

**REDEMPTORIST NORTH AMERICAN SECRETARIAT FOR PARTNERSHIP IN MISSION
ONGOING FORMATION AND FAITH-SHARING
VENERABLE ALFRED PAMPALON
Time Frame: 90 minutes**

CENTRE OF BEAUTY:

- Mission Cross
- Cloth
- Icon or picture of Venerable Alfred Pampalon, C.Ss.R.
- Candle
- Bible

HANDOUTS:

- "Venerable Alfred Pampalon, CSsR: A Brief Biography" by Dom Antoine Marie, OSB (adapted)
- Prayer of St. Alphonsus to the Holy Spirit

MATERIALS:

- Name Tags (if needed)
- Pens/pencils
- Paper

NOTES:

In preparation for this session, copies of the attached adaptation of "Venerable Alfred Pampalon, CSsR: A Brief Biography," by Dom Antoine Marie, OSB, are distributed to all participants, in order that they may read the short article before coming together. Throughout the gathering, we will be reflecting on the life and meaning of Venerable Alfred Pampalon, CSsR using an adaption of a prayer service by Terry Moran, "To Live in the Freedom of Truth: Alfred Pampalon."

SATURDAY MORNING OR WEEKDAY EVENING SESSION

GATHERING and WELCOME

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

Experience– Venerable Alfred Pampalon entered the Redemptorist Congregation in Belgium. He was a true son of St. Alphonsus, the “Doctor of Prayer,” known for saying: “There is no virtue without prayer,” In the life of Alfred Pampalon, we can discern a thread of triumph over adversity through steadfast faithfulness and prayer. Alfred was a sickly child, and this followed him into adulthood. From the age of 14, he suffered from tuberculosis. As the disease progressed, he endeavoured to endure its ravages without the use of painkillers, in order that he might remain open and aware, able to meet and respond to people and to pray with and for them. He had a pronounced speech impediment, which made school a trial and kept him from taking part in that most traditional of Redemptorist works, the preaching of popular missions. Instead, Alfred declared that , “My way of giving missions is to pray for souls,” and spent time on the missions hearing confessions, counselling and catechizing children. In many ways, his spirituality echoes that of St. Gerard Majella, and his ability to deal creatively and positively with adversity echoes that of St. Clement Hofbauer. Ask the participants:

- Has your life, or the life of someone dear to you, been touched by addiction?
- What response arose within you as you read and learned of Alfred Pampalon and his emerging role as intercessor for and patron of those dealing with addictions?

Reflection–

Reader 1: Jesus said to those who believed in him, “If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

All: The truth will set you free.

Reader 2: Alfred practiced great simplicity of life and wished, as he said, “to be poor out of love for the poor man Jesus.” We pray for freedom from an addiction to consumption.

All: The truth will set you free.

Reader 3: Alfred loved the Magnificat. He prayed it in the pulpit before every sermon and sang it with his last breath on his deathbed. Mary sings of the God who puts down the mighty from their thrones and raises up the lowly. We pray for freedom from our addiction to power and control.

All: The truth will set you free.

Reader 4: From his days as a student, Alfred was known as “the peacemaker.” He wrote, “I will be happy if I live in peace with all my confreres. I will obtain peace if I love them in God, whose image they are.” We pray for freedom from our addiction to violence.

All: The truth will set you free.

Reader 5: Alfred was a person of a deep interior life. He loved the liturgy and was faithful to many devotions to the Blessed Sacrament, Our Lady, St Joseph and St. Alphonsus. We pray for freedom from our addiction to activity that prevents us from cultivating the inner life.

All: The truth will set you free.

Reader 6: On his deathbed, Alfred refused morphine because he did not want to dull his ability to experience all of life. We pray for freedom from our addiction to substances that prevent us from living fully the truth.

All: The truth will set you free.

Generalization–

Discuss the article which participants have read in preparation for this gathering: an adaptation of “*Venerable Alfred Pampalon: A Brief Biography*,” by Dom Antoine Marie, OSB. Some reflection questions were appended to the article. You might wish to use the following questions as a discussion guide:

1. What impressed you about Alfred Pampalon as you read and reflected on this article?
2. What can we draw from the spirituality of Alfred Pampalon that we could apply to our own lives or our own day?
3. As you read about Alfred Pampalon, was anything affirmed for you? If so, what?
4. Did anything you read challenge you? If so, what was it?

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

Closing Intercessions

Leader: Recognizing our dependence on God’s limitless bounty, we make our needs known with confidence.

All: God of mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader: For courage and strength for those who struggle in recovery from addictions.

All: God of mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader: For people in twelve-step programs, that through surrender to God and the

support of the community, they might find the sobriety and serenity for which they long.

All: God of mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader: For all those who are victims of abuse and violence, that they might find healing and support from the community of believers.

All: God of mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader: For young people, that they will be inspired by the example of Alfred Pampalon to follow Jesus the Redeemer in the family of St. Alphonsus Liguori.

All: God of mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader: For the intentions of all those pilgrims who visit the tomb of Alfred Pampalon at the shrine of Ste-Anne-de-Beaupre, that they might leave with a deepened sense of God's presence and care.

All: God of mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader: Let us pray together the Serenity Prayer, the prayer that is special to all those who struggle to walk in the freedom of the truth:

All: God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And the Wisdom to know the difference. 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.

VENERABLE ALFRED PAMPALON, CSsR A BREIF BIOGRAPHY

BY Dom Antoine Marie osb.

Among the perils today that threaten youth and all of society, drugs are among the most dangerous, and all the more insidious since they are less visible... In the early stages of drug abuse, the user often holds an attitude of skepticism toward others and towards religion, marked by hedonism, which in the end leads to frustration, existential emptiness, a belief in the futility of life, and a drastic deterioration... “The scourge of drugs, encouraged by large economic and sometimes also political interests, has spread throughout the entire world,” declared Pope John Paul II (May 27, 1984 and June 24, 1991).

On May 14, 1991, the same Pontiff declared the heroic virtues of a young Redemptorist religious, Father Alfred Pampalon, who, since his blessed death in 1896, is often invoked by alcohol and drug addicts. The apparently insignificant life of this man shines like a light for our era, greedy for material efficiency and comfort. He built his life on supernatural realities, and what abundant favors—even temporal ones—have been obtained through his intercession!

On November 24, 1867, Alfred was born in the Marian parish of Notre-Dame de Lévis in Quebec, the ninth child in a deeply Christian family. His father, Antoine Pampalon, was a contractor who built churches. His mother, Josephine Dorion, known for her humility and faith, took loving care of her children. Every evening, the family prayed the Rosary together. Two of Alfred's brothers and his sister Emma dedicated themselves to God. Particularly affectionate and helpful, Alfred quickly learned—thanks to his mother—about the Lord's goodness, and to pronounce the names of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

An even better mother

At the age of five, he lost his mother, not long after she had the joy of a twelfth birth. Shortly before she died, Madame Pampalon gathered her eight surviving children and, with an affectionate smile, said, “My dear children, your Mama is going to die... I love you very much, but I must go... You will no longer have a mother on this earth... I entrust you to an even better mother, the best there is, the Blessed Virgin... She is stretching out her arms to you... Love her very much! Pray to her very much! She will take care of you...” Beside the bed, Alfred cried softly. These words from the one he loved more than anyone else on earth were engraved into his memory, and would mark his entire life. His mother died on July 2, 1873, at the age of 45.

One year later, Monsieur Pampalon decided to remarry. He married a fine Irish widow, Margaret Phelan, who would regard all of Antoine's children as her own. Alfred was affectionate and sweet to his second mother. “He always had a smile on his lips,” Margaret recalled. “He was cheerful, sweet, entertaining my little ones (Alfred's half-brothers), and was helpful to everyone.”

In September 1876, at the age of nine, Alfred became a day student at the high school in Lévis, run by diocesan priests. He would study there for five years, without ever thinking of becoming a priest. Interested in business, he chose to take business courses rather than classical studies. In May 1877, he made his First Communion, and on October 7, the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, he received the sacrament of Confirmation.

He exhibited a sense of the supernatural, which would continue to develop throughout his life. He confessed and received Communion once a week, which at that time was unusual. He loved to serve the Mass. Every day as he passed the parish church, he would stop to adore Our Lord and pray to the Blessed Virgin. «During the ten years I spent with him in the same classes in school,» a classmate reported, «I don't remember the slightest misbehavior from him. He would sit at the front of the class to be closer to the teacher and less likely to be distracted.» Nevertheless, Alfred's virtue drew others to him. He exuded goodness—in sports, in a good and somewhat playful humor, he proved to be an excellent organizer. No one equaled him in some games—the younger students in particular were amazed at his skill in cricket, soccer, baseball... He ran very fast. Not only did they admire him, but they loved him, because he was always modest and kind when he won.

A smile that lit up

The year was 1881. A young adolescent, Alfred was not a brilliant student, and a speech impediment—which he would never manage to get rid of—made it difficult for his listeners to follow him. But in catechism, he excelled. Suddenly, his life was threatened by a serious illness. He prayed, recommending himself to Mary. “God made me understand,” he would later write, “that He did not want me to belong to the world, but be entirely His. Immediately, at His call, I resolved that if I recovered, I would drop business and do classics, with the goal of becoming a priest.” He moderated his love of sports. He remained joyful, even playful, but he wanted to live with and for the Lord. For the rest of his life, he would retain a sickly face, yet always brightened by his smile. His efforts bore fruit—he ended the 1883 school year fourth in a class of thirty.

In 1885, pneumonia brought him to death's door. He received the last sacraments. The sanctuary of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, where Quebec Catholics venerate Saint Anne as their patroness, was nearby. The alarmed family urgently appealed to the mother of the Virgin Mary to obtain Alfred's cure from the Child Jesus. “As my studies progressed,” Alfred would later say, “my intention to become a priest became more and more firm. But what fixed it was my second illness. It was there that God was waiting for me. He inspired me to realize my plan through the bond of an unbreakable vow. I promised it to Him, if He granted my cure.” Teachers and students in Lévis joined the family in pulling this grace from Heaven. Alfred recovered... As soon as he had the strength, he walked the 35 km to Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, rosary in hand. At the sanctuary, kneeling before the miraculous statue, he gave thanks and promised to follow his brother's example and join the Redemptorists.

The Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer was founded in 1732 by Saint Alphonsus Maria de Liguori, a Neapolitan nobleman, in order to preach the Good News to the most abandoned souls. His religious—called Redemptorists—arrived in Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré only in 1878. Even before his decision, Alfred had read with profit the work the saint had dedicated to the

Virgin in 1750, *The Glories of Mary*. Since no Redemptorist house of formation had yet opened in Canada, he would have to set out for Europe. Courageously, on July 22, 1886—at the age of eighteen—he tore himself from his family's affections to enter the novitiate in Saint-Trond, in Belgium. Religious formation there was austere, but fed by the doctrine of the saints. Alfred applied himself to it with zeal and good humor. From the start, he spontaneously volunteered for the most undesirable jobs. Handicapped by ill health, he did his utmost, and edified others with his humble obedience... On September 8, 1887, he joyfully made the perpetual vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. He who at such a young age had abandoned himself into Mary's hands, exclaimed, "I promised my Good Mother to become a saint! And my confidence in her makes me hope for it!"

Sent to the major seminary of Saint-Jean-de-Beauplateau for two years of philosophy and four years of theology, he tackled his studies with courage. By his earnest prayer—above all to Mary, Seat of Wisdom—and hard work, he earned increasingly better grades. His sole ambition was to carry out his future apostolate as well as possible. Ordained a priest on October 4, 1892, he began his ministry in Mons, Belgium—preaching parish missions, hearing confessions, teaching catechism to children. He often visited the sick and encouraged them with his smile and kindness. From the dawn of his religious life, he saw in his order's rule a safeguard—by spiritual instinct, he knew that, without a disciplined life, perseverance is not assured. "Do you wish to be a saint, a very great saint? Then observe your Rule well, very well, and your superiors' instructions," he counseled.

A sure guide

From where did he draw his strength of soul? From prayer: "There is no virtue without prayer," he said, particularly prayer that ascends to the source, the most Holy Eucharist. He often stayed kneeling in the chapel, immobile, his eyes fixed on the tabernacle. Yet he never confused the means and the end: "He who loves God," he said, "demonstrates this love to Him with works and sufferings. In other words, he conforms himself to His holy Will." His actions showed his awareness of the presence of God. In community life, he had a friendly and gentle manner that did not keep him from freely expressing his opinions when the occasion arose, without fear of human respect.

In the Epistle to the Romans, we read, "The just man shall live by faith" (1:17). Alfred absorbed these words. "In the spiritual life," he said, "one must not be guided by feelings, but by faith. Feelings often deceive; faith is a clear and sure guide." Faith showed him that love of God went hand in hand with fleeing from all intentional sin: "There is but one evil, sin, and but one good, God. I will never commit the slightest fault to please anyone, no matter who." The Catechism expresses the same truth: "To the eyes of faith no evil is graver than sin and nothing has worse consequences for sinners themselves, for the Church, and for the whole world" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, CCC, 1488).

Alfred frequently renewed his baptismal promises and his religious vows. His spirit of faith particularly shone when he celebrated the Eucharistic Sacrifice. As for hope, "when it reaches maturity, it takes the sweet name of confidence... I must maintain my peace of heart and not let in to the least uneasiness. The measure of our confidence determines the measure of our

holiness.” He thus was able to remain content with everything—his superiors, his confreres, in interior trials as in divine consolations, in difficulties with studies, in illness.

Father Alfred had placed at the top of the edifice a passionate love for Jesus Christ. Imbued with these words of Saint John: In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us ... God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him (I Jn. 4:9, 10), he wanted to render love for love. He meditated on the crib, the crucifix, the Eucharist. Every day, he made the Stations of the Cross and read Holy Scripture. He often repeated, especially during his final illness: “May my constancy not fail! Just a little while longer, and it will be eternity.” In turning towards the eternal realities, the thought of death helps us make the love of God prevail over all other loves. This is why the saints thought often about death.

Glorifying mercy

Alfred was driven by a burning zeal for souls. “I want to become and always remain a holy priest, so that I might work as effectively as possible for the salvation of souls. The holier I become, the more I will save souls.” Unable, because of his impediment, to preach much, he was diligent in the ministry of confession. In parish missions, he made his modest contribution, usually speaking to the children and preparing them to receive the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. His instruction—clear, solid, and practical—was greatly relished. Given his difficulty in speech, he was allowed to preach only one major sermon: he chose to glorify the mercy of the Virgin Mary. His thirst to work effectively for the kingdom of God led him to value Christian mortification, a powerful means to free oneself from self-love. Even when he was out walking, he rarely ate outside of meals; he patiently endured chapped skin...

In May 1895, he was transferred from Mons, a mining area, so that his sick lungs might be relieved by the clean air of Saint-Jean-de-Beauplateau, in the forests of the Ardennes. He wrote, “My way of giving missions is to pray for souls.” Unencumbered by the criticism of others, he thought that, “of all the vices, there is not one that has stopped more souls on the way to piety than pride. The spirit of vanity gives rise to the immoderate desire to impress and succeed in everything one does.” He spoke little about himself, but gladly mentioned his weak intellect. He carefully and happily performed the most menial tasks.

From the age of fourteen until his death, Alfred suffered from tuberculosis. He had hung in there as best he could. In 1895, certain that he was close to death, Alfred Pampalon was sent from Belgium home to Ste-Anne-de-Beaupre. There, even in his sickness and infirmity, he gained a reputation for holiness of life, and for his wisdom and counsel in the confessional. His love for the poor, inspired many around him.

But on February 5, 1896, nine months after his forced retreat into the Ardennes, he had to resign himself to remaining in the infirmary—one lung was gone, the other badly damaged. The doctor gave him until March or April. The young priest spent his days in an armchair: “Some work, while others are worked. Here I am, worked by illness.” He devoted his time to prayer and reading the lives of the saints—he was never idle. He coughed day and night. Soon consumption was joined by dysentery. Bedsores formed—Alfred had to lie on open wounds. Yet, he never showed the least impatience, but remained pleasant and cheerful. Everyone loved visiting him. In the Divine Sacrifice, which he still celebrated every day, he drew the

strength to endure it all in union with His Savior nailed to the Cross. But on August 23, no longer able to stand up, he was forced to stop several times. Through the month of September, he hovered between life and death. On the 29th, at three o'clock in the morning, he received Holy Communion for the last time. He could scarcely be heard. On the 30th, at one o'clock in the morning, he suddenly sang the entire Magnificat in a loud and clear voice. At two o'clock, he asked for and received absolution from all the sins of his life. Shortly before eight o'clock, he raised his eyes to Heaven smiling, as though he saw someone, and breathed his last. He was not yet twenty-nine years old.

Testimonies pour in

Such a sad and unproductive life, it seemed! It is true that this sickly priest did not pay any attention to conversations on worldly matters, seeming not to understand them. Yet, soon after his death, prayers went up to Alfred Pampalon. His brother Pierre would write six years later: "I have been collecting temporal favors attributed to the intercession of this Servant of God. I've reached number two hundred and seventy-five; I am still finding new ones. I have at least twenty-six cases of apparently miraculous cures." The records of the sanctuary of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré witness to this: "Victims of alcohol and drugs seem to draw the special attention and mercy of the Servant of God. Testimonies pour in from everywhere..." Youth invoke the Servant of God, for themselves and others. In our day, the blessings obtained continue to grow.

Father Pampalon left this world one year to the day before Saint Therese of the Child Jesus. Both dreamed of leaving for far-off missions; both desired martyrdom and died young. Both were stricken with tuberculosis and suffered terribly; both discovered that their vocation was to love throughout a life in which nothing extraordinary happened. It might be said that Father Alfred received from God an important role somewhat like that of the Patroness of Missions—to show mercy to those in distress.

Today, the tomb of Alfred Pampalon in the lower church at the shrine of Ste-Anne-de-Beaupre is much-visited by people who seek the strength and courage to conquer addiction.

Alfred Pampalon was declared "Venerable" by Pope John Paul II on May 14, 1991.

REFLECT AND DISCUSS...

1. What impressed you about Alfred Pampalon as you read and reflected on this article?
2. What can we draw from the spirituality of Alfred Pampalon that we could apply to our own lives or our own day?
3. As you read about Alfred Pampalon, was anything affirmed for you? If so, what?
4. Did anything you read challenge you? If so, what was it?