

REDEMPTORIST NORTH AMERICAN SECRETARIAT FOR PARTNERSHIP IN MISSION

INITIAL FORMATION GATHERING #9

**THEME: OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP:
ICON OF DEVOTION, ICON OF MISSION**

Time Frame: 90 minutes

CENTRE OF BEAUTY:

- Mission Cross
- Cloth
- Icon or picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help
- Candle
- Bible

HANDOUTS:

- "The Icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help" (2-page article, with reflection questions)
- The Meaning of the Icon (1-page handout)
- Devotions in Honour of Our Mother of Perpetual Help

MATERIALS:

- Name Tags (if needed)
- PowerPoint: Our Lady of Perpetual Help: Icon of Devotion, Icon of Mission
- Pens/pencils
- Paper
- Flip Chart
- Markers

NOTES:

In preparation for this session, copies of "The Icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help" are distributed to all participants, in order that they may read the short article before coming together.

SATURDAY MORNING OR WEEKDAY EVENING SESSION

GATHERING and WELCOME

OPENING PRAYER– Prayer of St. Alphonsus to the Holy Spirit (Attached)

Experience– Ask participants to look reflectively at the icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, which is placed in the Centre of Beauty. After a few moments, invite them to name aspects of the icon that they notice, or which attract them. One member of the group could serve as recorder, noting the aspects named by individuals. There should be no discussion at this time, simply a listing of the qualities seen in the icon.

Reflection– Invite the participants to review the list of aspects of the icon which attracted them. As each one is named, the person who placed it on the list might speak a little about what drew them to this aspect of the icon. If others wish to reflect or share on this aspect of the icon, they could be invited to do so.

Generalization– Use the PowerPoint “*The Icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help: Icon of Devotion, Icon of Mission.*” There are questions for reflection and discussion posed as you move through the PowerPoint. You might wish to pause and share on these together. They can also be given as handouts for reflection. (Attached)
How might the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help call us beyond devotion to mission?

Accompany:

- How do we accompany the poor and the abandoned, the wounded and the suffering, with compassion, tenderness and maternal love?
- In what concrete ways can we be in solidarity with migrants and refugees, with the victims of human trafficking, with young people and street children, with addicts and homeless?
- How can we accompany young families and the elderly members of our communities?
- How can we accompany those struggling to make sense of today’s world, those in despair, those who have lost hope?

Gather:

- Where might we create spaces to gather God’s people, safe places where real encounter can take place?
- What facilities might we use in our shrines or parishes, communities and schools, where people can meet one another, perhaps take part in formation programs or discussions, or

moments of socializing and sharing?

- How can our Churches become more welcoming, especially for the stranger?
- Are the confessionals inviting, and are there spaces for the sacrament of reconciliation?

Pray:

- All of our Churches and Shrines, communities and facilities, offer possibilities for prayer and reflection. In many places, we are strengthening and renewing the practice of the Perpetual Novena.
- Do the prayers we use truly reflect the concrete experience and situations among our people?
- Do they move us from personal intentions to praying for others, and addressing the needs of the society in which we are praying?
- Do we invite others to prayerful discernment with the Word of God, the 'signs of the times' and their own lives?
- Do our Novena Prayers integrate and reflect the renewed teaching on Evangelization, on the Family, on the care of our Common Home, and on Mercy?
- Do our prayers encourage and empower lay leadership?

Struggle:

- Does our devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help draw us into a deeper commitment in the struggle for justice?
- Like Mary, do we hold justice and tenderness together, so that the revolutionary power of mercy, compassion and love can transform our world for all?
- How do we express our passion for justice in concrete statements and actions?
- How do we do this in our actual situation and circumstances?
- What formation for action for justice can we offer through the mission of Our Mother of Perpetual Help today?

You might also ask:

1. Where did you first encounter the icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help?
2. What do you think is the source of the enduring popularity of the icon and devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help? Why are people, through the ages, so drawn to this image of the Mother of God?
3. Having experienced this interaction with the icon, how do you view it now as an icon for mission.

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

Prayer– “Devotions to Our Lady of Perpetual Help” (attached)

Social Time

OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP ICON OF DEVOTION—ICON OF MISSION

A resource for reflection.

How might the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help call us beyond devotion to mission?

Accompany:

- How do we accompany the poor and the abandoned, the wounded and the suffering, with compassion, tenderness and maternal love?
- In what concrete ways can we be in solidarity with migrants and refugees, with the victims of human trafficking, with young people and street children, with addicts and homeless?
- How can we accompany young families and the elderly members of our communities?
- How can we accompany those struggling to make sense of today's world, those in despair, those who have lost hope?

Gather:

- Where might we create spaces to gather God's people, safe places where real encounter can take place?
- What facilities might we use in our shrines or parishes, communities and schools, where people can meet one another, perhaps take part in formation programs or discussions, or moments of socializing and sharing?
- How can our Churches become more welcoming, especially for the stranger?
- Are the confessionals inviting, and are there spaces for the sacrament of reconciliation?

Pray:

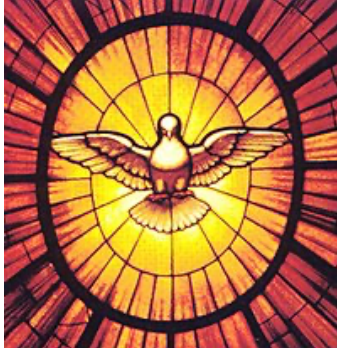
- All of our Churches and Shrines, communities and facilities, offer possibilities for prayer and reflection. In many places, we are strengthening and renewing the practice of the Perpetual Novena.
- Do the prayers we use truly reflect the concrete experience and situations among our people?

- Do they move us from personal intentions to praying for others, and addressing the needs of the society in which we are praying?
- Do we invite others to prayerful discernment with the Word of God, the 'signs of the times' and their own lives?
- Do our Novena Prayers integrate and reflect the renewed teaching on Evangelization, on the Family, on the care of our Common Home, and on Mercy? Do our prayers encourage and empower lay leadership?

Struggle:

- Does our devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help draw us into a deeper commitment in the struggle for justice?
- Like Mary, do we hold justice and tenderness together, so that the revolutionary power of mercy, compassion and love can transform our world for all?
- How do we express our passion for justice in concrete statements and actions?
- How do we do this in our actual situation and circumstances?
- What formation for action for justice can we offer through the mission of Our Mother of Perpetual Help today?

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.

St. Alphonsus Liguori

DEVOTIONS IN HONOUR OF OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP

Hymn: "O Mother of Perpetual Help"

1. O Mother of Perpetual Help, to thee we come imploring help.
Behold us here from far and near, to ask of thee our help to be.
Behold us here from far and near, to ask of thee our help to be.
2. Perpetual help, we beg of thee, our souls from sin and sorrow free.
Direct our wandering feet aright, and be thyself our own true light.
Direct our wandering feet aright, and be thyself our own true light.
3. And when this life is o'er for me, this last request I ask of thee:
Obtain for me in heaven this grace, to see my God there face to face.
Obtain for me in heaven this grace, to see my God there face to face.

Prayer to Our Mother of Perpetual Help (*recited in unison*)

Mother of Perpetual Help, your very name inspires confidence.
We come before your holy picture in praise and thanksgiving to God,
seeking your intercession with Jesus, your Son, for all the needs of our lives today.
We celebrate your holy motherhood
as we proclaim Jesus Christ our Lord and Redeemer.

You answered when called to be mother of our Lord.
Obtain for us the grace to be alive to our baptismal call
and especially to embrace the gospel of life
and to respect all life on earth.

You wondered as your Son grew in wisdom, knowledge and grace.
Intercede for us, so that we may welcome the Word of God in our lives
and be bearers of the good news to one and all.

You delighted as your Son healed the sick.
Intercede for our sick, that they may receive good health
and that they in their turn may be healers to others.

You enjoyed peace as your Son comforted the afflicted.
Intercede for all who suffer so that they may know
that we carry their burdens with them
and in this way we keep the law of Christ.

You rejoiced as your Son forgave sins. Obtain for us the forgiveness of our sins
and lead us to unbind others and set them free.

You suffered at the wounds your Son endured for our salvation.
Help us to bind up the brokenhearted and to give hope to the downtrodden.
You exulted at your Son's resurrection.
Obtain for us the grace to persevere in his way all the days of our life
and be granted a place in heaven.

You are the first of all the disciples and saints.
we trust in your motherly love and care.
Obtain for us all the graces we need
to fulfil God's plan each day in our lives.

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,
that never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection,
implored your help, or sought your intercession was left unaided.
Inspired with this confidence, we fly unto you,
O Virgin of virgins, our Mother.
To you do we come, before you we stand, sinful and sorrowful.
O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not our petitions,
but in your mercy hear and answer us. Amen.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Prayers of the Faithful

Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, at a word from Mary, your Mother, you changed water into wine at Cana in Galilee. Hear our prayers and grant our petitions in honour of Our Mother of Perpetual Help.

Grant wisdom and courage to all our religious and civil leaders, our Holy Father, Pope Francis, our bishops and all who lead us, we pray:

All: Hear us, Lord, through Mary, our Mother.

Leader: Grant peace, unity and good harvests in all the world, especially in places of conflict, war, famine and need, we pray: **L**

Leader: Grant married couples the grace of their Sacrament, wives and husbands a binding love for one another, parents the grace to welcome and cherish their children, single-parent families unity and strength, and peace and blessings on all our homes, we pray: **L**

Leader: Grant to our single adults fulfilment in their call, to our young people success in

their endeavours and courage to witness to their faith, to our old people vitality, security and contentment in their days, and to the separated and divorced the grace of your Spirit, we pray: **L**

Leader: Grant workers confidence in their work, dignity in their accomplishments, joy in their contributions, a just and living wage, and to the unemployed, grant gainful work, we pray: **L**

Leader: Grant to your Church many labourers for the harvest– good priests, brothers, sisters and laity– who will dedicate their lives to your faithful people, we pray: **L**

Leader: Grant eternal life to all the deceased and a place in the communion of saints, where every tear shall be wiped away and where we shall see you, our God, face-to-face, we pray: **L**

Leader: Grant to each of us the grace to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with you each day of our lives, for whatever we do to the least of our sisters or brothers, we do to you, we pray: **L**

Leader: Let us pray.

Mother of Perpetual Help, we, who call on your most powerful name, thank you for the graces we have received through your intercession and for hearing our prayers today, “for God, who is mighty, has done great things through you, and God’s mercy is from age to age, on those who fear him.” Amen.

Closing Blessing

May the Lord Jesus Christ, Son of Mary of Perpetual Help, be with you to defend you, within you to sustain you, before you to lead you, behind you to protect you and above you to bless you all the days of your life. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hymn: “Immaculate Mary”

1. Immaculate Mary, your praises we sing.

You reign now in heaven with Jesus, our King.

Chorus: Ave, ave, ave Maria!

Ave, ave, ave maria!

2. In heaven, the blessed your glory proclaim.

On earth, we your children invoke your fair name. *Chorus*

3. Your name is our power, your virtues our light.

Your love is our comfort, your pleading our might. *Chorus*

4. We pray for our mother, the Church upon earth,
and bless, dearest Lady, the land of our birth. *Chorus*



The Story of the Icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help

The origin of the icon that is at the centre of devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help is unknown. There has been a persistent story that it was painted by St. Luke, but the fact is that we cannot confirm its existence before the late Middle Ages, the 1400's. It is most likely of Eastern origin, given its Byzantine style and Greek lettering.

The icon shows the child Jesus fleeing into his Mother's protective arms as the Archangels Michael and Gabriel show Him the instruments of crucifixion. The Greek letters on either side of the figures spell out the first letters of Mary and Jesus' names. He has run to her in such haste and distress that one of his sandals hangs off his foot.

The icon arrived in Rome in the 15th century. A merchant who had heard about a miraculous picture on the island of Crete went to the island and stole it. When he arrived in Rome with the icon, he fell very ill. As he lay dying, he ordered a friend to place the icon in a church. It would seem that he hoped that this would bring about a cure. However, instead of taking the icon to a church, as requested, the friend took the icon to his own home, where his wife hung it in their bedroom.

The Virgin evidently was not pleased with this arrangement, and appeared several times to the man, telling him that she wished for her image to be placed in a church. The man, despite the miraculous visitations, would not give up the icon. The Blessed Virgin next appeared to the man's six-year-old daughter and asked that the icon be enshrined in St. Matthew's Church, a smaller church between the two very large churches of St. Mary Major and St. John Lateran in Rome. The daughter told this to her father and his heart was softened, and so in 1499 the icon was enshrined in St. Matthew's Church.

For 300 years, pilgrims flocked to the small church to pray before the miraculous image, but in 1798 Napoleon's invading army destroyed the church. Once the soldiers had left the area, people searched the ruins, looking for the icon, but they could not find it anywhere. They assumed that the icon had been stolen or destroyed, and for the next 60 years there was no mention of it.

In 1855, the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptorists) came to Rome, and were granted possession of the land where St. Matthew's Church had once stood. On that site, they hoped to build a church in honour of their founder, St. Alphonsus Liguori. It happened that a young Redemptorist priest, Fr. Michael Marti, remembered that, as a young boy, he had been told by an elderly caretaker of a miraculous icon of Mary that had once been enshrined in the previous church, the Church of St. Matthew. He told the young Michael that the image had been safely transferred to an Augustinian monastery near Rome.

When the Redemptorists heard of this, they petitioned the pope to allow the image to be returned to the spot that the Blessed Virgin had requested so long ago. The pope granted their request and further commissioned the Redemptorists to spread devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help throughout the world. On April 26, 1866, the image was transferred in a solemn procession to the Church of St. Alphonsus, where it has hung ever since, once again venerated by many pilgrims.

In 1996, the icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help was restored, which meant a thorough cleaning and restoration project that included removal of the crowns which were much later additions to the original. That icon now hangs in the Redemptorist Church of St. Alphonsus, on the Via Merulana in Rome.

Today, replicas of the icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help grace countless churches throughout the world. The Redemptorists still take very seriously their commission to "make her known throughout the world." In most Redemptorist churches, there are weekly devotions in honour of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, and often novenas leading up to her feast on June 27. In Canada, the Redemptorists of the Edmonton-Toronto Province televise Devotions to Our Lady of Perpetual Help each Wednesday on Vision TV.

Sources: Michael Dubruiel is a book-acquisitions editor at Our Sunday Visitor. This article was based on his book, "The Church's Most Powerful Novenas," released spring 2000 by Our Sunday Visitor.

REFLECT AND DISCUSS:

1. Where did you first encounter the icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help?
2. What strikes you as you read this account of the history of the icon?
3. The prayers of the Novena in honour of Our Lady of Perpetual Help are beautiful in their simplicity. Do you experience Mary as "perpetual help" in your own life? If so, how?
4. What do you think is the source of the enduring popularity of the icon and devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help? Why are people, through the ages, so drawn to this image?

of the Mother of God?