Consoling the Heart of Jesus

Retreat Coordinator’s Guide
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AUTHOR’S INTRODUCTION

If you’re reading this, then I assume you’ve made it through the 33 Days to Morning Glory Group Retreat. If you haven’t already made that retreat, there’s no need to panic. You can still make this retreat, but I do recommend that you start with 33 Days because Mary is the best guide into the Heart of Jesus.

Alright, so if you’re still reading this, then I assume you’ve chosen (or at least you’re thinking of choosing) to run a Consoling the Heart of Jesus (CHJ) Group Retreat. Thank you for your willingness to help! My intention in writing this guide is to lead you through the simple steps of running the retreat. For those who have already led the 33 Days to Morning Glory Group Retreat, I’ll be introducing you to some changes with this CHJ retreat. If this is your first time leading a group, be not afraid! You have this guide to assist you, as well as special access to the AllHeartsAfire.org website, and most importantly, if you’re now consecrated to Mary, she’ll be helping you in a special way.

From all of us at Hearts Afire: Parish-based Programs for the New Evangelization (HAPP)SM, 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
July 31, 2012
Memorial of St. Ignatius of Loyola
HOW THIS GUIDE WORKS

To understand how this guide works, it’s first important to know the basics of what’s expected of a Retreat Coordinator.

As a Retreat Coordinator, your job will be to run the entire Consoling the Heart of Jesus Group Retreat at your parish or gathering space. Once again, be not afraid! You will have the HAPPSM 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 and our website 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 10-week 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 final day (Consoler Celebration Day): before, during, and after. Here’s an outline to help you take it all in:

PART ONE: Overview
   The HAPPSM Program
   The Consoling the Heart of Jesus 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: Consoler Celebration Day
   Before the Consoler Celebration
   On the Celebration Day Itself
   After the Consoler Celebration
THE HEARTS AFIRE PROGRAM

The Consoling the Heart of Jesus Group Retreat is the second part of Stage One of the Hearts Afire program. So if you haven’t gone through the 33 Days to Morning Glory Group Retreat, it’s best if you do that retreat before starting the CHJ retreat.

What Is Hearts Afire?

Hearts Afire: Parish-based Programs for the New Evangelization (HAPP) 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 by leading us and our groups through a systematic and well-organized parish program. The program 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 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 is about burning hearts: Jesus’ Heart and Mary’s Heart, my heart and your heart, and someday we hope, all hearts.

Three Big Ideas

Three big ideas help us unpack the logic behind HAPP:

(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 with 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 on Divine Mercy.

STAGE TWO:

Wisdom and Works of Mercy

We begin Stage Two with the book *The ‘One Thing’ Is Three* and its upcoming accompanying group-study program. The purpose of Stage Two is to give group members an easy-to-read crash-course in Catholic theology and then 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 provides opportunities for ongoing formation. After having completed the *33 Days to Morning Glory* and *Consoling the Heart of Jesus* Group Retreats and *The ‘One Thing’ is Three Group Study*; 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 second part of Stage One, “The Two Hearts,” with an overview of our journey to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, namely, the Consoling the Heart of Jesus Group Retreat.

THE CONSOLING THE HEART OF JESUS GROUP RETREAT

The Consoling the Heart of Jesus Group Retreat consists of Reading, Answering, and Meeting (RAM). We’ll explain these three things now. (They’re also covered during the first DVD session, “Orientation & Introduction.”)

Reading

What will we read? The book, Consoling the Heart of Jesus: A Do-It-Yourself Retreat Based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. To make the retreat, each participant will need to read assigned section of this book before coming to the group meetings. Participants can read the book in daily increments or in one sitting. The weekly readings are very doable at an average of 15-20 pages per week. There’s flexibility so participants can tailor their reading schedules to their personal schedules. As a Retreat Coordinator, you can assure prospective participants that the daily reading is easily doable and flexible, even if they aren’t used to reading regularly. Also, the style is simple, straightforward, and easy to understand.

Answering

What will we answer? The questions we find in the Retreat Companion. Each week features a series of questions that help us reflect on the weekly reading. These questions also help us delve even more deeply into the reading by asking questions that help us see how the reading affects our lives.

One practical point: the Consoling the Heart of Jesus Retreat Companion is a powerful aid to going more deeply into the readings. Each day, it provides questions to answer that are meant to help us reflect on the reading from the retreat book. While we should at least try to answer at least the questions in the main part of the Companion, we shouldn’t look at this 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 going deeper.

Problem: What if I get behind in my reading? If a retreat participant worries that because he missed some of the reading, he’ll be too far behind, reassure him that he can still be part of the group retreat. You should also encourage him to make up the missed reading, at least because each weekly reading tends to build upon the previous one.

Using the bonus Appendix: Included in the CHJ Retreat Companion is an Appendix with additional questions for those who want to go deeper. As a Retreat Coordinator, you’ll want to explain this great feature to your participants at your first
session, “Orientation and Introduction.” (This information is also provided on page 6 of the Retreat Companion, but it’s good to review it with them as well.)

Here are three different ways to use the Appendix:

1. Use the additional questions your first time through the CHJ group retreat.
2. After you’ve already made the CHJ group retreat once, repeat the retreat later by yourself, using the additional questions.
3. Repeat the CHJ retreat as a group, perhaps the following year, this time with the new questions. (You’ll have been living consoling spirituality for a while and your group will be able to approach the retreat from a new perspective.)

Just remember that the Appendix questions are optional. You don’t have to do them at all! It’s up to each group member if he wants to do the extra questions. The weekly small-group session questions stay the same, so doing the extra questions won’t impact the small-group discussion. In option #3, the entire group repeats the retreat using the additional questions, and that’s something you as the Retreat Coordinator would decide ahead of time.

Meeting

Each meeting will last about an hour and a half and is broken up into four parts: (1) 5-minute Large-group Opening with a prayer and announcements; (2) 35-minute Large-group DVD Viewing with a talk on DVD that illustrates the key points of each week and keeps them simple and livable; (3) 45-minute Small-group Sharing that draws from the daily questions in the Retreat Companion; (4) 5-minute Large-group Closing. 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 won’t happen unless you’re well prepared.

PART TWO

PREPARATION

So, you’re a Retreat Coordinator and you want to run a Consoling the Heart of Jesus 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. 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 specific templates and helpful videos. One of the best tools as you begin preparation for your Consoling the Heart of Jesus 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 conclude the retreat and have your group’s Consolers Celebration. Unlike the 33 Days to Morning Glory Group Retreat, you can start whenever you want, because you don’t have to conclude on a specific feast day. Obviously, you’ll still want to pick a starting 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 give yourself at least two months before your group starts the retreat.

* 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’ll want to order the Consoling the Heart of Jesus 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, Consoling the Heart of Jesus. 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 that 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 or ceremony on your Consolers Celebration Day and/or a special blessing from a priest at the parish; (3) permission to hold a reception at the parish hall following the closing group ceremony.
For more resources on presenting the retreat to your pastor, visit the website, AllHeartsAfire.org.

STEP FOUR:

Promote the Program

As baptized Catholics, we’re called to draw others into a deeper 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 transformed 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, Consoling the Heart of Jesus: A Do-It-Yourself Retreat Based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius and (2) The Consoling the Heart of Jesus Participant Packet.
The packet includes the following:

- *Consoling the Heart of Jesus Retreat Companion*
- *Consoler’s Morning Offering* Prayer Card
- 8” x 10” Divine Mercy Image
- Rosary (colors will vary)
- *Chaplet and Novena of Divine Mercy* Pamphlet
- 8½” x 11” full-color Consoler’s Principle and Foundation Certificate
- *Way of the Cross* Pamphlet
- *Divine Mercy Message and Devotion* Booklet

The total cost for each participant of the 10-week retreat is relatively inexpensive. Please visit our website for prices.

*Retreat Coordinator Materials:* The retreat coordinator will need **two things:** (1) The book, *Consoling the Heart of Jesus,* and (2) The Consoling the Heart of Jesus Retreat Coordinator Kit. The kit includes the following:

- Consoling the Heart of Jesus Retreat Participant Packet
  - *Consoling the Heart of Jesus Retreat Companion*
  - *Consoler’s Morning Offering* Prayer Card
  - 8” x 10” Divine Mercy Image
  - Rosary (colors will vary)
  - *Chaplet and Novena of Divine Mercy* Pamphlet
  - *Way of the Cross* Pamphlet
  - *Divine Mercy Message and Devotion* Booklet
  - 8½” x 11” full-color Consoler’s Principle and Foundation Certificate
- *Consoling the Heart of Jesus: Retreat Talks by Fr. Michael Gaitley, MIC* (DVD set: 10 sessions, approximately 36-min each)
- *Consoling the Heart of Jesus 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 retreatants.

**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. 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) = CJPPWB
PARTICIPANT PACKET (without retreat book) = CJPP
COORDINATOR KIT (with retreat book) = CJCKWB
COORDINATOR KIT (without retreat book) = CJCK

Please note: The “retreat book” mentioned above is Consoling the Heart of Jesus: A Do-It-Yourself Retreat Based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. 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. Also, be sure to watch the video tutorial that is posted on the site.

STEP SEVEN:

Plan for Your Consoler Celebration Day

You will want to make the Celebration 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, “Consoler Celebration.”
PART THREE

THE WEEKLY MEETINGS

Once a week for 10 weeks, you’ll be meeting with your group for the Consoling the Heart of Jesus 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.

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. The whole meeting should be a time of prayful reflection. In fact, such reflection 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:
True 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) 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 anyone 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 the person just needs to be roped in and made part of the solution, perhaps as an assistant to the leader. For example, taking someone aside outside of the group and saying, “Wow, Mark, you know a ton about St. Therese, and that’s great, but it appears that every time a question
comes up, you talk about her at length 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 attends 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 making 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 four parts: (1) 5-minute Large-group Opening; (2) 35-minute talk on DVD; (3) 45-minute Small-group Sharing; (4) 5-minute Large-group Closing. Here, we’ll look more closely at each of these four parts.

**LARGE-GROUP**

**Opening (5 Minutes)**

You’ll begin each session by coming together in a large group. Within that large group, you’ll begin with a prayer and the Retreat Coordinator will make any necessary announcements.

**IMPORTANT:** During your very first Large-group Opening, as will often be the case, the participants will be receiving their materials for the first time. The Retreat Coordinator should hand out the materials at the beginning of the first Large-group meeting, before watching the DVD (the participants can take notes on the designated pages in the *Retreat Companion* while watching the DVD talk).
LARGE-GROUP

DVD Viewing (35 Minutes)

Following the prayer and any necessary announcements, the Retreat Coordinator will play the DVD talk for the group to watch. In the Retreat Companion, we’ve provided a “DVD Notes” section in each week so you have a place to jot down your ideas or impressions during the talk.

SMALL-GROUP

Sharing (45 Minutes)

Small groups (about 6-12 people, depending on your group and available space) meet for a 45-minute discussion time that follows the guidelines laid out in the Retreat Companion. The small-group dynamic is an important aspect of the retreat, because it fosters a true spirit of fellowship, and friendship in Christ is fostered and developed. By friendships in Christ, the members of his Mystical Body are connected in holiness to Christ and to one another in prayer and so are able to better receive his divine power (see Mt 18:20). The friendships that you discover and nourish in your small group are important sources of support and encouragement on your journey to a deeper relationship with Christ.

Small-group Leaders: Be sure to read the Small-group Session Outline at the end of each week in the Retreat Companion before each gathering. The Small-group Session Outline lists the questions for each week and outlines the small-group format, which is summarized as follows:

A. PRAYER: This is the Our Father; Hail Mary; Come, Holy Spirit; or other brief prayer.
B. PERSONAL RESPONSE: Particular questions selected from the week will be used for small-group sharing.
C. CLOSING PRAYER: The group closes by praying the Glory Be or some other, suitable prayer.

You will also want to register as a Small-group Leader on our website www.AllHeartsAfire.org to receive helpful tips and ideas that will help you make the most of your small-group experience.

IMPORTANT: During the very first Small-group Discussion, the Small-group Leader will introduce himself and explain briefly why he decided to lead the small-group discussion (see the Session 1, Small-group Session Outline for details). Then, he invites the other small-group members to also introduce themselves. It’s important that the Retreat Coordinator instructs the Small-group Leaders to kindly limit their introduction time and that of the other small-group members so that the small group can get to the session questions.

LARGE-GROUP

Closing (5 Minutes)

You’ll end each session by coming back together in a large group. Together, you’ll conclude with a prayer and the Retreat Coordinator will make any necessary announcements.
PART FOUR

CELEBRATION DAY

Your Consoler Celebration 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 your celebration before, on the day of, and afterwards.

Before the Consoler Celebration

In anticipation of your Consoler Celebration Day, here are a few ways to prepare. We recommend that you start preparing for your Celebration 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 celebration. (It helps to plan this at the very start of the retreat.)
- Print up or order copies of the Consoler’s Principle and Foundation Certificate for each member of your group if they don’t already have them.
- If you wish, you may order copies of the *Diary of St. Faustina, Consoling the Heart of Jesus Prayer Companion* (a small, portable book containing the essential prayers and ideas of the CHJ retreat), 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 the pastor, family, and friends to the ceremony and reception.
- You may wish to have each participant give a rose to Jesus by placing them before the image of the Divine Mercy or the Sacred Heart. This, and many other beautiful gestures, are not required, but they do require planning.

On the Celebration Day

These are the basic steps for the ceremony:

- Have everyone meet after Mass (if you can attend Mass together) and recite the Consoler’s Principle and Foundation 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 hymn to God’s Mercy or the Sacred Heart.
- If you would like to share your celebration with the HAPPSM 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 10-week journey together.
• 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 the Consoler Celebration

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

• Continue to Stage Two of the Hearts Afire program, “Wisdom and Works of Mercy,” with The ‘One Thing’ is Three Group Study.
• Take a break from the weekly meeting and begin monthly “Fueling the Flame” retreats before starting The ‘One Thing’ is Three Group Study. See the website for more details.
• Get involved on the HAPPSM website. Read what other Retreat Coordinators and Small-group Leaders are doing. Look for updates on the rest of Stage Two.
• 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, read our FAQ page on the website, or e-mail us at HAPPMarian.org. Also, don’t forget to check out our website for helpful resources such as bulletin announcements, checklists, and timelines.

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.