even death—with delight. Love cannot remain idle. Love never says, "Enough!" The person who loves God, the more she does for her beloved, the more she desires to do. This holy fire in enkindled by prayer. A psalmist says, In my meditation a fire shall flame out," If we were to burn with love toward God, let us love prayer. Prayer is the furnace in which divine love is enkindled.

**Reader 2:** We share St Alphonsus' certainty that God's love and redemption are abundant and overflowing. And so we pray today for an outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit on this community, on those in need, and on those who attend to those needs. To each intercession, we will respond, "Come, Holy Spirit."

**Reader 3:** Fear of the Lord is the gift that works within us to move us to wonder and awe in the face of God's might, God's mercy and God's majesty. We ask God for an increase in our capacity to be moved and amazed by the beauty and bounty of creation. We pray...

**All:** Come, Holy Spirit.

**Reader 4:** Piety is the gift that moves us to gratitude and prayer, encouraging us to follow God's holy inspirations with greater joy and openness. We ask God for open, listening and responsive hearts, ready to do God's will. We pray...

**All:** Come, Holy Spirit.

**Reader 5:** Knowledge is the gift that gives us deeper insight into the ways of God. We pray for the gift of knowledge to rest upon those who lead and guide the Church and are entrusted with the care of souls. We pray...

**All:** Come, Holy Spirit.

**Reader 6:** Courage is the gift that that allows us to resist the enticement of evil and to

stand strong, loving and faithful in good times and in bad. We pray for courage for married couples, parents, grandparents, guardians and all who accompany young people. We pray...

**All:** Come, Holy Spirit.

**Reader 7:** Counsel is the gift that enables us to make good choices in life, and to discern in times of doubt and confusion the most life-giving and faithful way forward. We pray for counsel and wise companionship for those who face difficult decisions. We pray...

**All:** Come, Holy Spirit.

**Reader 8:** Understanding is the gift that empowers us to see below the surface; to discern between what is really important and what is a deceptive illusion. We pray for the gift of understanding and understanding companions for those who face sickness and suffering. We pray...

**All:** Come, Holy Spirit.

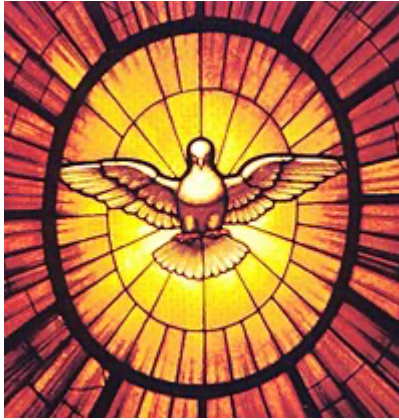
**Reader 9:** Wisdom is the gift through which we have the capacity to learn from experience and discover how best to know, love and serve God and God's people. For the poor, the lonely, the homeless, the abandoned and those who have nobody to pray for them. We pray...

**All:** Come, Holy Spirit.

**The Lord's Prayer**

**SOCIAL TIME**

## PRAYER OF ST. ALPHONSUS TO THE HOLY SPIRIT



**L.** You are **fire**;

**R.** enkindle in me your love.

**L.** You are **light**;

**R.** enlighten my mind with the knowledge of eternal things.

**L.** You are the **Dove**;

**R.** give me innocence of life.

**L.** You are the gentle **Breeze**;

**R.** disperse the storms of my passions.

**L.** You are the **Tongue**;

**R.** Teach me how to bless you always.

**L.** You are the **Cloud**;

**R.** shelter me under the shadow of your protection.

**L.** You are the **Giver** of all heavenly gifts;

**R.** animate me,

**L.** I beseech you, with your **grace**;

**R.** sanctify me

**L.** with your **charity**;

**R.** enlighten me

**L.** with your **wisdom**;

**R.** adopt me by your goodness as your child, and save me in your infinite mercy;

so that I may ever **bless** you, **praise** you, and **love** you;

first during this life on earth, and then in heaven for all eternity.

Amen.



