

**NORTH AMERICAN SECRETARIAT FOR PARTNERSHIP IN MISSION
GATHERING FOR FORMATION AND FAITH-SHARING**

THEME: REDEMPTORIST SAINTS– ST. JOHN NEUMANN, C.Ss.R.

Time Frame: 90 minutes

CENTRE OF BEAUTY:

- Mission Cross
- Prayer Cloth
- Picture of St. John Neumann
- Candle
- Bible

HANDOUTS:

- Prayer of St. Alphonsus to the Holy Spirit (Attached)
- Handout: St. John Neumann, C.Ss.R. (attached)
- Litany in Honour of St John Neumann (attached)
- 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

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

Experience: Ask the group: Have you ever known someone whose energy or apostolic zeal you admire? Who are these people? As these are named, list them on chart paper. What is it about these people that you admire? List these qualities also on chart paper.

Engage in some story-telling about the people whose names and qualities are before us.

Reflection: Have the group look over the list that has been generated. Then, ask: In your opinion, what qualities are essential in a missionary? Discuss these as they are named.

Generalization: Discuss the brief article on St. John Neumann, which participants have read in preparation for this gathering: The following are the reflection questions that were appended to the article. You might wish to use the following reflection questions as a discussion guide:

1. Even in his early life, John Neumann showed many interesting character traits that served him well in his later missionary work. Which of his character traits stood out for you as you read this brief story of his life?
2. John realized his need for community and so chose to enter the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. How do you experience the need for community in your own life? How is this need met for you?
3. John had tremendous drive, energy and missionary zeal. What aspects of his commitment to the service of the most abandoned appeal to you?
4. John was well-known for his warmth and hospitality. Why do you think this value is still such an important one for Redemptorists today?

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

PRAYER IN HONOUR OF ST JOHN NEUMANN, CSsR

Hymn: "Lord, you Give the Great Commission" (or another suitable hymn)

Word of God: Matthew 28:16-20

Litany in honour of St. John Neumann (adapted from Terrence J. Moran, *In the Spirit of St. Alphonsus*):

Leader: For you dreams for the spread of the Gospel in North America...

All: John, we remember you.

Leader: For your willingness to leave home and family for the sake of the Gospel...

All: John, we remember you.

Leader: For your willingness to stretch yourself beyond your limitations and fears...

All: John, we remember you.

Leader: For love of your Redemptorist confreres...

All: John, we remember you.

Leader: For your dedication to education and faith formation...

All: John, we remember you.

Leader: For your lifetime commitment to establishing religious life in a new land...

All: John, we remember you.

Leader: For your support of the ecclesial ministry of women...

All: John, we remember you.

Leader: For your struggles to learn to communicate in different languages and understand other cultures...

All: John, we remember you.

Leader: For the heritage of imaginative response and risk-taking that you have bequeathed to those who come after you...

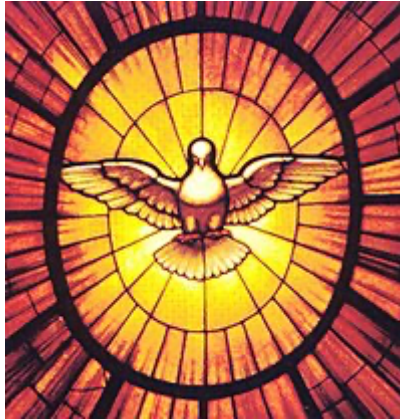
All: John, we remember you.

Closing Prayer (adapted from Terrence J. Moran, *In the Spirit of St. Alphonsus*):

God of bountiful love, we give you thanks for the life and example of St. John Neumann. Fill us with his zeal, his patience, and his kindness.

May we grow in faithfulness to the heritage that is ours as members of the Redemptorist family. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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. John Neumann, C.Ss.R.

John Neumann, who became Bishop of Philadelphia, was born in Prachatitz in Bohemia on 28th March 1811, son of Philip Neumann and Agnes Lebis. He attended school in Budweis and entered the seminary there in 1831. Two years later he passed to the Charles Ferdinand university in Prague, where he studied theology.

He was looking forward to being ordained in 1835 when the bishop decided there would be no more ordinations. It is difficult for us to imagine now, but Bohemia was overstocked with priests. John wrote to bishops all over Europe but the story was the same everywhere; no one wanted any more bishops. John was sure he was called to be a priest, but all the doors to follow that vocation seemed to close in his face.

But John didn't give up. He had learned English by working in a factory with English-speaking workers, and then he wrote to the bishops in America. Finally, the bishop in New York agreed to ordain him. In order to follow God's call to the priesthood, John would have to leave his home forever and travel across the ocean to a new and rugged land.

In New York, John was one of 36 priests serving 200,000 Catholics. John's parish in western New York stretched from Lake Ontario to Pennsylvania. His church had no steeple or floor. But that didn't matter, because John spent most of his time traveling from village to village, climbing mountains to visit the sick, staying in garrets and taverns to teach, and celebrating the Mass at kitchen tables.

Because of the work and the isolation of his parish, John longed for community and so joined the Redemptorists, a congregation of priests and brothers dedicated to helping the poor and most abandoned. John was the first priest to enter the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer in America. He took his vows in Baltimore on January 16th, 1842.

From the beginning, he was highly regarded by his fellow Redemptorists for his evident holiness, for his zeal and affability. His knowledge of six modern languages made him particularly suitable for work in the multi-lingual American society of the nineteenth century.

After working in Baltimore and Pittsburgh, in 1847 he was appointed Visitor or Major Superior of the Redemptorists in the United States. Father Frederick von Held, superior of the Belgian province, to which the American houses belonged, said of him: "He is a great man who combines piety with a strong and prudent personality". He needed these qualities during the two years he was in office, as the American foundations were passing through a trying period of adjustment.

When he handed over his charge to Father Bernard Hafkenscheid, the Redemptorists of the United States were better prepared to become an autonomous province, which happened in 1850.

Father Neumann was named Bishop of Philadelphia and was consecrated in Baltimore on March 26th, 1852. His diocese was a very large one and was going through a period of considerable development. As bishop, he was the first to organize a diocesan Catholic school system. A founder of Catholic education in the United States, John Neumann increased the number of Catholic schools in his diocese from 2 to 100. He founded the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis to teach in the schools.

Among the more than eighty churches built during his episcopate must be mentioned the cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul, which he commenced.

St. John Neumann was of small stature, never robust in health, but in his short lifetime he achieved a great deal. He found time even for a considerable literary activity in addition to his pastoral duties. As well as numerous articles in Catholic papers and periodicals he published two catechisms and in 1849 a Bible history for schools. He continued to be active right to the end. On January 5th, 1860 at the age of 48, he collapsed in the street in his episcopal city of Philadelphia and died before the last Sacraments could be administered.

He was beatified by Pope Paul VI on October 13th, 1963 and canonized on June 19th, 1977.

REFLECT AND DISCUSS:

1. Even in his early life, John Neumann showed many interesting character traits that served him well in his later missionary work. Which of his character traits stood out for you as you read this brief story of his life?
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