



33 Days  
to  
Morning  
Glory

Retreat Coordinator's Guide

Fr. Michael E. Gaitley, MIC

MARIAN PRESS  
STOCKBRIDGE MA 01263



© 2012 Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception

Copyright © 2012 Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception  
of the B.V.M. All rights reserved.

Available from:  
Marian Helpers Center,  
Stockbridge, MA 01263  
[www.TheDivineMercy.org](http://www.TheDivineMercy.org)

Orderline: 1-800-462-7426  
Retreat Coordinator Support: 1-877-200-8477

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

Cover Art: "Immakulata" image © Rektoratskirche  
St. Peter, Kunst und Kultur Referat

Printed in the United States of America

# Contents

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION .....	5
HOW THIS GUIDE WORKS .....	7
PART ONE: Overview	
The Hearts Afire Program .....	8
33 Days to Morning Glory Group Retreats .....	10
PART TWO: Preparation	
Step One: Visit the Website .....	11
Step Two: Pick a Date .....	12
[Optional Step: Order Your Retreat Coordinator Kit] .....	13
Step Three: Find a Venue .....	13
Step Four: Promote the Program .....	13
Step Five: Order the Retreat Materials .....	14
Step Six: Train Small-group Leaders .....	15
Step Seven: Plan for Consecration Day .....	16
PART THREE: The Weekly Meetings	
The Gift of Christian Fellowship .....	16
Small-group Dynamics — and Seven Tips for Managing Them .....	17
Structure of the Meetings .....	20
PART FOUR: Consecration Day	
Before Consecration Day .....	22
On Consecration Day .....	22
After Consecration Day .....	23
CONCLUSION .....	23



## AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

If you're reading this, then you're a generous soul: You've chosen (or at least you're thinking of choosing) to run a 33 Days to Morning Glory Group Retreat. Thank you for your willingness to help! My intention in writing this guide is to make the process as simple as possible. Therefore, I encourage you, be not afraid! For not only will you have this guide to assist you, but you'll also have special access to the AllHeartsAfire.org website, and most importantly, Mary is going to be very close to you. After all, this is her retreat, and she'll be right by your side. I assure you that she's smiling at you now, because you're going to help her bring many souls closer to her Son, and she's not outdone in generosity. I promise that you will be greatly blessed and that you will not regret your sacrifice.

Right at the outset, I want you to know exactly what you're getting yourself into.

First, you're getting into a spiritual battle. This isn't meant to scare you, and you really shouldn't be scared. But here's the reality: Satan hates Mary and doesn't want people consecrated to her, so you will face spiritual battles as you run the retreat. By this, I mean that during the time of retreat preparation and during the retreat itself, you may experience such things as spiritual dryness, self-doubt, and temptations to discouragement or fear. But again, be not afraid! I repeat, *be not afraid!* If such times come, turn to Mary, and she will most certainly give you her peace and strength. Call on Mary! Invoke Mary! She will be there *especially* for you, because you are choosing to be there for her by running the retreat. Take comfort in this, because it's a great gift. Also, take comfort in knowing that, as a true mother, Mary fights for her children, and as a gentle mother, she makes even our crosses into something sweet.

Second, you're embracing a period of service in imitation of our Lord who came not to be served but to serve. You'll be "washing the feet" of the people in your group by performing behind-the-scenes tasks that make the retreat possible. For instance, you'll need to find a place to meet, communicate with participants, arrive early, rally the Small-group Leaders, secure a TV and DVD player, and speak with the pastor if the venue is a parish. This all takes time and energy. But again, be not afraid! Our Lady will give you strength, and you will be greatly blessed. Really. As you do these things, imagine Mary right beside you, laboring with you, and don't forget that she's smiling at you.

Third, as you probably already know if you're reading this, you'll have to pay a bit more than retreat participants, because Retreat Coordinators are required to get the *Retreat Coordinator Kit*. The extra cost is for the DVDs. On the bright side, when the retreat is all over and done, you'll own the DVDs and can watch my talks over and over — what a great penance! Seriously, though, I hope it's at least comforting to learn that all proceeds from the sales of the Hearts Afire programs — which are relatively inexpensive compared to others — go to support the good works and mission of my religious congregation, the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Again, you will be greatly blessed for your sacrifices. It truly is a joy and privilege to be an instrument in the hands of Mary Immaculate as she labors to bring all souls to Christ. And speaking of being an instrument, I'd like to thank Sarah Chichester, David Came, and Kelly Wahlquist, who have been powerful instruments in Our Lady's hands to make the retreat a reality, and they've all helped with the editing of this guide.

Finally, all of us from Hearts Afire: Parish-based Programs for the New Evangelization (HAPP)<sup>SM</sup> thank you for working with us as part of the New Evangelization. May the Lord bless your efforts and reward you with his grace. We're praying for you, and through our website and various lines of support, we're here to help. Please pray for us!

In Christ and his Immaculate Mother,

**Fr. Michael E. Gaitley, MIC, STL**

National Shrine of The Divine Mercy

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

March 19, 2012

Solemnity of St. Joseph

## HOW THIS GUIDE WORKS

To understand how this guide works, it's first important to know the basics of what's expected of Retreat Coordinators. The introduction you just read mentioned some of the sacrifices involved in running the retreat, but now let's cover a few more things.

As a Retreat Coordinator, your job will be to run the entire 33 Days to Morning Glory Group Retreat at your parish or gathering space. Once again, be not afraid! You will have the HAPP<sup>SM</sup> Team assisting you through this *Retreat Coordinator's Guide*, support lines, and through special Retreat Coordinator access on our website. Regarding the website, be sure to register yourself and your group. This lets our support team know who you are so they can give you the help you need. You will also likely have a team of Small-group Leaders if your retreat includes more than two groups. It will be your responsibility to train and organize these leaders, which this guide will teach you to do.

Okay, so here's how the guide works: It's broken up into four parts that will lead you through all the steps to running the retreat. The first part gives you an overview of the whole Hearts Afire Program itself (the big picture). Then follows an overview of this particular 33-day retreat. In the second part, we'll cover your preparation steps before the retreat begins. The third part will get into the nitty-gritty of the retreat itself, specifically, the weekly meetings. Finally, in the fourth part, we'll look at all aspects of the big day (Consecration Day): before, during, and after. Here's an outline to help you take it all in:

### **PART ONE: Overview**

- The HAPP<sup>SM</sup> Program

- The 33 Days to Morning Glory Group Retreat

### **PART TWO: Preparation**

- Seven Steps to Running the Retreat

### **PART THREE: The Weekly Meetings**

- The Gift of Christian Fellowship

- Small-group Dynamics — and Seven Tips for Managing Them

- Structure of the Meetings

### **PART FOUR: Consecration Day**

- Before Consecration Day

- On Consecration Day

- After Consecration Day

## PART ONE OVERVIEW

### THE HEARTS AFIRE PROGRAM

The 33 Days to Morning Glory Group Retreat is the first part of Stage One of the Hearts Afire program. So you’re starting at the right place: 33 Days is the very beginning of the program.

#### What Is Hearts Afire?

Hearts Afire: Parish-based Programs for the New Evangelization (HAPP)<sup>SM</sup> is a bold and fresh approach to small-group, parish-level, faith-renewal programs. It’s designed to help us live the complete Catholic life. It aims to help set our hearts on fire with love of God and neighbor and to inspire us to works of mercy in our families, parishes, and communities.

Beginning with you and friends from your parish or neighboring parishes, the goal of HAPP<sup>SM</sup> is to lead the whole world to the burning love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus through the fire of love of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. It’s about heeding Jesus’ words, “*I have come to set fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already burning!*” (Lk 12:49). It’s about heeding Mary, who with her Spouse, the Holy Spirit, wants to get this blaze going as quickly as possible. In short, HAPP<sup>SM</sup> is about burning hearts: Jesus’ Heart and Mary’s Heart, my heart and your heart, and someday, all hearts.

#### Three Big Ideas

Three big ideas help us unpack the logic behind HAPP<sup>SM</sup>:

##### (1) *Time of Evil, Time of Grace*

According to Blessed John Paul II, ours is a time of extraordinary evil. For this very reason, it’s also a time of extraordinary grace. Saint Paul explains, “Where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more” (Rom 5:20). Concretely, this time of extraordinary grace means some very good news: It’s easier than ever before to grow in holiness and even to become saints! Indeed, God wants to raise up many, many saints in our day. And he’ll do it — gently, quickly, and easily — if only we’ll let him, if only we’ll tap into the extraordinary graces he’s sending our way.

##### (2) *Heart of Jesus, Heart of Mary*

How do we “let the Lord do it”? How do we let him form us into saints? How do we tap into the amazing graces he’s pouring out during this extraordinary time of mercy? We go to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Within this Heart, we find the fire of Divine Mercy. Within this Heart, we discover extraordinary graces for our time. But how do we get there? First, we go to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Her role is to lead us to the Heart of Jesus, and she does this in the best way possible. According to the saints, she is the quickest, easiest, surest way to the fire of love that burns in the Heart of Jesus.



### *(3) Small Groups, Big Difference*

“No man is an island,” as the saying goes. Jesus didn’t call just one person to set the world on fire with his love. Rather, he gathered around him a small group: twelve apostles. He formed them, sent them out into the world, and they made a big difference. That’s what Jesus wants to do now. He wants to form new apostles for the New Evangelization, and he wants to begin in parishes and small groups of Christians. He wants to begin with you and a few of your friends. He wants to set the world ablaze, using your small group.

## **How Does Hearts Afire Work?**

It’s simple. Gather a group — or better yet, several groups — of six to twelve people who want to be set on fire with God’s love, find a place to meet, and start the program. There are three stages to the program.

### STAGE ONE

#### **The Two Hearts**

Stage One has two parts: the Immaculate Heart and the Sacred Heart. We begin with the Immaculate Heart, because Mary leads us to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. We begin our journey to the Immaculate Heart with the book *33 Days to Morning Glory* and its accompanying group-retreat program. The goal of this program is to lead us to formally entrust ourselves to Mary. Mary then leads us to the Sacred Heart, which begins the second part of Stage One, the book *Consoling the Heart of Jesus* and its accompanying group-retreat program.

### STAGE TWO:

#### **Wisdom and Works of Mercy**

We begin Stage Two with an upcoming book on our Catholic faith and its accompanying group-study program. The purpose of Stage Two is to give group members a kind of crash-course in Catholic theology and to offer various opportunities, ideas, and support for works of mercy. With this stage, the members of the group would discern and choose an apostolate individually, as a group, or both. They would also be asked to consider helping their parish launch a solemn Divine Mercy Sunday celebration. Moreover, the group could formally register with the Association of Marian Helpers and receive a certificate from the Congregation of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception.

### STAGE THREE:

#### **Keeping the Hearts Afire**

This stage has to do with ongoing formation. After having completed the group retreats of *33 Days to Morning Glory* and *Consoling the Heart of Jesus* and the group study on our Catholic faith; after having undertaken works of mercy; and after being formally recognized by the Association of Marian Helpers, your group will probably want to continue to meet together and grow in your faith. At this point, the Hearts Afire Team will recommend to your group a wide range of further group studies, parish renewal opportunities, and more in-depth training that will suit the desires and needs of your group.

This concludes the big-picture overview of the Hearts Afire Program. Now we're ready to delve more deeply into the first part of Stage One, "The Two Hearts," with an overview of our journey to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, namely, the 33 Days to Morning Glory Group Retreat.

## THE 33 DAYS TO MORNING GLORY GROUP RETREAT

The 33 Days to Morning Glory Group Retreat consists of **Reading**, **Pondering**, and **Meeting (RPM)**. We'll explain these three things now. (They're also covered during the first DVD session, "Orientation.")

### Reading

What will we read? The book, *33 Days to Morning Glory: A Do-It-Yourself Retreat in Preparation for Marian Consecration*. To make the retreat, each participant will need to read this book every day for 33 days. The book is short, and the daily reading is only about two and a half pages. That's less than five minutes a day of reading. As a Retreat Coordinator, you can assure prospective participants that the daily reading is easily doable, even if they aren't used to reading regularly. Also, the style is simple, straightforward, and easy to understand.

### Pondering

What will we ponder? Each day's readings. In other words, throughout the day, we should reflect on the day's reading in our hearts. This kind of prayer is particularly "Marian" insofar as we read in Sacred Scripture that Mary often "pondered" in her mind and heart (see Lk 2:19, 51). A woman who had already made the retreat shared that when she practiced this prayerful pondering of the text, it was as if Mary were always at her side, for instance, when she was cutting veggies in the kitchen.

One practical point: If the goal is to reflect on the daily reading, then it would be a good idea to try to do the daily reading sometime in the morning or the night before. This way you'll have the whole day, every day, to ponder the day's teaching.

Another practical point: the *33 Days to Morning Glory Retreat Companion* is a powerful aid to pondering. Each day it provides questions to answer that are meant to help us ponder the reading from the retreat book. While we should try to answer all the questions each day, we shouldn't look at it as a burdensome homework assignment or a quiz. So tell your group members not to panic if they don't get through all the questions. They're simply aids to pondering.

Objection: Not enough vocal prayers? Some retreat participants may express surprise that there aren't a lot of vocal prayers to say each day. That's because the goal of the retreat is for us to be constantly pondering in our minds and hearts. It's not that we have just one set time of vocal prayer a day, and then we're done. The goal is to be praying all day! So, we're actually challenging people to engage in even more prayer than the traditional version of the 33-day preparation for consecration. Moreover, the prayer style of the retreat aims at helping the participants to assimilate into their minds and hearts exactly *what Marian consecration really means*. This is better accomplished through

prayerful pondering than through saying lots of set prayers. If any of the participants express that they want to pray more vocal prayers, direct them to Appendix One of *33 Days to Morning Glory*, which presents many vocal prayers.

**Problem:** What if I miss a day or two or three? If a participant of the retreat worries that because he missed one or some of the days of reading then his consecration won’t count, reassure him that he can still make the consecration. You should also encourage him to make up the days of missed reading, at least because the daily teaching tends to build on the previous days.

**Warning:** People who prepare to consecrate themselves to Mary will likely experience more intense spiritual battles. Again, Satan hates it when people consecrate themselves to Mary, and so he’ll try everything to tempt them to stop their preparation for the consecration. Encourage those who may be struggling with some of the teachings to persevere, and remind them that the 33 days is a journey that will surely have its ups and downs.

## Meeting

Each meeting will last about an hour and a half and is broken up into three parts: (1) 15-minute Large-group Opening with a 6-minute introduction talk on DVD; (2) 45-minute small-group sharing that draws from the daily questions in the *Retreat Companion*; (3) 30-minute talk on DVD that illustrates the key points of each week and keeps them simple and livable. In a later section (Part Three: The Weekly Meeting), we’ll explore these three parts of the weekly meeting in greater detail. Before then, let’s talk preparation, because the weekly meeting will never come together unless you’re well prepared.

## PART TWO PREPARATION

So, you’re a Retreat Coordinator and you want to run a 33 Days to Morning Glory Group Retreat at your parish (or home). Chances are, since you’re reading this, you’ve already done some of what comes next, but for the sake of being thorough, here are all the steps you’ll want to take if you’re starting from scratch.

[Note: We recommend that you finish reading this guide before actually starting the steps listed below.]

## SEVEN STEPS FOR RUNNING THE RETREAT

### STEP ONE

#### Visit the Website

First, you’ll want to visit the website, [AllHeartsAfire.org](http://AllHeartsAfire.org). There, you’ll get a sense of the program and be introduced to the resources available to help you plan, organize, and implement the retreat. On the website, you’ll want to be sure to visit our “Getting Started” tab and review the various elements available to you such as the 33 Days to Morning Glory Introduction PowerPoint, the specific templates, and the helpful

videos. One of the best tools as you begin preparation for your 33 Days to Morning Glory Group Retreat is the Retreat Coordinator Preparation Checklist. This downloadable checklist walks you through your necessary tasks starting six weeks prior to the beginning of the retreat.

STEP TWO:

**Pick a Date**

If you do decide you want to run the retreat, you’ll need to pick a date to make the consecration. Ideally, you’ll want to start at least 33 days before a Marian feast day. You can find a list of starting dates on the chart below. Obviously, you’ll want to pick a date far enough in advance so as to give yourself time to organize and prepare. Depending on whether or not you already have a group and the support of your pastor, you’ll want to give yourself *at least* two weeks before the starting date, but preferably two months. So, for instance, let’s say it’s May, and you don’t have anyone in mind to make the retreat with you, you haven’t spoken with the pastor, and don’t have the materials. Well, then you’d probably want to shoot for the Feast (Solemnity) of the Assumption of Mary into Heaven, which is celebrated on August 15, as your Consecration Day. The starting date for this feast day is July 13, which would give you two months to prepare.

By the way, because a given feast day will not necessarily fall on the day of the week that’s most convenient for your group — for instance, let’s say your group plans to meet on Wednesdays but the feast is on a Friday — you’ll therefore conclude the 33 days prior to the feast day. That’s no problem. In *33 Days to Morning Glory*, we provide you with prayers that bridge these extra days before Consecration Day (see pp. 172-175).

STARTING DATE CHART

START OF THE 33 DAYS	MARIAN FEAST	CONSECRATION/FEAST DAY
January 9	Our Lady of Lourdes	February 11
February 20*	The Annunciation	March 25
April 10	Our Lady of Fatima	May 13
April 28	The Visitation	May 31
Varies	Immaculate Heart	Saturday after Corpus Christi
June 13	Our Lady of Mt. Carmel	July 16
July 13	The Assumption	August 15
July 20	Queenship of Mary	August 22
August 6	Nativity of Mary	September 8
August 10	Holy Name of Mary	September 12
August 13	Our Lady of Sorrows	September 15
September 4	Our Lady of the Rosary	October 7
October 19	Presentation of Mary	November 21
November 5	Immaculate Conception	December 8
November 9	Our Lady of Guadalupe	December 12
November 29	Mother of God	January 1
December 31	Presentation of the Lord	February 2

\* During a leap year, when February has 29 days, the starting date is February 21.

\* OPTIONAL STEP \*

### **Order Your Retreat Coordinator Kit**

Before you approach your pastor about having the retreat at the parish (the next step), you may want to have your retreat materials to show him. If this is the case, then you will want to order the 33 Days to Morning Glory Retreat Coordinator Kit, which includes a *Retreat Companion* and the DVD talks that go with the retreat and comes with or without the retreat book, *33 Days to Morning Glory*. This may be helpful to have before the meeting with the pastor if he wants the opportunity to look the materials over. There’s also a page on our website to guide you as you prepare to introduce this retreat to your pastor.

STEP THREE:

### **Find a Venue**

Once you have at least a tentative date, you’ll want to decide whether or not you will do the program at your parish, at a friend’s parish, or at some other venue, such as someone’s home. We recommend it be done at a parish, if possible.

To determine whether or not it can be done at your parish or a neighboring parish, you’ll want to call the parish office and schedule a meeting with the pastor. Here’s what you’ll need from the parish/pastor: (1) Permission to run the retreat at and through the parish; (2) a suitable gathering place for your group; (3) a TV and DVD player. Here’s what you’ll want from the parish, but don’t absolutely have to have: (1) Assistance with promotion — more on this later; (2) a special Mass on Consecration Day and/or a special blessing from a priest at the parish; (3) permission to hold a reception at the parish hall following the consecration day.

For resources for presenting the retreat to your pastor, visit the website, [AllHeartsAfire.org](http://AllHeartsAfire.org).

STEP FOUR:

### **Promote the Program**

As baptized Catholics, we’re called to awaken people to a relationship with Christ. Inviting people to join this retreat is an excellent way to do just that. In fact, when it comes to this retreat, the principle, “the more the merrier,” really applies, provided you have enough space to accommodate everyone during the meetings.

Here are ways you can promote the program at the parish:

- Call friends and invite them.
- Send an e-blast to your Catholic friends who live close to the parish and to members of the Legion of Mary, Knights of Columbus, or other groups from the parish that might be interested.
- Insert a retreat flyer into the parish bulletin. (You’ll need permission from the parish to do this.)
- Ask the pastor to invite people to participate in the retreat at the time of the announcements at the Sunday Masses, and be prepared with a sign-up sheet at the back of the church.

- With proper permission, post fliers on the bulletin boards of all the local parishes.
- If your pastor allows, make a 3-minute pulpit announcement after Communion, and have registration tables in your gathering space for people to ask questions and/or register on site. The greatest marketing of your retreat is a heart that’s been transform by Christ, so any time you can share that joy with others, be sure to do so.

On our website, you can see examples of ways to promote the retreat and can even download and print PDFs of parish bulletin announcements, sign-up sheets, and fliers.

One important thing to keep in mind is that if your group grows to more than about 10-12 people, you will want to break them up into small-groups for the discussion period of the weekly meetings. For each small group, you will need to select a Small-group Leader. This is someone who will help run the small groups. The Small-group Leader needs to be a responsible person who is willing to lead group discussion. (See Step Six for more information about the Small-group Leaders.)

#### STEP FIVE:

#### **Order the Retreat Materials**

Once you have a group of people who want to do the retreat, then at least two weeks before your first meeting, you’ll want to order the retreat materials — three weeks would be ideal.

*Retreat Participant Materials.* Each retreat participant will need **two things**: (1) The book, *33 Days to Morning Glory: A Do-It-Yourself Retreat in Preparation for Marian Consecration* and (2) The 33 Days to Morning Glory Retreat Participant Packet. The packet includes the following:

- *33 Days to Morning Glory Retreat Companion*
- Prayer Card with Consecration Prayer
- *Collection of Daily Prayers*, a greeting-card-sized compilation of the daily prayers for each week.
- Rosary (colors will vary)
- Pamphlet on How to Pray the Rosary
- Miraculous Medal
- 8 ½ x 11 full-color Consecration Day Certificate

The total cost for each participant of the 6-week retreat is relatively inexpensive. Please visit our website for prices.

*Retreat Coordinator Materials.* The retreat coordinator will need **two things**: (1) The book, *33 Days to Morning Glory*, and (2) The 33 Days to Morning Glory Retreat Coordinator Kit. The kit includes the following:

- 33 Days to Morning Glory Retreat Participant Packet
  - *33 Days to Morning Glory Retreat Companion*
  - Prayer Card with Consecration Prayer



- *Collection of Daily Prayers*, a greeting-card-sized compilation of the daily prayers that change each week
- Rosary (colors will vary)
- Pamphlet on How to Pray the Rosary
- Miraculous Medal
- 8 ½ x 11 full color Consecration Day Certificate
- *33 Days to Morning Glory: Retreat Talks by Fr. Michael Gaitley, MIC* (DVD set: six sessions, approximately 36-min each)
- *Retreat Coordinator’s Guide*

As the Retreat Coordinator, you will have to pay more than the retreat participants because of the DVDs. (See website for details on pricing.) To cut down on the cost of shipping and handling for everyone, try to order all your materials at the same time and have them shipped to the same location, such as to the parish or to the Retreat Coordinator’s home. The Retreat Coordinator can then distribute the retreat materials at the first meeting and people can reimburse the Retreat Coordinator or parish. (It is not necessary that the participants have the retreat materials before the first meeting.) Also, some people like to increase their order of retreat materials for participants by 10 percent to be able to accommodate any last-minute additions.

**To order your materials**, contact the Member Services Department at the Marian Helpers Center at 1-800-4-MARIAN (1-800-462-7426) minimally two weeks in advance of the first group retreat meeting. As of this writing, the only way to purchase the Retreat Participant Packet and the Retreat Coordinator Kit is through the phone number just mentioned or through our website, AllHeartsAfire.org. Again, all proceeds from the sales of the Hearts Afire programs go to support the good works of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception.

When ordering, please use the following product codes:

PARTICIPANT PACKET (with retreat book) = **PTPKWB**  
 PARTICIPANT PACKET (**without** retreat book) = **PTPK**  
 COORDINATOR KIT (with retreat book) = **COKTWB**  
 COORDINATOR KIT (**without** retreat book) = **COKT**

Please note: The “retreat book” mentioned above is *33 Days to Morning Glory: A Do-It-Yourself Retreat in Preparation for Marian Consecration*. We are offering the Participant Packets and Coordinator Kits “without retreat book” in consideration of people who already own the retreat book. For pricing, please visit our website, AllHeartsAfire.org.

STEP SIX:

### **Train Small-group Leaders**

Once you have your group members signed up, you will need to decide how many small groups your retreat will accommodate. Usually, the small groups consist of 6-12 people. Before the retreat begins, a Small-group Leader for each small group needs to be selected and trained to lead the small-group discussion. Because it is often difficult to

determine exactly how many participants you’ll have for a given retreat, it’s a good idea to hold the training meeting shortly before the first retreat meeting.

During the Small-group Leader training session, you’ll want to go over all of Part Three of this *Retreat Coordinator’s Guide*, entitled “The Weekly Meeting” (see below). In fact, you might want to photocopy or download and print that entire chapter and hand it out to all your Small-group Leaders. A free PDF of this *Retreat Coordinator’s Guide* is available for download at [AllHeartsAfire.org](http://AllHeartsAfire.org). Also, be sure to watch the video tutorial that is also posted on the site.

STEP SEVEN:

### **Plan for Consecration Day**

You will want to make Consecration Day as memorable as possible for the participants of your retreat. To do this, you can read Part Four of this *Retreat Coordinator’s Guide*, “Consecration Day.”

## PART THREE

# THE WEEKLY MEETINGS

Once a week for six weeks, you’ll be meeting with your group for the 33 Days to Morning Glory Group Retreat. We’ve already covered the basics of these 90-minute meetings in Part One: Overview. Here, we’re going to do three things:

- (1) Speak to the importance of rediscovering the gift of Christian fellowship;
- (2) Provide tips for Small-group Leaders as they manage group dynamics;
- (3) Go into greater detail with regard to the structure of the meetings.

Let’s begin now with the first of these three things.

## THE GIFT OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Jesus teaches us that when two or more are gathered in his name, there he is in our midst (see Mt 18:20). Does this apply only to Sunday Mass? No. Our Lord not only wants his followers to come together to worship for the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist, where he becomes sacramentally present, but he also wants them to come together for fellowship and prayer at other times as well. Such coming together of Christians for prayer and deepening in the faith is a good and holy thing. It pleases Jesus, makes him spiritually present, and brings us into his abundant life.

Unfortunately, making a commitment to come together as Christians outside of Sunday Mass is not always easy for people in our modern society. We’ve become so busy that not only do we often find it impossible to make time to be with friends, but many families no longer even take time to share the evening meal together — and when they do, the television is often on, stealing their attention from one another. Moreover, how many of us are becoming so glued to our smartphones that we miss important face-to-face time with those we love?

Because our society is becoming more and more fragmented, dissipated, and distracted, authentic Christian communion is, sadly, becoming something rare. It’s no



wonder, then, that an alarming number of people are depressed, unhappy, and stuck with a growing sense of loneliness.

The antidote to this problem begins with saying yes to communion with others and no to so many routine recreations that involve digitized pseudo-communion. It’s time to relearn the gift of presence, rediscover the joy of group fellowship, and develop new friendships in Christ. It’s the perfect time to begin a group retreat that focuses on an expert of communion: the Mother of God.

Mary is said to have held the Church together after the Ascension of her Son. It was her prayers that brought down her Spouse, the Holy Spirit, on the Apostles, who were as fickle and broken as we are. It was this same Holy Spirit who transformed their tepid love into so many hearts afire, a fire that went on to ignite countless others.

Mary can obtain for us the same graces she gained for the Apostles, but we need to commit to spending time “gathered together in prayer” with her (see Acts 2:42,46; 4:31). It will be good to remind the people who are preparing to enter the retreat of the importance of this moment for them and their families. For while their families may not be making the retreat with them, their enkindled hearts can truly transform whole households. But it starts with the desire and commitment to come together as a group.

While this retreat can be made by people on their own, God gives especially great graces when two or more are gathered in his name. He becomes present in their midst, and the Holy Spirit comes down with fire.

## SMALL-GROUP DYNAMICS — AND SEVEN TIPS FOR MANAGING THEM

Each person is an unrepeatable, unfathomable mystery that should trigger our sense of wonder. Even more so then, a whole group of persons who gather together in Christ, is a mystery worthy of our contemplation and awe. What depth of experience is contained in a single group of six, seven, eight, or more? How many hundreds of hidden persons are brought to each group meeting, held in each participant’s heart with loving concern? How many secret prayers lie unspoken in a small group, waiting to come to the surface if only given an invitation? How many thousand times will the Holy Spirit flash forth in a word, facial expression, or movement of the heart? How many lifelong friendships does Christ want to form during the sacred time of meeting?

The place of the small-group gathering is indeed holy ground, and so it’s fitting that it begin with prayer, as we’ll explain in a later section. But the prayer doesn’t stop at the beginning of the meeting. Just as the 33 Days to Morning Glory Group Retreat is meant to be a time of constant prayerful pondering, so also such prayerful pondering should be part of the small-group meeting. In fact, such prayerful pondering should even intensify. For it’s in a group setting that the Holy Spirit especially likes to give his gifts through insights, lights, and deepening understanding.

See what a responsibility the Small-group Leader has! He needs to facilitate the occasion of grace that is the small-group meetings. To do this, he needs to be a man or woman of prayer both before the meeting and especially during the meeting. He should

pray for the members of his small group, asking the Lord to bless them. He should also ask for the graces he needs to recognize God’s presence in his fellow group members, hear the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, and preserve the bond of charity. He also may need some tips. And that’s what we’ll provide now.

TIP ONE:

### **Truly Listen**

Yes, you will need to have your questions ready and will have lots of things on your mind, but fight the temptation to be distracted when someone is sharing her heart. The Holy Spirit rewards loving attention and will inspire you with the right questions when you listen with your heart.

TIP TWO:

### **Acknowledge the Good**

You might not be able to give a word of affirmation in response to everything someone has said, but it is important for you, as the Small-group Leader, to acknowledge what is shared — and it should be genuine. You should say things like, “Thank you, Sally, for sharing that personal experience,” or perhaps repeat back to the group what the person said, “Bob, that was really interesting there, you said ... .”

TIP THREE:

### **Don’t Push the Silent Participant**

Sometimes you’ll have a participant who rarely speaks, or speaks only when asked. This could be out of shyness or habit, or he could simply be listening and reflecting on what others are saying. Some people need several weeks to get comfortable enough to say anything. If they are put on the spot, even gently, they may be uncomfortable enough not to return. It’s important to show warmth to the silent participant who may feel self-conscious of the fact that he is not opening up. Usually, when he feels safe and accepted, he will begin to open up on his own. So, while it’s true that everyone should come to the meetings with a readiness to share, nobody should be pushed to do so.

Here’s one way to invite the silent participant to speak that doesn’t push the person, “Julie, it looks like you had something to say ... .” To do this genuinely, you’ll want to monitor their eye contact. Also, because many times silent people are forming their sentences in their minds before they speak, you might want to set up some quiet time up front. For example, you could say, “Ok, let’s take 30 seconds and just think about this one as it is an especially good question.” Then monitor the silent person’s eye contact. Finally, affirming them when they do speak up gives them the confidence to continue to contribute.

TIP FOUR:

### **Lovingly Direct the Talkative Participant**

While some participants may be quiet, others may be quite lively and talkative. The challenge for the Small-group Leader is to keep the talkative participant involved and excited but also to make sure that he doesn’t dominate the conversation. The key is to

direct his conversation, and this will take practice and patience. Here are a few examples of how to direct his conversation: If he’s talking for too long, gently break in and say, “You’re covering a lot of interesting (exciting, important, etc.) territory, Thomas. Let’s back up a second and see if anyone else has something to add. What do you think, Judy?” Or, “Let’s stop there, Luke. That’s an interesting experience. Has any one had a similar experience?” The principle is to lovingly direct the conversation of the talkative participant and to draw other participants back into the conversation.

TIP FIVE:

**Hand Off the “Problem Person” to the Appropriate People**

It’s rare, but it does happen. Someone in the group may engage in inappropriate sharing or repeatedly “off the wall” opinions. It’s important that the Small-group Leader bring in the priest or other pastoral leader for one-on-one guidance in dealing with the problem person. The Small-group Leader should also bring this person to the attention of the Retreat Coordinator.

Of course, not every “problem person” will require this kind of action. In some cases, it’s simply a matter of someone being overly knowledgeable and they just need to be roped in and made part of the solution, perhaps an assistant to the leader. For example, taking someone aside outside of the group and saying, “Wow, Mark, you know a ton about Marian Dogmas, and that’s great, but it appears that every time a question comes up, you talk about one of them and the group gets a little confused. Let’s do this: I really need some help getting some of the members in the group to interact. How about if you and I remain quiet for the first 60 seconds and then, if no one is speaking, I’ll nod to you and you can jump in with a relevant comment, but remember to really encourage the others to speak.”

TIP SIX:

**Attend to the Sometimes-Absent Participant**

It’s ideal that every participant attend every meeting, but sometimes this is not possible. So what do you do if a participant misses one or more meetings? If the participant misses the first meeting, make sure you introduce him at the second meeting, and give him the opportunity to express why he’s missing the retreat and what he hopes to gain by it.

If a participant misses any other meeting, you may want to arrange for him (and any other absentee members from other small groups) to come early to the next group meeting, and then play the DVD talk that he missed. Of course, you’ll have to make sure that you can use the gathering room earlier and that you can come early to the next meeting to set up the DVD talk.

If the participant misses the first two meetings, or two consecutive meetings, he may want to consider starting the program again, with another group. This would need to be his decision. If he decides to continue with the group, he should be encouraged to do all the make-up reading before he attends the next meeting. Moreover, you might want to reiterate the importance of attendance, depending on the reason for his absence.

Make sure that you cover the procedures for absences in your first group meeting. It’s worth emphasizing that the presence and participation of each member is important.

Each member should let the group leader know in advance of any anticipated absences. And as a Small-group Leader, you’ll need to contact your absent participant before he returns to the small group and update him on any announcements, as well as coordinate his review of the DVD talk he missed.

TIP SEVEN:

### **Hand Out the “10 Commandments for Small-group Success”**

This document, which is available on our website, offers 10 guidelines for the small-group discussion. The Small-group Leader should know them well, and will hand them out at the first meeting. The guidelines are as follows:

1. **Be willing to share.** Participants should come to the meetings with a joyful readiness to share. The small-group experience depends on sharing. You never know how much something you share may help another. Sometimes you may not want to share, and that’s okay.
2. **Let others share.** Everyone needs to be given an opportunity to share. Give others the chance to talk. Do not fear silence. Try to give “equal time” to everyone. No one person should dominate the small group’s time with lengthy sharing, even if unintentional. It is the Small-group Leader’s role to ask people to observe this rule should someone get “carried away.”
3. **Do your homework.** Participants are expected to do their best to do the daily prayer, reading, and writing at home. This provides the basis for the small-group time. If you haven’t done your homework, give others a chance to speak first.
4. **Stay focused.** The small-group sessions are to be focused on reading and questions, not on personal problems, theological opinions, gossip, or promotion of a cause — even a worthy one.
5. **Don’t give advice.** It is not appropriate to give advice to someone during the small-group sessions. If a person seeks advice from you, speak to one another at the end of the meeting.
6. **Don’t lecture.** This is not a time for teaching or lecturing, unless the Small-group Leader is explaining something related to the subject matter at hand.
7. **Be respectful.** Everyone’s experience with the reading and questions is valid. If you disagree with something, do so respectfully and charitably. Never ridicule or cut down another person. When someone else is speaking, we should be listening.
8. **Keep confidentiality.** A promise of confidentiality is asked and expected of each group member, giving one another freedom to share sensitive feelings or personal information relevant to the reading and questions, if desired. However, this is not the time for confession or counseling.
9. **Follow the Leader.** It is important to give support and cooperation to the Small-group Leader who is charged with the responsibility of seeing that these group guidelines are followed.
10. **Enjoy yourself!**

[Inspiration for many of these commandments is taken with permission from the ideas of Carol Marquardt.]

## STRUCTURE OF THE MEETINGS

Recall that the weekly, 90-minute meeting is divided into three parts: (1) 15-minute Large-group Opening; (2) 45-minute small-group sharing; (3) 30-minute talk on DVD. Here, we’ll look more closely at each of these three parts.

### LARGE-GROUP

#### **Opening** (15 Minutes)

You’ll begin each session by coming together in a large group. Within that large group, you’ll begin with a prayer and watch the 6-minute introduction for that session. Begin each session at least with a Hail Mary. Some groups enjoy singing a Marian hymn instead, and that is fine, too.

This brief, large-group time is also a perfect opportunity for the Retreat Coordinator to make any announcements. Allow 15 minutes for this time and the transition of all participants to their small groups. (If the entire group consists only of one small group, then there’s obviously no need to break up into smaller groups.)

**IMPORTANT:** During your very first Large-group Opening, the DVD segment, “Orientation,” will last 16 minutes instead of the usual 6. So, the very first Large-group Opening will last about 25 minutes instead of the usual 15. This will leave only 35 minutes (instead of the usual 45) for the small-group sharing, but this is no problem because the group members will not yet have read the materials. In fact, if the Retreat Coordinator ordered the materials for the group, as will often be the case, this will be the first time the participants will be receiving their materials. The Small-group Leaders should hand out the materials at the beginning of the first small-group meeting. Please see page 13 in the *Retreat Companion* for the first Small-group Session Outline.

### SMALL-GROUP

#### **Sharing** (45 Minutes)

Small groups (about 6-10 people, depending on your group and available space) meet for a 45-minute discussion time that follows the small-group session outlines at the end of each week. The small-group dynamic is perhaps the most important aspect of the retreat. Within a small-group setting, true Christian fellowship and communion can grow.

Instruct the Small-group Leaders to be sure to read the Weekly Sessions at the end of each week in the *Retreat Companion* before each gathering. There the preselected focus questions for each week are listed. Also, you should register your Small-group Leaders on our website [www.AllHeartsAfire.org](http://www.AllHeartsAfire.org) so they can receive weekly, helpful tips that will help them to make the most of the small-group experience.

The small-group time is divided as follows:

1. Prayer: This is the given week’s prayer from the *Retreat Companion*. The group should pray it together.
2. Personal Response: Particular questions selected from the week will be used for small-group sharing.
3. Petition: The Small-group Leader will recite the daily closing invocations of the Holy Spirit within the group, and the members respond.

The above-mentioned prayer, personal-response questions, and petitions are provided in the Retreat Companion at the end of each week as the Small-group Session Outline.

#### LARGE-GROUP

##### **DVD Talk** (30 Minutes)

Following the small-group discussion and prayer, participants reconvene in the large group to listen to a talk on the topic of the week. After watching the DVD, the Retreat Coordinator may make announcements, briefly introduce the topic for the upcoming week, and its corresponding prayer. In fact, it's a good idea to close each meeting by praying the prayer for the upcoming week. (During the last week, you can pray the prayer of that week.)

## PART FOUR CONSECRATION DAY

Consecration Day will be a deeply significant day for you and your group members, and as such, we recommend that you celebrate it with a certain degree of solemnity. Below are tips and suggestions for preparing to celebrate your consecration before, on the day of, and after your consecration.

### **Before Consecration Day**

In anticipation of Consecration Day, here are a few ways to prepare. We recommend that you start preparing for your Consecration Day at least three or more weeks in advance.

- Ask your pastor if you can have a special ceremony (preferably after Mass) on the day of your consecration. (It helps to plan this at the very start of the retreat.)
- Print up or order copies of the Morning Glory Consecration Certificate for each member of your group if they don't already have them.
- If you wish, you may order miraculous medals, scapulars, rosaries, or chaplets for each member of your group. If you do plan on ordering them, we recommend ordering them by the third week of the retreat to ensure availability and that they are shipped in time.
- Arrange to have a reception after the ceremony. (If you're doing this in your parish, make sure that you have the proper permissions for reserving the room, etc.)
- Invite family and friends to the ceremony and reception.
- You may wish to have each participant give a rose to Mary after their consecration. This, and many other beautiful gestures, are not required, but they do require planning.

### **On Consecration Day**

These are the basic steps for the consecration ceremony:

- Have everyone meet after Mass (if you can attend Mass together) and recite the consecration prayer (individually or collectively).



- Ask them to sign their own handwritten prayer or printed certificate.
- Have the priest (if he is willing and able) give a special blessing.
- You may also wish to conclude with a Marian hymn.
- If you would like to share your celebration with the HAPP<sup>SM</sup> team, mail or e-mail us a picture of your group so we can post it on our website.
- After the ceremony, have a reception with food and decorations. This is only a suggestion, and you can make it as elaborate or as simple as you like. A reception gives your group time to celebrate the conclusion of your 33-day journey together. You may also want to invite your family, friends, and the pastor to the reception as well.
- Structure the reception however you wish. Some ideas include asking a few group members to share their experience with the rest of the group or taking pictures.

### After Consecration Day

After Consecration Day, it’s likely that your group will want to continue to meet. You have several options in this regard:

- Continue to the second part of Stage One of the Hearts Afire programs, “The Sacred Heart of Jesus,” with the Consoling the Heart of Jesus Group Retreat.
- Take a break from the weekly meeting and begin monthly “Fueling the Flame” retreats before starting the Consoling the Heart of Jesus Group Retreat. These retreats draw from the many treasures in the book, *33 Days to Morning Glory*. The topics for these retreats deepen your Marian consecration and provide for further group discussion. See the website for more details.
- Get involved on the HAPP<sup>SM</sup> website. Read what other Retreat Coordinators and Small-group Leaders are doing. Look for updates on the launch of Stage Two, “Wisdom and Works of Mercy.”
- Keep in contact with your group members to the extent that you are able. These friendships in Christ can provide an important support in our own spiritual growth.

## CONCLUSION

We hope this guide answered many of your questions and gave you a sense of the responsibilities of and options for Retreat Coordinators. If you still have questions, we encourage you to sign up as a leader on [AllHeartsAfire.org](http://AllHeartsAfire.org), read our FAQ page on the website, or e-mail us at [HAPP@marian.org](mailto:HAPP@marian.org). Also, don’t forget to check out our website for helpful resources such as bulletin announcements, checklists, and time lines.

If you think that the Lord is calling you to be a Retreat Coordinator, we hope and pray that you answer this important call and that you have a very blessed time. Also, keep in mind that the Lord doesn’t call the perfect to work in his vineyard. Rather, his merciful Heart prefers to select everyday, imperfect people like you and me. All we have to do is give him our “Yes!” just like Mary did.

