



# *The Vision and the Dream*



**A CALL TO PRAYER  
IN RESPONSE TO  
THE USCCB  
NATIONAL PASTORAL INITIATIVE  
FOR MARRIAGE**

By  
Fr. Chuck Gallagher, S.J.  
and  
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Pastoral and Matrimonial Renewal Center  
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Thank you for praying  
and leading others to pray.  
May God bless you



The Pastoral and Matrimonial Renewal Center  
may be contacted via email at [PMRCusa@msn.com](mailto:PMRCusa@msn.com)  
or through our web site  
**[www.livinginlove.org](http://www.livinginlove.org)**

Other PMRC programs to enrich and empower the Sacrament of Matrimony and prepare couples to marry in a sacramental way include:

**Living in Love**

a day and a half, life-changing retreat workshop for married couples that provides a conversion of heart and habit to a Theology of the Body lifestyle

**Preparing to Live in Love**

a comprehensive, experiential marriage preparation course based on John Paul II's Theology of the Body that combines the benefits of a personal mentor with the practical life skills, insights, tools, principles, and strategies that make it possible to live in love for a lifetime

Other Booklets:

Please, visit: [www.livinginlove.org](http://www.livinginlove.org)  
for the latest listing of resources available

**A CALL TO PRAYER**

It is in grateful thanksgiving for the leadership of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops in launching their National Pastoral Initiative on Marriage that we offer this call to prayer to every Catholic in the United States and around the world. We believe that the American Bishops are prophetic in their vision and powerfully led by the Holy Spirit in asking us all to build a culture of marriage in every parish and diocese.

In many ways, we are all dependent on couples to set the standard for love, belonging, faithfulness and trust in the church as well as in society in general. So much depends on marriage. The couple sets the level of love in the family. Their delight in each other can make the home sing, just as their discord can scar everyone present. The family is, as we know, "the first school of love." It is there that we learn loving sacrifice, unconditional acceptance, affirmation, trust, openness, compassion and forgiveness, or we learn anger, criticism, pride, apathy and isolation. The patterns of relating that we observe in our home of origin can be passed on for generations.

The Sacrament of Matrimony is personal but not private. In particular, Catholic sacramental couples can reveal and manifest Christ's love for His bride the church by the way they give themselves completely to each other as gift. Couples need grace to marry well every day, and the church is called to be fully invested in each and every marriage. Our support and encouragement ought not to end on the wedding day.

Through this simple yet profound prayer campaign, we

hope to harness the prayer of the Body of Christ to help build a culture that nurtures marriage and family and empowers the sacrament of matrimony for the sake of the church and the world.

Our rich Catholic teaching on marriage, so beautifully articulated in Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body, is the firm foundation upon which we will build marriages and "marriage building" parishes. As a faith community, we must also provide specialized programs, retreats and resources that can evangelize and offer practical assistance in living out the full vision of Matrimony in the church. To that end, the USCCB has created a special website, [www.foryourmarriage.org](http://www.foryourmarriage.org), intended for a broad public audience to connect couples with available resources and provide enrichment and catechesis. We have personally witnessed the miracles, conversions, enthusiasm and energy that can be unleashed in a parish as a result of a new evangelization that Pope John Paul II called for. They offer real hope for the next generation of matrimony and for the renewal in the church.

Unlike those necessarily specialized approaches, this prayer effort is unique because of its inclusivity, simplicity, and broad appeal. It is an invitation offered to every member of the Body of Christ. Just as we all come together at a family wedding to delight in and support a couple, we can continue to come together as a faith family, at least in prayer, to provide the grace that every couple needs as they seek to become one in mind, heart, and affection and to live out their vocation to be a sign to us of Christ's passionate, intimate, permanent, and life-giving love.

Prayer is something we all can do, from the youngest grade

## OTHER RESOURCES

For a complete list of national resources and ideas to enrich marriage and build a culture of marriage in our parishes be sure to visit the USCCB website

**[www.foryourmarriage.org](http://www.foryourmarriage.org)**

Booklets to aid in Praying for Marriage and Family

**Ask, Search, Knock** by Fr Johnny Doherty  
a companion booklet for anyone praying for marriages and families that helps call to mind specific people in various circumstances of life.

**Father, It's Us** by Fr Chuck Gallagher  
a prayer book specifically for couples. A night table book one can turn to in the special circumstances of our married lives.

**The Passionate Couple**, by Fr Chuck Gallagher  
a refreshingly incarnational review of the theology and spirituality of Matrimony. It enthusiastically calls husbands and wives to a passionate prayerfulness and a prayerful passion

Available through  
The Pastoral and Matrimonial Renewal Center  
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school child to the most elderly shut in. Each of us can dedicate one hour a month to focus on the couples in our parish and lift them up to the Lord in prayer. We do not need to leave our homes, learn or teach a skill, or have any particular talent or education to sincerely care about the families around us and the couples who are at the heart of each family. All we need to do is commit to pray for a specific hour on the same day each month.

An incarnational approach can make that hour engaging and exciting. “Ask Search Knock” is a simple prayer booklet designed to surface people whom we know in every circumstance relevant to marriage. We can bring to mind and lift up in prayer the future spouses of our children and grandchildren, couples preparing for marriage, having babies, leading and teaching others to live in love, those struggling, divorcing, nursing sick spouses or grieving the loss of a spouse. With their faces and names in view, our prayer can be particularly sincere, personal, and filled with affection. Those of us who are ourselves married can also find the hour a great opportunity to open to the graces that we need to be more generous toward our own spouse and to give thanks for the gift that he or she is to us.

This guide is intended to help spread the vision and the dream of what the Sacrament of Matrimony is intended to reveal and manifest in the church as well as offer practical strategies to help us invite every member of the parish to pray one hour a month for marriage and family. It will make our experience of that hour of prayer more meaningful and efficacious. Together, we can make a difference.

With our love,  
Ron and Kathy Feher

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### Father Charles Gallagher S.J.

Fr. Chuck is a renowned Champion for Marriage and Family, and a prophet for our times. He was the driving force behind the Worldwide Marriage Encounter Movement that has so effectively empowered the Sacrament of Matrimony and released the joy of couple-love since 1968. As its first Executive Director, he spread the ME weekend experience to all 50 states in the U.S. and 56 foreign countries. A man of vision and relentless passion, Father Chuck is the Founder of the Pastoral and Matrimonial Renewal Center which is dedicated to revitalizing the Sacrament of Matrimony, developing Catholic Parish Communities, and empowering lay leadership in the Church. He has authored hundreds of books, booklets, tapes, videos, programs and powerful retreat experiences whose impact has been life-changing for priests and laity alike.

### Ron and Kathy Feher

Ron and Kathy are the authors of *Preparing to Live in Love*, *Living in Love*, and *Living in Love Every Day*. They are also the current Directors of the Pastoral and Matrimonial Renewal Center. Joyfully married for 39 years and parents of 10 children, they offer 34 years of experience in evangelization, catechesis, parish renewal and parishioner empowerment at the parish, diocesan, national and international levels as speakers, adult facilitators, and retreat masters.

Father,

I come to You in wonder and awe to celebrate and honor You.

You have created me to be your treasured child and have poured out your love and affection on me all my life. You have truly held me in the palm of Your hand, and seen me with eyes of tenderness.

I thank you Father, for the wonderful mystery of the love of a man and woman in marriage. Through your beloved Son you have made that love an image of your own intimacy in the Trinity. May it always be a powerful sign to us of Christ's passionate love for His bride, the Church.

I am committing myself to this Campaign of Prayer for Married Couples to support your beloved couples, and to build in my own heart a special affection for them. I promise to be their advocate before you in beseeching the graces they need to live out their love commitment fully and devotedly.

I ask you to bless and empower my efforts and to help me call others to join in this chorus of petition to you on behalf of our brothers and sisters who have dedicated their lives to one another in the Sacrament of Matrimony.

Father, Thank you for sending your Spirit to cover the whole Church with a blanket of prayer to honor and nurture husbands and wives. May we all be one Father through your beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

Amen



## A PERSONAL NOTE

From Fr. Chuck

Before you start to read this booklet, I wish to express my thoughts of gratitude and admiration. Your wanting to involve yourself in this Campaign of Prayer for married couples shows how graced you have been by the Lord and how generously you have responded to His presence in your life.

You are, no doubt, a person of faith, one who truly believes in the power of prayer not just in emergencies but as a normal part of a full life. One who not only is personally committed to a life of prayer but who also reaches out to others to bring forth their capability to pray. You truly believe that more is accomplished by prayer than by anything else we can do.

Furthermore, I believe that you are a person of vision and hope, one who sees the latent potential of marital love and what it can do to change the world. This ambition of yours to desire greatness for our sacramental couples is a magnificent gift to the whole Church. Because of you, the Body of Christ will throb with new life.

This Campaign of Continuous Prayer for Marriage and Family Life is totally dependent upon the good will, inspiration, and commitment of those who are willing to pray. It is your dedication that makes this all possible. You will be making a difference in the quality of life in numerous couples and of the Parish as a whole.

So, I can't thank you enough for your willingness to be a part of this Campaign. You are absolutely essential to

the dream of spreading this blanket of prayer over all our couples wherever they may be. Know how important you are and what a blessing you are to the whole People of God.

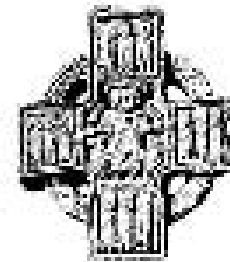
As your priest, I recognize your goodness and what a contribution you are making to married couples and to the Church at large. Your prayers are truly a sweet incense rising to heaven pleasing to the Lord. You may never know all the effects of your efforts to stir up a cloud of prayer. That will have to wait until the Lord welcomes you in heaven with outstretched arms and says: “Well done thou good and faithful servant.” There will be countless couples there to greet you whose love for one another has been magnified by your passion for their sacramental commitment.

“You are the salt of the earth. You are the leaven in the mass.” Through you, many, many couples will experience the more abundant life the Lord has promised. Thank you for praying and leading others to pray. May God bless you and your efforts in His name.



Penance is quite simple. It is saying yes to my no and no to my yes, in any area of my life. It could be giving up my favorite TV show, fasting, giving up snacks, paying attention to a friend who talks too much, doing a chore I don't like with a smile, giving up an hour's sleep, being on time if I'm always a late comer, going out of my way to take someone home, spending less money on extras, giving up a grudge or the remote control. Penance actually put us back in control of our lives through self-denial. We are so used to doing what we want, when we want. It is good to hold ourselves back and put a clamp on ourselves occasionally.

You will be amazed at how the power of penance can fuel your hour of prayer.



human resources have been exhausted and we have abandoned all other hope. As members of the Body of Christ, we are not limited only to the realm of human possibilities.

### **Penance and Prayer**

In this matter of prayer, consider where we are with the practice of penance. Jesus told us some devils are only cast out by prayer and fasting. The two experiences are interlocked. In our day, we are inclined to be rather lax about penance. We think that is old Church. Isn't it interesting that a society that jogs relentlessly and tortures ourselves at the gym or health club, looks upon penance as unreasonable or medieval? Exercising is good. It helps our cardiovascular system, cleans out the gook we have placed there through our eating habits. Penance is to the soul what jogging is to the body. It clears out the debris.



### **DEDICATION**

It is a great joy to dedicate this booklet to Fr. Johnny Doherty, C.S.S.R., whose idea it was to call the Body of Christ to prayer for marriage and family, and to those of you who have joined us in opening our hearts to the Father for an hour of prayer each month. We go forth with enthusiasm to ask the Lord to heal, empower, and encourage couples in their love for each other, to bless their children, their families, their parish family and all of us who rely on the Sacrament of Matrimony as a living Sign of the intimate and passionate love of Christ. We give thanks for the special graces that have been bestowed on those who are praying and for all of the miracles and blessings already granted to those for whom we have prayed.

There is always more available in our relationship with God, more intimacy, more grace, more joy, more awareness of His presence. His consolations are limitless. The lives of the Saints are replete with wise counsel for prayer. We encourage you to do as much spiritual reading as possible.

### **Activating the Holy Spirit**

Pray for the power to pray. That can be a new idea for us. There can be a tendency to just turn on the prayer button and start. We need divine intervention in order to pray. Prayer is not a human capability. We can't merely turn on the prayer switch and begin to pray. Before praying, turn to the Holy Spirit and let Him pray through you. Prayer is a divine activity, not a human one. Often, we don't even think about that. We need to seek the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to take us beyond our humanity. Put aside what you are thinking about, what you think will be the subject matter of your prayer, and let the Holy Spirit guide you into prayer. Let it be the power of the Holy Spirit that lifts your mind and heart to the Father.

Often, when praying, either for ourselves or for others, we seek a response from Him merely on the natural plane. We will be more attentive to the Lord if we are alert to the charisms and gifts of the Holy Spirit: healing, wisdom, forgiveness, and understanding rather than the indications of human competence such as good advice, practices that promote mental health, and worldly prudence. Human gifts are fine. We should use them to the degree they are effective. However, many of the difficulties people face in life call for much more than what those talents and resources offer. We don't set our sights high enough. We tend to look for and ask for God's intervention only when all

I asked God for strength that I might achieve.  
I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey.

I asked for help that I might do greater things.  
I was given infirmity that I might do better things.

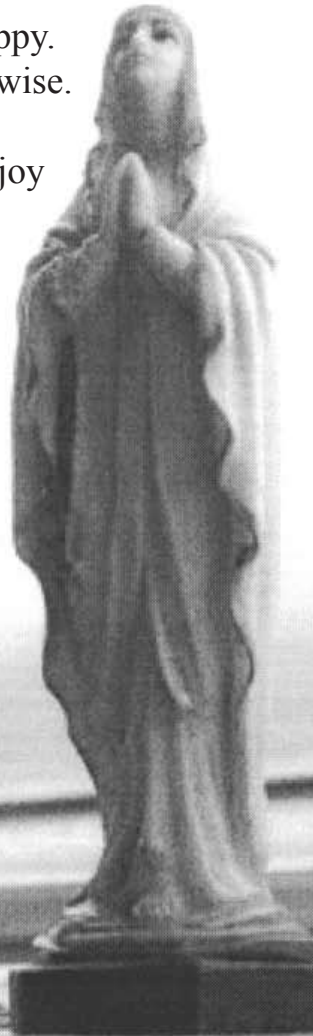
I asked for riches that I might be happy.  
I was given poverty that I might be wise.

I asked for all things that I might enjoy  
life.  
I was given life that I might enjoy  
all things.

I got nothing that I asked for but  
everything I hoped for.

Despite myself,  
my prayers were answered

I am among all men  
most richly  
blessed.



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not ours.



As a result of consciously joining ourselves with the Father, we will begin to look for His view of things rather than to present Him with our own. That is hard, but it is truly what prayer is all about. God's view is so different, that, at first, it takes us aback. We don't know what to make of it. We can't conceive having a full life any other way than what we have been brought up to believe is good and which everyone else aspires to. This is the "death to self", Jesus talked about. Giving up our own way for the Lord's. Our prayer is, above all, to put ourselves in God's hands, to have Him point the way, to choose Him.

A magnificent prayer, offered by a Confederate soldier, as he lay wounded on the battlefield during the Civil War, has some beautiful and powerful thoughts.



other way around. Instead of us going to Him and telling Him what we want to talk about, we ought to ask Him what is on His mind. Haven't we been frustrated with a friend, on occasions, when the topics we talk about are always his or hers? The suggestion here is not to prohibit initiating conversation but simply not to do it all the time. We speak before we listen because we have something so strongly on our minds.

We think we can't help ourselves. We want to get this settled, but there are occasions when, if we just listened, we would be in a completely different frame of mind and our problem would be solved. This is one reason it is always good to start with Prayer of Praise.

Of course, there is nothing wrong in seeking help from God. He is a loving Father and wants us, his children to be happy. He enjoys so much giving us pleasure. It is just that our prayer can be more than that. We should give Him a chance to help us to be happy, His way, rather than merely asking for the way to happiness that we have already defined. He made us. He knows what is best for us. All of us have had the experience of being convinced that if we could only have this thing or that person, we would be completely happy and wouldn't need anything else. Our life would be fulfilled. Then we receive it or him or her and we're back again shortly with something else we need, or worse, we are not so pleased with what we sought in the first place and received from Him. That is not a horrible flaw. It is so human, but it should clearly show us that we don't always know what is in our own best interests. We should look to the Father and His plans for us. In other words, be responsive to Him. Receptivity is the predisposition we would like to bring to our prayer. His will be done,

## 1. MATRIMONY, SIGN AND SACRAMENT

Have you ever noticed how everyone delights in and is drawn to a couple in love? We all rush to engagement parties, bridal showers, and weddings. We love movies and books about true love and melt at the thought of a first kiss or a marriage proposal. When the love between a man and a woman is sincere, passionate, unselfish, other-centered, committed and intimate, it is obviously special and significant. The Church tells us that it takes on the quality of a "sign" for us, a sign of Christ's total and permanent love. In Matrimony, His presence and His love is made manifest so beautifully and so powerfully that it transfigures the "sign" into a "Sacrament."

Married couples have a very specific job in the church, a special vocation to be this sign of Christ's love for His Bride, the Church. That really is the "job description" of husbands and wives. They are sent to one another to love each other in the same way that Christ loves the church. It is truly awesome how well they can do that. The fundamental reason they can is that sexuality and spirituality are completely integrated. Sexuality creates an atmosphere of other-centered generosity and responsiveness in which sexual love can be profoundly holy. If we believe that "God is Love" then it follows that our way of loving is our "spirituality." We cannot separate our way of loving from our sexual identity, that is, both our physiological gender and our masculine or feminine relational patterns.

It is not a coincidence that most people's concept of God's love is strongly influenced by their ideal of married sexual love. The closest thing in human terms to the intimacy of the Trinity is the married couple. We learn about the pas-

sionate self-donation of Christ when we witness a man and a woman giving themselves to each other in marriage.

As Catholics, we believe that the Sacrament of Matrimony is intended to be a sign of Christ's Love for the Church. The sacrament is not the wedding, the "sign" is not the rings. Instead it is the couple's love relationship, lived out everyday that is a visible sign of God's love to us, and that sign is read in every home and in every parish. When husbands and wives are generous in their mutual self donation, unselfish in their forgiveness, open, trusting, intimate, and passionately life-giving to the other, that sign is a "Sacrament" where the real presence of Jesus is experienced and efficacious. Children learn what it means to belong by watching Mom and Dad belong to each other. Everyone learns how to trust by watching a couple deeply in love respond to each other.

It is possible, and it is necessary that these "signs" be faithful witnesses of Christ's love. Every marriage "models" marriage to the next generation, and plants pictures in a child's brain of what is normal, and how one should act toward one's spouse. Children can learn about intimacy and unity, compassion, affirmation, openness and trust, or they can learn criticism, control, irresponsibility, anger, and isolation. Furthermore, every marriage helps to set the "standard of love" in the home, the parish, and the community.

We might ask ourselves, "What makes marriage sacramental? What transforms it into Matrimony?" Certainly the openness of the couple to the grace of God and their personal willingness to prioritize their relationship and live it out in a generous, self-less way, but it is also the Church

A beautiful way to open our conversation with the Father is to tell him exactly where we are with ourself and life, right at this moment. Describe fully what is going on inside you, how you are feeling and what your circumstances look like to you. Let it all out. Be completely open, then listen. Let Him talk to you. He will share with you how He feels about what you have just communicated. He will reach out to you, as you are, and tell you the pleasure of having you as a daughter or son. Just be still, don't debate or try to explain further. You've done that already. He understands you completely. This is His time. Just give it over to Him and let our Father tell you what He thinks of you and how He finds you to be.

### **Listening**

Another general tip for successful prayer is that the ears are more important than the mouth. That is true in our human communications and equally so in our conversations with the Lord. Too often we clutter our relationships with a lot of verbiage. We talk too much and don't do enough listening. Some of this is our difficulty with silence. We don't know what to do with it. When alone, we are likely to put on the TV or radio to fill the void. When with those we love, we find it difficult merely to contemplate each other. We have almost a compulsion to talk instead of silently delighting in the comfort of the other's presence. Try closing your eyes and allowing yourself to be aware of that other person. Simply let the person's being there take over our consciousness.

We often talk too much in prayer. The Lord hardly has a chance to get a word in edgewise. One difficulty with this is that we establish the agenda with God. It should be the



The natural response to being in the presence of God is praise. We are overwhelmed at the goodness of the Lord and the love He pours out on our behalf. The more we stop to think about the wonderful love of married couples in our parish, the more we will see God's presence manifest in them and we will begin to praise Him for blessing them and blessing us by putting them in our community. A good way to cultivate our appreciation and gratitude is to call to mind a specific couple whom we admire for their extraordinary tenderness and closeness toward one another and hold them up to God. Mention all the qualities you see in them as a couple. We will naturally praise the couple for their response to God's invitation to love and praise God for empowering them to love so profoundly.

### Sharing myself in prayer

Part of our approach to God is to examine where we are with ourself and others before we pray. Too often, we turn prayer on like a water faucet as if to say, "Well, I want to pray, so I'll pray". We know that doesn't work well when conversing with a spouse, a family member, or even a friend. We sometimes end up in a fight, without intending to, because we had a hidden agenda. If there is an emotional charge under the subject matter to be discussed, it will affect the way we talk and what the listener hears. So, find out where you are as you begin to pray. Are you happy, sad, eager to pray, or dutiful, at peace with the world or looking for a fight, discouraged, excited, or enthused? None of these are bad, but our condition is important to know before we go to the Lord. Any of these mindsets will precondition the way we pray and, above all, the way we listen in prayer.

that holds up the vision of what their marriage can be, and it is us, the Church as the Body of Christ, who encourages, supports, and prays their love into fruition.

What can make the difference? We can! Our prayer can fuel a couple's efforts to love. Too often couples experience being married "at" the church but not "in" the church. Belonging to the Body of Christ can provide the grace that turns the ordinary water of marriage into the wine of Matrimony. Fed by the Eucharist and nurtured by all the Sacraments, a couple that is woven into the Body of Christ can reach their full potential to live in love. We are relying on our sacramental couples to be a living sign of the kind of love that is possible in Christ, and our prayer can make the difference.



The impact of our prayer will be enormous because the influence of the couple relationship is not contained within the nuclear family. Joy spreads as well as anger. We

laugh about getting a traffic ticket because the cop had a fight with his wife, but the truth is that some of the toxic spillover of marriages that have not been fueled by prayer leaves scars for generations. On the other hand, when the Sacrament of Matrimony is life-giving, it also spills over to encourage and to heal.

So much of the pain and brokenness in our youth today is sexual brokenness. For chastity to flourish our teens need to see marriages that are worth waiting for. We need to empower the Sacrament of Matrimony to be a light in the darkness and allow the tender love of husbands and wives to bring Christ's presence into the world. That is the vision and the dream. Only prayer can make it happen.

The Movement of Continuous Prayer is a call to share responsibility for the life blood and the richness of the Church; for, we are a people who believe in a God who is Love, and those who live in love, live in God, and God in them.



with the Lord. We might choose to begin with standard forms of vocal prayer like the Hail Mary, Our Father, Act of Contrition, and the Rosary. These are commonly available, already created for us to use, gifts from our brothers and sisters in the faith community. They are simple and familiar. Or, we could take a short passage from Scripture and let the words wash over us in humble reflection. The Gospel of the daily Mass can always be found in the Missalette in Church or online at [www.USCCB.org](http://www.USCCB.org). These are unpretentious ways to pray.

The method of prayer you use is entirely up to you. There is no form of prayer that can be a failure. So, vocal prayer, pondering Scripture, or simply speaking to God from the heart all have great value. It is good to experiment with various forms of prayer in order to discover what fits you best.

Predominately, our prayer tends to be a prayer of petition. It is only natural and good to appeal to our Father to make life better for us. We are His sons and daughters and know He desires our happiness. We have confidence in His eagerness to fill up anything lacking in us. So, bringing the Father our requests is perfectly in order. We just overdo it. It would be wonderful to simply be there with Him, saying nothing, doing nothing, not looking for anything. Merely enjoying a moment of total personal presence, drawing into our consciousness a full awareness of Him. Remember the words of Peter at the Transfiguration: "Lord, it is good for us to be here". The wonder of the Lord amazed him, took him over. We should seek to experience our Father so totally that the words explode out of us: "Lord, it is good for me to be here".

so that we can understand someone other than ourselves. Oddly enough, it can be easy for us to forget God's part in our hour of prayer. We can make it a one way street. We focus on what is on our mind and how we are saying it rather than desiring to make His thoughts and interests paramount to our own. Prayer is part of the overall Church experience. Ways of praying have been developed through the prayerfulness of holy men and women under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit over the whole life of the Church. We should draw upon the richness of the Church, in all its many dimensions, to increase our own potential and add to our confidence in prayer. While prayer, like relationship and intimate sharing, is most personal, we can establish some basic principles that generally apply, and we will talk about prayer orientations and values that are applicable to all.

Most of us give notional assent to the need to pray and accept that prayer should be important to us. Moreover, we do pray, and have even committed to praying for a special hour every month. That is so good of us. It shows our heart is in the right place. The next step is to develop an urgency to pray, to build a deep fire within us that yearns to find the Lord and communicate with Him. If we do, personal intimacy with Him will reach beyond being a nice part of our life and become integral to our whole way of being. We can become eager for our time with one another. Our times of prayer will become the high points of our day or month, something we look forward to and consider to be as essential to our well being as the air we breathe and the food we eat. We will develop a passion for prayer.

The specific form of prayer we adopt makes no difference. There is a whole world of opportunity stretching before us

## 2. PURPOSE OF THE CALL TO PRAYER

The purpose of this worldwide movement of Continuous Prayer for Marriage and Family Life may seem obvious. The need is certainly pressing and crucial to the well-being of society. Marriage is under attack from all directions and suffering from systemic anti-family practices in our culture. Divorce has touched our lives to such an extent that many young people are increasingly afraid to marry. There will be occasions when the pains of a relative or friend in their marriage so touches us that our hour of prayer concentrates on seeking healing and strength just for them. Our compassion demands this of us. The brokenness all around creates an urgency that stirs us to spread this crusade for prayer. However, in spite of the clear and obvious concern for troubled or threatened marriages, the primary motivation for the Movement for Continuous Prayer is not to heal hurting marriages or counteract the cynicism about marriage which is so prevalent in our society today.

The real vision is to spread the good news of the beautiful plan God has for marriage and to open us all to the grace of hope and thanksgiving for how present God is and can be in the love of a man and woman in Matrimony. Our God, who is Love, is manifest so powerfully in the intimacy, vulnerability, passion, sacrifice, forgiveness, affirmation, and self-donation that is Matrimony. We need to remind as well as predispose ourselves to experiencing Him there anew, and we need to remind a world that has forgotten that "God is with us" in a special way in the Sacrament of Matrimony.

Specifically, we have to keep in mind that couples are more important and influential than most of us are aware. A

prime purpose of this campaign of prayer is to testify to the fact that we are all dependent for our quality of life upon the love that married couples commit themselves to and generate over the years of their marriage. A husband or wife who is happy in marriage will be happy in life. Children of a happily married couple are secure in that reality and better able to reach their God-given potential. Parish couples establish the stability and tone of the whole parish.

We want to focus our crusade on the forgotten ones, the marriages we take for granted, those who are doing well in their love for each other but who still need and deserve our prayers. They are a “hidden” treasure in our midst. The Movement of Continuous Prayer will help us all pay attention to the marriages around us. We want to honor the Sacrament of Matrimony incarnate in the beloved couples of our family and our Parish. We recognize that Baptism is holy, the Eucharist is sacred. We believe with all our hearts that Jesus touches us through these miracles of grace. Yet, we see our Sacramental couples as ordinary. Only prayer can turn us around and inspire us to see Matrimony through God’s eyes. We want our faith to be expanded to see that these Sacramental couples are as sacred as all the other Sacraments. They are living, breathing symbols of Christ’s presence in our midst and they are efficacious, they make real what they symbolize. We pray for them not only because it is good for them, but also because it is good for us, and because we belong to one another.

We also pray to give evidence that Matrimony is not a private matter between two individuals; it is a Sacrament. The whole Church has a stake in the quality of the love relationships of its couples. Our awareness of Jesus is strongly influenced by His real presence among us, most markedly

that will enable the prayer movement to grow quickly and effectively. We would like to be able to provide basic and enriching materials in a timely manner in order to allow momentum and enthusiasm to build. At the same time, we do not want to burden individuals with organizational demands. We will no doubt learn from all of you how to tailor our structure to be most supportive.

## **9. TIPS ON PRAYER FOR MARRIAGE AND FAMILY**

Unfortunately, prayer is a major life experience only for some. While most of us do pray regularly, we often feel inept, very junior grade. We think of prayer as primarily the domain of priests, religious, or older people and miss the realization that prayer is not only possible, but truly essential for everyone. Prayer is simply being conscious of God, opening our lives to his presence, exposing our hearts to His love. Everyone can do that. Everyone needs to pray because God does not force His presence or love on anyone, in any situation. It is always at our invitation. He keeps after us, but He does not force His way. Without prayer, our lives will be empty of the conscious presence of God. Without prayer, our world will be starved for His loving care, not because He does not offer it, but because we are not even aware that He is there, reaching out to us.

Prayer is personal communication in which we share our minds and hearts in order to be understood. That is important in any relationship. Being understood on the personal level enables us to trust and open up further. We feel important and worthwhile to the one who understands us. Even more importantly, it sparks our desire to listen,

We might consider organizing a Quarterly Get-Together gathering all those who are praying on a regular basis in order to build a sense of community and power. It will also provide a chance to compare notes and learn different ways to use their hour of prayer. Keep it simple. Don't try to be elaborate, just coffee and snacks. The focus is on the people there.

A great bonus will be the mixture of the married and unmarried, children, teens and widows. All will be together with a common bond. The normal human separations that are too prevalent will be wiped away. The married will see those who are not married with different eyes and will be drawn toward them. This can be a fine time for the married to express their appreciation to all those who have been praying for them.

### **One Leader for Every Diocese**

To foster a sense of larger solidarity each diocese should have a leader whose mission is to direct, encourage and support the parish leaders and to be the contact with people from other parishes who want to start the prayer campaign in their parish. It may take a while to grow to the point where we have a diocesan coordinator in every diocese, but that is our ultimate goal. Until such time, the family life office may fill that role with someone on staff. It is our hope to establish a national website for this call to prayer as soon as possible in order to connect everyone with other parishes who are already praying. For the time being, such information can be made available on the PMRC website, [www.pmrcausa.org](http://www.pmrcausa.org).

This entire approach is intended to provide a structure

His sacramental presence.

Furthermore, each married couple is dependent upon the Community of the Faithful raising them to the dignity of Sacramental love. A couple can be married on their own but it is the Body of Christ who makes them one of our Sacraments. Scripture tells us, "I am the vine and you are the branches, apart from me you can do nothing." Just as a person cannot be married without a spouse, a couple cannot be Matrimonied without the Community of the Faithful. Connected to the Eucharistic community, couples have access to enormous grace and are capable of far greater self-donation and generosity, the kind of unselfish love in which we see the "real presence" of Jesus.

It is our urgent hope that once this Campaign of Prayer is solidly established, the Sacrament of Matrimony will become publicly acknowledged in each Parish as a matter of universal concern. While the couple relationship remains intensely personal, the Community of the Faithful will step forward to proclaim their devotion and support for these couples who have a special place in the Church. Husbands and wives will know that hour after hour, day after day, someone in their parish is bringing their love to the attention of the Lord, that in hundreds and thousands of parishes throughout the United States and the world, the Sacrament of Matrimony is truly a priority.

Interestingly enough, this very sense of priority and urgency can cause jealous objections from those with a misguided sense of justice. They may argue "why pray for just the married, why not everyone?" We are in no way suggesting that there ought not to be prayer for other vocations. We are simply saying that this hour is focused



specifically on the married so that it can be more effective and because the need is pressing. Marriage is foundational and effects all other areas of the church including vocations to the priesthood and religious life. It models belonging to singles, children, widows and divorced persons. Furthermore, this campaign answers a felt need in the community. We are all worried about the marriages of our children and our grandchildren, parents, friends, and relatives. This is something simple and profound that we can do to address that need.

This is the start of something great! We are like the mustard seed that is tiny but grows into a full-grown tree. You are a wonderful part of this and will look back in years to come with a smile of joy and fulfillment in having accomplished something that has enriched the lives of countless others.

### **3. THE VISION**

Our ultimate vision is to have every Catholic in the world spend one hour a month in prayer for the marriages around them, paying attention to the presence of God in their own marriage or family and His ambition for marriages and families in the Church. We yearn to see every Catholic - single, divorced, celibate, married, or widowed, young or old, great or small - pleading with compassion for healing for those who are in pain, interceding with enthusiasm to bring encouragement and blessings on those who are succeeding in their choice to grow in love and generosity. What a simple way to change the world!

Our goal is to have this prayer campaign on-going in every Parish in the United States and then ultimately the world,

and wonders that have been experienced during the times of prayer. We will rely on them to get the stories in great detail from the daily leaders and pass them on to the diocesan and national leaders who can share them with parishes all over the country. We can all thank God together for these big and little miracles. It would be ideal for this leader to be a part of the parish marriage ministry team if there is one.

### **Some Possible Opportunities**

Our primary goal is to have more and more Catholics praying in their own homes, one hour per month, for married couples and family life. That is what we are about, constantly reaching out to draw others into the movement of prayer. However, once people are praying, we may want to provide some opportunities to support and encourage them. It can help to know that we are part of something in the parish that is widespread, that we are not just a few individuals doing a good thing.

For example, you may want to have a monthly Sunday parish Mass for those who are in this prayer campaign. Mass is the central empowerment in the parish. Having one Sunday Mass for all the pray-ers will strengthen us. It will also show us that we are a powerful source of richness in the parish as we all come together. We can see us grow month by month as more join the campaign. It will certainly encourage all married couples in the parish to know that they are being prayed for around the clock. Such a visible witness can raise the consciousness of all parishioners as to the importance of the Sacrament of Matrimony and attract more to join us in prayer.

two, that you select a particularly enthusiastic participant to take your place as daily leader. Give them some instruction and a copy of this booklet. They will report to you, but you will then be free to fill the second day. The idea is that the original daily leader will eventually become the parish contact, coordinating all of the daily leaders in a given parish. Another approach is to simply ask the participant who is most enthused to consider filling the next day and taking responsibility for the people that he or she has signed up, since they are likely to be friends or relatives. Certainly, there is much freedom for the Spirit to move here. These are only suggestions. It is likely that many individuals in a single parish can and actually will fill one or two days themselves. This is ideal because they will ask those they already know and love and will have an immediate bond with them.

#### **One Leader for Each Parish**

Once the campaign has grown beyond the first few days, it will be important to have someone whose responsibility it will be to direct, encourage, and support the daily leaders and to be the parish contact perhaps connected to a diocesan leader. This is usually the person who first began the movement in the parish, but it can be anyone who is filled with ambition to expand the prayer circles to the greatest degree possible. Each month, they will remind the daily leaders to get out their reminder post cards or emails. At the end of each month, they are to contact the daily leaders to rejoice with, support, and encourage them.

The parish leader's role is primarily to keep the vision clear and to plan for further expansion of the campaign. They will of course also be the clearing-house for all the joys

but we know that we must start small. We begin with one person who commits to one hour of prayer a month, prayer specifically for married couples in their parish or faith community. Then we expand one pray-er at a time until a whole day is covered, then, two days and so on until we have all the days of the month covered. By "pray-er," we mean any individual, couple, or group that will pray during a specific hour allotted to them. Since the commitment is for an hour each month, the whole year is automatically covered once a single month is filled.

#### **4. GETTING STARTED - INVITING PEOPLE TO PRAY**

The essence of the Movement of Continuous Prayer for Marriage and Family is a cadre of people who commit themselves to pray one hour every month for the Sacramental Couples in their Parish. Each leader's concentration has to be on expanding the pool of pray-ers in their Parish.

Within the Parish, the most fruitful place to start recruiting people to pray is with the daily Mass and Communion crowd. Granted, this is usually a small group, but they are gold, and you will find an enthusiastic reception. They will also be a reservoir of information about other potential participants. Daily Mass and Communion people are often very knowledgeable about the parish as a whole.

The next source of additional participants are the family, friends and relatives of those who have already committed themselves to pray. Many of these will not be members of the same parish. That is fine to get us off the ground, but

we want, as soon as possible, to encourage our friends, relatives and families from other parishes to get one day begun in their own parishes and grow from there. We can replace them with parishioners as this happens.

Shut-ins should be a fertile recruiting ground. Eucharistic Ministers, the parish priests and the parish secretary can provide names and phone numbers. The persons from the parish (Eucharistic Minister, Priest) who visit them could inform them of this opportunity for them to become active in the parish and encourage them to select an hour a month and commit themselves to it. Their praying will not only be a gift to us, to receive their powerful prayers, but it will also be a blessing to them because they often feel cut off from parish life.

Every parish has faith-filled senior citizens. Whether they are married, widowed or single, many will leap at the opportunity to be wanted and needed. Certainly, almost all of them will have married children that they would like to pray for in the name of the church.

Parish teens are a great source of energy and enthusiasm. Wherever the movement has begun it has been the teens who have taken the most difficult hours in the middle of the night. They are just waiting to be asked. A great way to help people feel that they belong is to offer them an opportunity to be significant. Start with a few teens you know, get them to participate. Then, they can recruit others.

School children are a treasure in every parish, especially First Communicants or those preparing for Confirmation. They often have a direct line to the Father's heart. Certainly they are most aware of how important the relation-

of prayer. The easiest way is via email, but it may also be that they see everyone at Sunday Mass, or speak to some on the phone anyway.

The purpose of this contact is to celebrate with and thank each participant. The most wonderful aspect of the follow-up phone call is gathering the touching and sometimes powerful stories of the effect of the prayer period on the pray-er. You may well hear of miracles and answered prayer, but just as significant are the effects on their own marriage, or insights into themselves that participants often share. We can certainly encourage them to share the effects of their prayer with others.

We may also learn about any problems they might be having and work it through with them. One might be having a dry period in prayer. Another might be upset at their spouse. Another might lack confidence in their prayerfulness. There are tips on prayer at the back of this booklet and many other resources available to suggest. If they have forgotten to pray, please reassure them that next month will be here before they know it and there will be a new opportunity to pray their assigned hour. People who forget often like to make up the hour on their own. That is so good of them. It is important to then reassure them that we appreciate their dedication.

It is during these follow-up phone calls that we most often learn of new people who might like to join the campaign or discover new potential daily leaders. If we follow these leads, we will have more people praying before the next month rolls around. We do not want you or anyone else overly burdened; so, we suggest that once the first day is filled, and everyone has experienced praying for a month or



and every yes encourages us to approach the next person.

Once the day is filled you may want to ask others who have a heart for marriage to take the responsibility to fill another day.

It is ideal to have a leader for each day who will ensure that each hour of that day is covered. This won't happen immediately. The leader starts with one, two, or three people and gradually builds up to the twenty-four needed to cover each day. We want to reach out to everyone and constantly invite more people to join us in prayer. By the way, we are not limited to one person praying at any specific hour; there could be two or three.

Each of us who fill a day have a relationship with those we have invited to pray, and so we are the likely choice to remind them each month, but it is also a task we can delegate if necessary. A few days before the assigned day of prayer, we should send an email message (or perhaps a post card to any elderly who may not use the internet), to each member of our prayer circle reminding each person of their day and hour of prayer. It is a wonderful idea to include the name and phone number of the person who will be praying after them in your reminder and suggest that they spend the last 5 minutes of their hour praying for the next person who will be praying. Many people like to call the next Prayer to "pass the baton" so to speak. This has the practical effect of helping people not to forget, and it also allows Prayers to connect with each other. Passing the prayer can reinforce old friendships and start new ones.

What can make this campaign an even more fruitful effort to build a culture of marriage in a parish is to have each leader contact their 24 Prayers in some way after their day

ship between mom and dad is for the overall well being of the home.

Our Sisters in Religion are a tremendous power source of prayer. Their wisdom and faith are matched only by their devotion to families. Those who are actually present in parishes may be our most effective participants. Of course, we cannot forget the active workers in the parish, full-time and volunteer. Pastor, associate priests, deacons, teachers in the parish school and religious education, eucharistic ministers, lectors, the organist, secretaries, cooks and other workers in the rectory, liturgical ministers, youth ministers, janitors, ushers, collection counters, choir members, and leaders of parish organizations.

Once you get started, it can be helpful to put a regular notice in the Parish Bulletin with a phone number for people to contact. It would also be a wonderful idea to ask for an opportunity to speak at the end of all the Masses on a Sunday, but don't forget that the very best source of prayers will be your own friends and family.

Our parish priest can be an invaluable resource in our campaign of prayer, but we don't want to dodge our own responsibilities and put the entire burden on him. Too often, in parishes, someone comes up with a good idea, goes to the rectory, presents the idea and then expects the parish priest to take it over and accomplish it for them. Father does not need one more thing to do! This is our gift to the parish. If we are successful in strengthening marriage and family life, we will have an army of new vocations to the priesthood to help ease his burdens. Of course, we ask his blessing on our efforts, will share all of the wonderful results of prayer with him, and we welcome

his involvement. Many priests have signed up to pray an hour and others spread the campaign everywhere they go. The point is not to pressure our parish priest in any way. Simply allow the Holy Spirit to direct you.

## 5. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PRAY-ERS

We must have the mentality that this is a church-wide movement not simply a little individual event. True, prayer is intensely personal, but our vision is ever expanding. If we have a passion for all married couples and an urgency to light a fire in all members of the Church to participate in the pilgrimage of love of all Sacramental couples, this prayer campaign will be a powerful and effective parish presence. As we develop in our own parish, we will have occasions to seep into neighboring parishes through our daily contacts at work and social activities.

No one should be left out of an opportunity to participate. Yes, the focus of the prayer campaign is marriage and family, but that by no means restricts participation to those who are married. We all have a stake in Catholic marriages no matter what our age or marital status. Whether we are pillars of the parish, “Sunday” Catholics, or even on the margin of parish life, our prayers are welcome and needed. The power and the beauty of this movement is that every Catholic, big or little, young or old is included. Teenagers, elderly widows, divorced men and women, first communicants, pre-teens, engaged and married couples, singles, priests and religious all go to the Father as the Body of Christ, His Son.

In our society the social code pretty much demands that singles associate with singles, the divorced with the

absence of organization interferes with the family’s ability to fulfill its dreams.

Organizational skills will be a real help for those of us who choose to take a lead in spreading this blanket of prayer in the church .. However, the single most important quality we all need to lead in the church is a tender concern and affection for those we are inviting to pray.. The details are important, but much more significant is that the person who is willing to pray feel loved and appreciated. People do things that they are convinced are important, but they are even more likely to get involved and continue to be committed when there is personal warmth and relationship as part of the activity. Anytime we take a lead in any mission or ministry we do well to learn from Jesus’ leadership style. We will be most effective if we let the people we call to pray experience a deep sense of how much they mean to us personally. They need our encouragement, affirmation, affection, and enthusiastic support.

### One Leader for Each Day of the Month

A simple way to begin is to choose a specific day of the month that may be meaningful to you or to the parish. Then begin to invite individuals, couples, or groups to sign up to pray during a specific hour of that day every month. The best way to fill a day is to pray and ask the Lord to point out who He has in mind. Another great approach is to simply resolve to ask every Catholic you normally meet in an ordinary day of your life. Do this for a day or a week, or however long it takes. This way we are sure to reach all ages and walks of life from our teenage babysitters to our grandmothers, doctors, and businessmen. It has been a universal experience thus far that virtually no one says no,

other parishes are involved, but that we should view it as a temporary situation. We are strongly encouraging efforts to get as many parishioners involved as possible right from the beginning. When a significant percentage of the parish participates in this prayer campaign, there is an excitement and fulfillment that is very powerful.

We may have problems filling the daytime hours since so many families depend on dual incomes these days. We can cover some of those hours on lunch breaks, but we can also look to the retired and widowed. College students can even be a rich source of Pray-ers because they often have scheduled breaks between classes.

We might also consider rotating the hours between midnight and 6:00 a.m. These can get to be a burden for those who, for example, have to get up for their hour at 3:00 a.m. every time. We could give them a break. On the other hand, they may have chosen to make that sacrifice specifically because it is a sacrifice and a great source of grace to them and to all of us through them. They may not want to be nor should they be deprived of the privilege of such a cross.

## **8. BUILDING A CULTURE OF MARIAGE**

When talking about something as glorious as prayer and the mystery of Sacramental love, it can come across as a bit of a downer to clutter our discussion with the mundane details of putting together an organization. While we don't want to get flooded with structural details, we do have to be practical and establish an orderly way of doing things. Even in the personal realm of family living there has to be some framework. Otherwise, things don't get done and the

divorced, and the married with the married. The Church should be different. This prayer campaign can be a tremendous opportunity to bond the whole parish. All parishioners, whatever their personal circumstances, can get together in the common mission of promoting the success of our Sacraments of Matrimony. In fact, the participation of those parishioners who are not married is most vital to the success of this prayer campaign.

It is important to the unmarried to belong to the faith family and to share a sense of responsibility for the success of the Sacrament of Matrimony in their parish. There is no need for them to stay on the sidelines wishing their married friends well but not feeling that they are personally involved. Every member of a family has an impact on the other members for better or for worse. Like any other aspect of parish life, all parishioners have an obligation to make Matrimony a success. It is OUR Sacrament not just a private deal between the two people who marry. A couple is married "in" the church, "in" the Body of Christ, and therefore, we should all care enough to pray for them after the wedding day.

Couples often feel isolated and alone in their pilgrimage of love. They believe that it is all up to them to make their marriage a success. How inspiring it will be for them to experience all of us telling them that we support their efforts to love fully. What a gift it will be for them to know that we consider them so important to our growth and happiness as the people of God that we are praying around the clock for them twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, three hundred and sixty-five days a year.

Can you imagine how important it will make them feel to

know that their fellow parishioners are constantly praying for them? It may lead them to be much more responsible in their interactions with their family. Perhaps they will stop before speaking in anger. They will realize that the parish is counting on them to seize the opportunities they have to love generously in their marriage and to avoid or quickly get out of self-pity, pettiness, and the urge to control.

### Teens and Young Singles

Every where that our teens have been invited to participate in the prayer movement it has encouraged others to sign up. The participation of singles makes a great impression on those thinking about or already praying, and an even greater impression on the married couples for whom they pray. Teenagers and young adults (especially those in college) are often “nocturnal” in lifestyle. They inevitably volunteer for the difficult middle of the night hours that so many older adults cannot manage. They then become real heroes in the prayer movement, and a tremendous source of encouragement to couples. Most couples do not expect teens and young adults to care that much about them. Their



Parish foundation. We look to get pray-ers from everywhere and anywhere. That is alright in the beginning, as long as we see people from outside the parish as seeds for other parishes, joining us until they get started on their own, and we continue to work to fill our parish slots with parishioners as soon as possible.

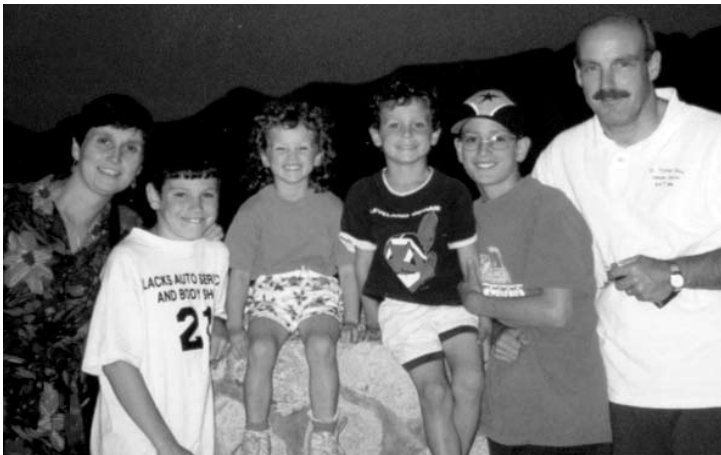


The reason we think it is so important to fill the hours with parishioners is that there are “spill over” effects that occur. Our couples who are being prayed for will run into those who are praying for them in their neighborhoods, outside of Mass on Sunday, in the supermarket, at the Little League games, at the PTA. They will constantly be reminded of how special they are to the people of God. This will fill them with newfound energy and enthusiasm for their marriage. When we have people from all over, the parish is not caught up in the excitement of a common vision and goal. Whereas, when parishioners are praying for parishioners, there is a special intimacy and sense of belonging. We are not saying that our success is diminished when people from

## 7. THE PARISH FAMILY

Our vision is parish-based because this is the way the Church is. If something has not gotten down to the parish level, it is not really very effective. The parish is really home base for Catholics. For most of us, there is a real sense of identity with our parish, as well as warmth, affection and familiarity with the people of our parish.

It enhances the experience of the prayer campaign when people know and love each other and feel connected as part of the same parish. If their friends and local family are also praying, it will be a source of support and encouragement for them to continue. Most people get their spiritual life and nourishment from their parishes, and so, it is a natural connection. The results of the prayer will also be visible and personal.



The advantages of being parish-based outweigh the initial difficulties. Sometimes our own goodness and dedication can get in the way. As leaders we can be so committed to the goal of getting every hour covered that we dilute the

prayer will have a powerful impact.

God will simply not be outdone in generosity. He will certainly bless the teens and young singles who participate in the prayer campaign. They are storing up rich graces for their own marriage. As they pray for the marriages of others, it will help bring the importance of marriage to the forefront of their consciousness. It will be much more real to them. Their prayer will deepen their ambitions for their own marriages. It is great marriage preparation at an early age! A powerful motivation for teens to get involved is to recognize the chance to pray for their own parents and married siblings as well as their own future marriage.

### Children

There is a degree of ageism in the Church. We don't look upon our young as being capable of full participation in the Church. We perceive them as in need of our help. By including the young in our prayer campaign, we can take a step to overcome our bias. The innocence and sincerity of a child's prayer more than makes up for any lack of sophistication. Children love Father Johnny's booklet and have no difficulty thinking of people for whom they would like





to pray. Their hearts are much bigger than ours are. It is no wonder that the Blessed Mother has often gone to children when she wants to call us to pray and do penance. They are great spreaders of the word and win hearts. By allowing children to experience the prayer campaign, we will also have a profound effect on their attitude about the sacredness of marriage and its importance in the community.

Getting them involved will be great marriage preparation even though they will not begin to think seriously about marriage for many years to come. Adults are always amazed that children can do this on their own. They really don't need an adult to lead or supervise them, and they will feel very significant at being included now. Most importantly, from their young age, they will understand that their faith community will care about their marriage in the future.



to even begin to understand love. We will never be “good” at marriage without Him.

2. Not good enough at prayer: That makes you eligible. Anyone who thinks they are great at prayer raises serious doubts. You will fit in perfectly with the rest of us who aren't pros at prayer. Besides, God is good at prayer, so He will do His part well. The only way to improve our inadequacies at prayer is to pray. Baseball players don't become good hitters by talking about how bad a hitter they are.

3. “Well, I pray but I don't know how to pray for couples.” Join the crowd. It's never been done like this before. We are pioneers. No one can tell us that what we are doing or the way we are doing it is wrong because we are breaking new ground. This is such a great chance to make a difference.

4. Hesitant about making a long-term commitment. The AA method works for good habits as well as bad - just this one hour this month and then the next. Don't get overwhelmed at the thought of what you are getting yourself into. Just go one month at a time.

5. Not a joiner: You are not joining anything. There are no fees, no public meetings, no Constitutions or By-laws. You don't have to step a foot out of your home. You can have all the advantages of organizations without being organized.

lization in the New Millennium on Marriage and Family, and our own U.S. Catholic bishops have launched a pastoral initiative for marriage. They have asked us to begin to build a culture of marriage in the parish. A wonderful priest came up with an incredibly simple way to do that without even leaving our homes.”

7. “What do you think would happen if every Catholic in the world spent a full hour once a month praying very personally for the couples in their parish?” (wait for their answer) More than the divorce rate plummeting, the graces would be felt in families. Couples would try harder just knowing people cared so much, and they would be better models for young people, even the person praying would be changed. When a couple forgives or gives joy to each other, it gives life and spills out to the whole community. It would have a profound and lasting impact. If the whole church got involved, we could change the world!”

These are just a few ideas to get you started. We would love to hear your own ideas and what has worked best for you.

### **Encouraging Reluctant Parishioners**

Many of our fellow parishioners tend to have a very poor self-image when it comes to spiritual things. They tend to think only priests and nuns are good in religious matters. They need positive reinforcement. Some typical forms of resistance you can help people overcome:

1. Not good enough at marriage: That is the perfect reason to join this campaign. Marriage is a mystery. Marriage is all about love, that means God. We need His intervention

### **Older Singles, Never Married**

Older singles, in their 30s, 40s, 50s, or older, are another key group to engage in the movement of prayer. As with those who are divorced, there can be a tendency to exclude older singles from a venture that focuses on marriage. Unfortunately, the experience of being overlooked in church life is a common one for many older singles and one that not only hurts them but undermines the church. In this movement of prayer, we approach the older single as a gift and a power source for the church’s mission. What are some of the gifts that older singles bring to a movement like this? Firstly, they do not take marriage for granted. The experience of being without a partner is a daily reality that can lead to a sharpened appreciation of marriage in ways which married people often take for granted. Secondly, single people have a built-in generosity in that they are used to reaching out to couples and families in subtle but important ways. For example, most couples with children assume that the single friend or single family member will visit them in their home, rarely will they visit the single on his or her home turf. There are, of course obvious practical reasons for this one-way social dynamic, and we are not suggesting that it is necessarily “wrong”. We are simply pointing out one of the simple, quiet ways single people go out of their way to accommodate the needs of couples with children in everyday life. Another example is the way childless single people will sincerely rejoice in the pregnancies, births, and children of their friends, even though it may touch on an area of deep sorrow in their hearts. This generosity of heart is a great grace for the church and a natural source of prayer for marriage and family life.

Thirdly, The older single can sometimes have unique insights into the marriages of those close to them. Having grown up together as young singles, then watched their friends fall in love and get married, observed their marital struggles and babysat their children, they are privy to insights that can escape the couple who are at times “too close” to the action to see what is really going on. It follows that older singles can pray for specific couples in ways which the couples may not be able to pray for themselves.

Fourthly, in learning to live alone, chastely and contentedly, the older single witnesses to a dimension of solitude, our aloneness before God, which is also part of married life. Couples can be tempted to overlook or avoid the challenges of solitude. Singles, like celibates, point to the value of this dimension through the witness of their lives. In this movement of prayer, older singles engage such gifts and insights in their efforts to support and encourage marriage and family life. Also, let’s not forget the many singles who are still open to the possibility of a future marriage and therefore their involvement and prayer is directly relevant to the discernment of their own vocation and direction in life.

### **Widows (Both Sexes)**

We want widows to know how much we seek them out to be a backbone of our prayer for couples. They know how important couple love is. They have many years of vivid experience. Many will know how important prayer was in their life with their spouse.

Widows are a living reminder to every couple to never take each other for granted, to live each day as if you might not have the opportunity to love tomorrow.

remind ourselves that we are part of the Body of Christ, we pray the last 5 minutes for the next person or persons praying. You know how God is. He is never out-done in generosity. Everyone who is involved says that they get back more than they give. We don’t always treat ourselves to an hour with the Lord, and because we are unselfishly praying for others and reflecting on the Sacrament of Matrimony, we come away inspired.”

3. “I want to show you this beautiful little prayer book to help you pray for the marriages in your family and tell you about the wonderful Irish priest that has started a movement of continuous prayer for marriage and family.”

4. “So many people are worried about their children’s marriages, or those of their friends and relatives. Instead of worrying, would you be willing to do something very simple in the privacy of your own home? Pray for those marriages that are on your mind and heart, one specific hour every month.”

5. “I have something exciting I would like to share with you, a very simple idea that can have a lasting and profound impact. We are inviting parishioners, young and old single, divorced, married, or widowed to pray for couples around the clock. You can pray any way you like right at home, but Fr. Johnny Doherty has written a beautiful guided prayer booklet that helps us to think of specific couples we know in every circumstance relative to marriage (childless, lonely, struggling, etc.) Especially for the sake of the children, would you be willing to commit to praying one specific hour each month?”

6. John Paul II called us to center our efforts of evange-



only sincere. They can be themselves and pray any way they like, right in their own home. Most importantly, share your personal enthusiasm for the campaign and what you have gotten out of your hour of prayer. Tell your personal stories about the positive reactions of being invited to pray, how people sincerely appreciate being included, and when it comes to someone you are already close to, don't be afraid to ask them to pray as a personal favor to you.

Many leaders go first to prayer, especially at liturgy, and ask the Lord to point out those whose hearts He has already prepared for this mission. Then, when they approach them, they can sincerely tell them that they have been thinking of them or were reminded of them in prayer. You might start with, "I am involved in a prayer campaign that I think you would be interested in", or simply, "Would you be willing to focus one hour a month to pray for the marriages and families in your life?"

The following are some approaches that have been successful. We offer them as a help and a catalyst to stir your own thoughts. By no means are they intended to constrain you.

1. "So much of our well-being depends on marriage and family. Would you be willing to focus one hour of prayer a month for the couples of your parish and those in your family? You can pray any way you like right in your own home. There are thousands of Catholics praying around the clock for couples, even teenagers praying in the middle of the night.
2. "All you have to do is commit to a specific hour of a certain day of the month. Right now we have a slot open on Day 14 (for example). As an added blessing, and to

Most widows also have married children. They have great hopes and ambitions for the marriages of those precious sons and daughters of theirs. They will pray especially fervently for the sake of their grandchildren who will be the primary recipients of all the graces and blessings poured forth on the parents. We have already had an incident where a grandchild's life was saved at the very instant his grandmother was praying her hour and lifting him up to the Lord. The monthly hour of prayer can be such a powerful gift to their loved ones.

A great motivation to win their involvement is to suggest that they enter their hour with an intense spirit of gratitude for the gift they have received from the Lord through their own marriage. They often know well how beautiful marriage can be and desire others to experience some of the same joy that they once knew. This thankfulness puts a fire in their belly to empower others to fulfill their potential to love one another. Widows have always had a special role in the Church. They are a rich resource of grace for us.

### **Divorced**

The divorced are persons toward whom prejudice can be subtle but real. We can be tempted not to approach them since their situation is the opposite of what our goal is. That fact should be precisely the reason to include them. Divorce is completely opposite to what they themselves ambioned and hoped for. At the depth of their being, through agony and suffering, they realize more than anyone what they have lost. They often will be the parishioners most urgent for the well being of couples and can draw on their own experience to know how to pray effectively for marriages that are struggling. Certainly, they can recognize

the warning signs of a marriage in urgent need of prayer.

Another thought that might cross our minds, before approaching them, is that we don't want to remind them of their pain, the pain of the years that led up to their divorce and the present pain of abandonment and loneliness, but it is precisely that pain that, like Paul, they add to the sufferings of Christ for the sake of His Body. It is that pain that can motivate them to make a difference for others. In their prayer, they can bring their loneliness to the Lord and beseech Him to protect others. Being part of this prayer campaign can be a profound blessing for those who have had a bad personal experience of marriage. It can help them to overcome any remaining bitterness or cynacism. Spending time in prayer can only help.

By inviting the divorced willingly and enthusiastically, we will take a step of reparation for the pain of isolation our divorced men and women sometime experience from us. In social events, invitations to dinner for example, divorced women are often not included. They are sometimes restricted to socializing with other divorced or single men and women, as if they were potential home wreckers. When they realize that we eagerly want them to be a part of this, a bit of their pain can be healed. They are valued and precious to us in the Body of Christ.

### **Married**

Of course, couples are a prime though certainly not the exclusive source of Pray-ers. They are the chief beneficiaries of the prayers that will saturate the parish. By their hour a month of prayer for married couples, they themselves will profit immensely. Every ounce of energy they

the gift. Wouldn't it be wonderful if all across the United States, in every denomination and religion, there would be around the clock prayer for married couples? Other Christians may even be more enthusiastic than we are. That should challenge us to embrace the power of prayer and our commitment to pray more fully.



## **6. SUCCESSFUL APPROACHES**

What exactly do I say? There is certainly no magic formula to get someone to make a commitment to pray; yet, we have isolated some basic principals utilized by those who have been successful thus far. Try to keep your request simple and encouraging, underscore the freedom of the invitation, and above all, be warm and very personal. Reassure them that they do not have to be great at prayer,

knowing that they have given their lives for us, but then, to know that they are thinking of us and interceding on our behalf for a specific hour every month is even more beautiful and powerful. It is rather like the difference between knowing that your relatives know and love you in a vague or general way and actually receiving a card or a present from a relative on your birthday. It makes it real.

Most of us would agree that God desires for our marriages to be growing in unity, intimacy, trust, generosity, affirmation, and unselfish devotion, but that kind of marriage is very difficult to nurture in the culture in which we live - fast-paced, activity-oriented, and materialistic. Sisters remind us of another culture that we live in, the culture of the church - humble, reflective, sincere, cherishing people and relationships. They also remind couples of the promises that they made before God and the community and call them back to those vows by their own faithful example.

The most important reason to invite sisters to join in our prayer campaign is that they are irresistible to the Father. There is no doubt that their prayers will be answered. They are and always have been our greatest champions of prayer.

### **Those of Other Faith Traditions**

We welcome Prayers of other faiths with open arms. We should let them know that we are so pleased that they are willing to join us. If we are to be truly ecumenical, we should not just enthusiastically accept their hour of prayer in our midst; we should encourage them to establish this prayer campaign in their own Churches. While our own first efforts should focus on bringing this gift to our Catholic faith family, it would be narrow and selfish not to share

put into the betterment and empowerment of others' marriages will reinforce their own determination to love their spouse.



In participating, they are enriching the soil in which the marriages of their sons and daughters will be planted. A major concern of parents for their children is the prevalence of marital breakdowns in our society. Our prayer campaign will change the present marital soil from arid to fertile. We may actually be praying for the couple who is raising our future son or daughter-in-law. That child is learning how to be married by watching his or her own parents relate.

It will be important to reassure couples that they need not have the perfect marriage to participate. In fact, there is always room to grow closer and more in love in every marriage.

Every couple ought to remember to address their own marriage in prayer for some part of the hour, even if it is only to thank God for their spouse. Those who are struggling are not just welcomed, but encouraged to join us in prayer. It is one of the best things they can do. There is no reason

they can't spend the whole hour praying for their own marriage. We are all praying for them too.

We don't insist that couples pray together. Obviously, this is highly desirable and can be very special and bonding for them as a couple. It can inspire them to grow in love in their own marriage, but not all couples are comfortable with it. So, if one spouse wants to sign up alone, that's fine. Or possibly, both could sign up for different times. They might choose to do this because of caring for the children or because one spouse feels inferior about prayer and could use an individual experience to gain confidence. If one spouse has a tendency to just drift along with the more "spiritual" one, making a personal commitment to a separate hour of prayer could be a significant growth experience.

Married couples don't have to be convinced of the importance of marriage. They know that if you're happy in your marriage, you are happy! No other success can ensure happiness. You may be a brilliant doctor, a multi-millionaire, or a famous artist, but if your marriage is unhappy, you will be miserable, and so will those around you. The married are "experts" at marriage and know from their own fondest memories, their moments of intimacy and joy, what to hope and pray for others to experience.

### **Priests and Religious**

We naturally look to priests and religious to be eager participants. After all, their own vocations have their roots in family life. They would not be who they are today without the love of their mothers and fathers.

Furthermore, they have an enlightened self interest because of their present assignments. The more good marriages there are in the parish, the less problems they will have to face, the fewer burdens will be thrust upon them. More importantly, our priests and religious recognize the presence of Christ in the total mutual self-donation of committed couples. They are inspired by the unconditional love and intimacy they witness there. They rely on married couples as a model of belonging and trust for their own relationship to the people of the church.

Our sisters in religion have always been a power source of prayer in the church. We simply cannot be the faith family God intended us to be without their prayers and sacrifices. Even in our own families, there is no one more devoted than a caring sister. We rely on them for so much help and support. Somehow, just knowing that "the sisters are praying" helps people to expect miracles. We feel special

