Wisdom & Works of Mercy

Coordinator’s Guide
For Stage Two of the Hearts Afire Program:
The ‘One Thing’ Is Three Group Study
The ‘You Did It to Me’ Group 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 (33 Days) and Consoling the Heart of Jesus (CHJ) Group Retreats. If you haven’t already made those retreats, there’s no need to panic. You can still make this group study, but I do recommend that you start with 33 Days and CHJ because together they constitute the beginning of a complete faith-formation program, which culminates in this group study. After all, Mary is the best guide to the Heart of Jesus (as we learn in the 33 Days and CHJ retreats), and Jesus is the one that brings us to the Father and into the Divine Life of the Trinity (as we learn in this group study).

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 The ‘One Thing’ Is Three Group Study and participate in a work of mercy as a group. Thank you for your willingness to help! My intention in writing this guide is to lead you through the simple steps of running the study and choosing your work of mercy. For those who have already led the 33 Days to Morning Glory and/or CHJ Group Retreats, I’ll be introducing you to some changes with this group study. If this is your first time leading a group, be not afraid! You have this guide to assist you, special access to the AllHeartsAfire.org website, and most importantly, if you’re now consecrated to Mary and striving to console the Heart of Jesus, you’ll have special graces to aid you in your work.

From all of us at Hearts Afire: Parish-based Programs from the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception (HAPP®), thank you for working with us to set all hearts afire with love for God. 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
April 27, 2014
Divine Mercy Sunday
HOW THIS GUIDE WORKS

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

As a Coordinator, your job will be to run the ‘One Thing’ Is Three Group Study at your parish or gathering space and assist the participants in choosing a group work of mercy with the ‘You Did It to Me’ Group Guide. But once again, be not afraid! You will have the help of this Coordinator’s Guide, one-on-one support from our HAP® Team, and special access to our website. To receive this special access, you’ll need 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 one small group. It will be your responsibility to train and organize these leaders, which will be easy with the help of this guide.

Okay, so here’s how the guide works: It’s broken up into five parts that will lead you through all the steps to running this study. The first part gives you an overview of the whole Hearts Afire Program itself (the big picture). Then follows an overview of the ‘One Thing’ Is Three 10-week study and “Session 11,” on the works of mercy. In the second part, we’ll cover your preparation steps before the study begins. The third part will get into the nitty-gritty of the study itself, specifically, the weekly meetings. In the fourth part, we’ll look at all the practical aspects of your Celebration Day: before, during, and after. Finally, in the fifth part, we’ll cover the ways you and your group can chose a work of mercy with the help of the ‘You Did It to Me’ Group Guide. Here’s an outline to help you take it all in:

PART ONE: Overview
The HAP® Program
The ‘One Thing’ Is Three Group Study
The ‘You Did It to Me’ Group Guide

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: Celebration Day
Before the Celebration
On the Celebration Day Itself
After the Celebration

PART FIVE: Choosing a Work of Mercy
How to Choose a Work of Mercy
THE HEARTS AFIRE PROGRAM

Wisdom (The ‘One Thing’ Is Three Group Study) and Works of Mercy (the ‘You Did It to Me’ Group Guide) belong to Stage Two of the Hearts Afire program. And, again, while we recommend first going through Stage One — the 33 Days to Morning Glory and CHJ Group Retreats — this is not necessary. Anyway, let’s now become familiar with the Hearts Afire Program.

What Is Hearts Afire?

Hearts Afire: Parish-based Programs from the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception (HAPP®) is a bold and fresh approach to small-group, parish-level, faith-formation 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 others from your parish or neighboring parishes, the goal of HAPP® is to lead everyone 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, all hearts.

Three Big Ideas

Three big ideas help us unpack the logic behind HAPP®:

(1) Time of Evil, Time of Grace

According to St. Pope 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. Through this Heart, we receive the Holy Spirit, sent from the Father, and enter into communion with the Trinity. But to arrive at this Heart, it’s best to begin with the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Her whole 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 himself 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 a new evangelization, and I believe he wants to begin in parishes and small groups of Christians. I believe he wants to begin with you and a few of people from your parish to help set the world ablaze with love for him.

How Does Hearts Afire Work?

It’s simple. Gather a group — or better yet, several groups — of six to 12 people who want to be set on fire with God’s love, find a place to meet, and start the program. There are three stages to the program.

STAGE ONE

The Two Hearts

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

STAGE TWO

Wisdom and Works of Mercy

We begin Stage Two with the book The ‘One Thing’ Is Three and its accompanying group-study program. The purpose of Stage Two is to give group members insights into the relevance of the Trinity to our daily lives, how the Trinity illuminates every aspect of our faith, and how knowing and loving our Triune God allows us to live our faith to the full. Also, within this stage and with the help of ‘You Did It to Me’: A Practical Guide to Mercy in Action, the members of the group will discern and choose a group work of mercy. Finally, any group member who has also completed Stage One will be entitled to receive an Honorary Membership in the Association of Marian Helpers, which gives them a perpetual sharing in the many spiritual benefits of the Association, along with free gifts.

STAGE THREE

Keeping the Hearts Afire

This stage provides opportunities for ongoing formation. After having completed Stages One and Two, 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, through communication with you, 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 Stage Two, “Wisdom and Works of Mercy,” with an overview of our journey to the heart of the Catholic faith, namely, the ‘One Thing’ Is Three Group Study and the ‘You Did It to Me’ Group Guide.

THE ‘ONE THING’ IS THREE GROUP STUDY

The ‘One Thing’ Is Three Group Study consists of the assigned reading from *The ‘One Thing’ Is Three* book, the *Study Companion* workbook, and the weekly meeting. I’ll explain these three things now. (An explanation is also covered during the first DVD session, “Introduction and Orientation.”)

**Assigned Reading**

What will we read? The book, *The ‘One thing’ Is Three*. To make the group study, each participant will need to read the assigned sections of this book before coming to the weekly meeting. Participants can read the book in daily increments or in one weekly sitting. The weekly readings are very manageable at about an hour or so per week. It’s that simple, and there’s flexibility so participants can tailor their reading schedule to their personal schedules. As a Study Coordinator, you can assure prospective participants that the daily reading is easily manageable and flexible, even if they aren’t used to reading regularly. Also, the style is simple, straightforward, and easy to understand.

Two suggestions:

1. Remind participants that they can use the “Plow” method! (See pages 7-8 of the *Study Companion*.) In other words, if they encounter difficult concepts in their reading, they can “plow” through them and keep going. By continuing to read, they are still breaking up the soil (so to speak) in preparation for seeds of wisdom.

2. If the members of your group are completely overwhelmed with 30 pages of reading a week plus the *Study Companion* sections, you can always suggest meeting once every two weeks instead of every week, which makes the reading more manageable. However, be aware that this would stretch out the study to 20 weeks, which may be too long for the people in your group. We recommend first trying to meet every week.

**The Study Companion**

What will you find in the *Study Companion*? There are four key aspects to the *Study Companion* that will help us grow the seeds of wisdom: the summary of the reading, the key words, the study questions, and the small-group session questions.
The summary of the reading gives a snapshot of the key points of each reading. The summary is meant as a review and is not meant to take the place of the weekly reading.

The key words identify the most important words and concepts to which each participant should pay attention.

The personal study questions help each participant to assimilate the most important points they’ve encountered in the weekly reading, the summary, and the key words.

The small-group session questions are the questions you’ll discuss within your small group. These questions are perhaps the most important step in bringing the wisdom you’ve learned from your heads to your hearts.

One Practical Point:

While we should try to answer the personal study questions in the Study Companion, we shouldn’t look at it as a burdensome homework assignment or a quiz. So tell your group members not to panic if they don’t get through all the questions. They’re simply aids to growing more deeply in wisdom.

One Problem:

What if I get behind in my reading? If any participants worry that because they missed some of the reading they’ll be too far behind, reassure them that they can still be part of the group retreat. Tell them to do the best they can, encourage them to at least skim the text, and have them at the very least read the summary provided in the Study Companion.

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 Discussion that draws from the small-group session questions in the Study 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.

‘YOU DID IT TO ME’ GROUP GUIDE

After you go through The ‘One Thing’ Is Three 10-week Group Study, you and your group will have one more full meeting (Session 11) that will be dedicated to the works of mercy. During that meeting, you will have some sharing and discussion time, and then, ideally, you will choose a work of mercy for your small group.

Assigned Reading

Your assigned reading is simply the book, ‘You Did It to Me.’ It may seem like a lot to have more reading, but ‘You Did It to Me’ is only half the size of The ‘One Thing’ Is Three and it’s very easy reading. And while you and your group can decide how long to give yourselves to finish it before you meet to discuss it, I suggest one month. That’s
more than enough time to finish the book. Plus, that much time lets each member of
the group start doing the “Action Items” listed in the book. That’s actually a key point:
Your experience of putting mercy into action will be an important part of your
group discussion.

The Group Companion Guide
As you’ll soon discover, ‘You Did It to Me’ is a very practical book with lots of ideas and
suggestions for putting mercy into action. However, it’s primarily geared for individuals.
That’s one reason why you’ll need your Group Companion Guide. It will help you and
your group discover works of mercy you can do together. And that’s really what the
second half of Stage Two is all about: putting mercy into action not just individually but
as a group.

The Group Companion Guide to ‘You Did It to Me’ has two parts: (1) The part you
read (after finishing ‘You Did It to Me’) to prepare for Session 11, and (2) the part you
read as a group to guide your group discussion.

Meeting
This meeting will last about an hour and a half, and is broken up into three parts: (1)
5-minute Large-group Opening with prayer and announcements; (2) Small-group
Discussion (because there is no DVD talk for Session 11, the Small-group Discussion will
last one hour and include discussion on individual Action Plans as well as the Small-group
work of mercy. See pages 127-128 of the Companion for more details.); (3) Large-group
Program Vote & Closing, in which the large group votes on a new group study. (If there
are no follow-up studies proposed or if there are several studies that people want to do —
that’s okay. Participants in the Large-group do not have to stay together for the next group
study if they prefer to start their own group study or simply not do one.) If there are no
further studies proposed, you can invite each of the Small-group Leaders to share their
group’s work of mercy and then conclude with a prayer.

PART TWO
PREPARATION

So, you’re a Coordinator and you want to run The ‘One Thing’ Is Three Group Study
and ‘You Did It to Me’ Group Guide 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 STUDY

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 study. On the website, you’ll want to review the various elements available to you such as specific templates and helpful videos. A great tool as you begin preparation for Wisdom and Works of Mercy is the Study 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**

What day do you want to begin? 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 study 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 would start the study.

*OPTIONAL STEP *

**Order Your Stage Two Coordinator Kit**

Before you approach your pastor about having the study at the parish (the next step), you may want to have your study materials to show him. If this is the case, then you’ll want to order the Stage Two Coordinator Kit, which includes the *Two-in-One Companion* and DVD talks and comes with or without the study book, *The ‘One Thing’ Is Three*. This may be helpful to have before the meeting with the pastor if he wants the opportunity to look the materials over.

**STEP THREE:**

**Find a Venue**

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

To determine whether or not it can be done at your parish or a neighboring parish, you’ll want to call the parish office and schedule a meeting with the pastor. Here’s what you’ll need from the parish/pastor: (1) Permission to run the study 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 need to have: (1) Assistance with promotion — more on this later; (2) permission to hold a reception at the parish hall following session 10.

**STEP FOUR:**

**Promote the Program**

As baptized Catholics, we’re called to awaken people to a relationship with Christ. Inviting people to join this group study is an excellent way to do just that. In fact, when it comes to this study, 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.
• Get your fellow participants in the 33 Days to Morning Glory or CHJ Group Retreats to join you in this group study.
• Send an e-blast to your Catholic friends who live close to the parish and to members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Knights of Columbus, or other groups from the parish that might be interested.
• Insert a flyer into the parish bulletin. (You’d need permission from the parish to do this.)
• Ask the pastor to invite people to participate in the group study 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 the vestibule for people to ask questions and/or register on site. The best promotion of the study is the testimony from someone whose heart has already been touched by a Hearts Afire program.

On our website, you can see examples of ways to promote the study and can even download and print PDFs of posters 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 Materials
Once you have a group of people who want to do the study, then at least two weeks before your first meeting, you’ll want to order the materials — three weeks would be ideal.

Stage Two Participant Materials. Each study participant will need two things: (1) The book, The ‘One Thing’ Is Three and (2) Stage Two Participant Packet. The packet includes the following:

• Wisdom and Works of Mercy: Two-in-One Companion
• Three Points of Communion prayer card
• 10 Divine Mercy prayer cards (to give away)
• CD with the “Farewell Discourse” from The Gospel According to John
• 8½" x 11" full-color Three Points of Communion Certificate
• You Did It to Me: A Practical Guide to Mercy in Action book
• Full-color Bookmark with assigned readings
The total cost for each participant of the 10-week study is relatively inexpensive. Please visit our website for prices.

Stage Two Coordinator Materials. The Study Coordinator will need two things: (1) The book, *The ‘One Thing’ Is Three*, and (2) Stage Two Coordinator Kit. The kit includes the following:

- Stage Two Participant Packet
  - *Wisdom and Works of Mercy: Two-in-One Companion*
  - 10 Divine Mercy prayer cards (to give away)
  - Three Points of Communion prayer card
  - CD with the “Farewell Discourse” from *The Gospel According to John*
  - 8"x10" full-color Three Points of Communion Certificate
- *The ‘One Thing’ Is Three: Talks for the Group Study* by Fr. Michael Gaitley, MIC
  (DVD set: 10 sessions, approximately 35-min each)
- Coordinator’s Guide

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

To order your materials, contact the Member Services Department at the Marian Helpers Center at 1-800-4-MARIAN (1-800-462-7426) minimally three weeks in advance of the first group-study meeting. All proceeds from the sales of the Hearts Afire programs go to support the good works and evangelization efforts of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception.

When ordering, please use the following product codes:

- PARTICIPANT PACKET (with study book) = **PKSTWB**
- PARTICIPANT PACKET (without study book) = **PKST**
- COORDINATOR KIT (with study book) = **CKSTWB**
- COORDINATOR KIT (without study book) = **CKST**

PLEASE NOTE: The “study book” mentioned above is *The ‘One Thing’ Is Three: How the Most Holy Trinity Explains Everything*. We are offering the Participant Packets and Coordinator Kits “without study book” in consideration of people who already own the study 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 study will accommodate. Usually, the small groups consist of 6-12 people.
Before the study 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 program, it’s a good idea to hold
the training meeting shortly before the first-group study meeting.

During the Small-group Leader training session, you’ll want to go over all of Part
Three of this 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 Coordinator’s Guide is available
for download at AllHeartsAfire.org.

PLEASE NOTE: Small-group Leaders who already have experience leading a small group
from Stage One would not need to attend this meeting.

STEP SEVEN:

Plan for Your Celebration Day

Many groups enjoy having a Celebration Day after completing their study. If you’re
interested in having such a celebration, see Part Four of this Coordinator’s Guide,
“Celebration Day.”

PART THREE

THE WEEKLY MEETINGS

Ideally, once a week for 10 weeks, you’ll be meeting with your group for The ‘One
Thing’ Is Three Group Study, then you’ll read ‘You Did It to Me’ and meet one more
time to pick your group work of mercy (more on that in Part Five). We’ve already covered
the basics of the 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.

(1) 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. The concept of communion is very important with this group study, not just because we are called into communion with each other but because we are called into communion with the Most Holy Trinity!

While this study can technically be made by people on their own (without group discussion), God gives particularly 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.

(2) 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 unseen persons are brought to each group meeting, held in each participant’s heart with loving concern? How many secret prayers lie unspoken in a small group, waiting to come to the surface if only given an invitation? How many thousand times will the Holy Spirit flash forth in a word, facial expression, or movement of the heart? How many lifelong friendships does Christ want to form during the sacred time of meeting?

The place of the small-group gathering is indeed holy ground, and so it’s fitting that it begin with prayer, as we’ll explain in a later section. But the prayer doesn’t stop at the beginning of the meeting. Just as The ‘One Thing’ Is Three Group Study is meant to be a time to prayerfully grow together in wisdom and bring that wisdom from our heads to our hearts, so also such growth in wisdom should be part of the small-group meeting. In fact, such a search for wisdom 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, be sensitive to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, and preserve the bond of charity. He also may need some tips. And that’s what we’ll provide now.

TIP ONE:

**Truly Listen**
Yes, you will need to have your questions ready and will have lots of things on your mind, but fight the temptation to be distracted when someone is sharing. 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 Reserved 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 reserved 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 reserved 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 reserved 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 question as it is an especially good one.” Then monitor the reserved 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 reserved, others may be quite lively and talkative. The challenge for the Small-group Leader is to keep the talkative participant involved and excited but also to make sure that he doesn’t dominate the conversation. The key is to
direct his conversation, and this will take practice and patience. Here are a few examples of how to direct his conversation: If he’s talking for too long, gently break in and say, “You’re covering a lot of interesting (exciting, important, etc.) territory, Thomas. Let’s back up a second and see if anyone else has something to add. What do you think, Judy?” Or, “Let’s stop there, Luke. That’s an interesting experience. Has any one had a similar experience?” The principle is to lovingly direct the conversation of the talkative participant and to draw other participants back into the conversation.

**TIP FIVE:**

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

It’s rare, but it does happen. Someone in the group may engage in inappropriate sharing or repeatedly “off the wall” opinions. It’s important that the Small-group Leader bring in the priest or other pastoral leader for one-on-one guidance in dealing with the problem person. The Small-group Leader should also bring this person to the attention of the Study 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. Thomas Aquinas, and that’s great, but it appears that every time a question comes up, you talk about him 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 study 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 at least skim the missed reading and read the summaries in the *Study Companion* 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 and you may want to 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 may 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 it’s 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 assigned reading and sections of the *Study Companion* 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.]
(3) STRUCTURE OF THE MEETINGS
— For The ‘One Thing’ Is Three Group Study Only

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 Discussion; (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 Coordinator will make any necessary announcements.

PLEASE NOTE: 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 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 Study Companion while watching the DVD talk).

LARGE-GROUP

DVD Viewing (35 Minutes)

Following the prayer and any necessary announcements, the Coordinator will play the DVD talk for the group to watch. In the Study 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

Discussion (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 Study Companion. The small-group dynamic is an important aspect of the study, 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 Study 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 prayer from the Study Companion or other suitable prayer.
B. PERSONAL RESPONSE: Particular questions based on the assigned reading or DVD lecture will be used for small-group discussion.
C. CLOSING PRAYER: The small-group will pray the closing prayer together.

PLEASE NOTE: 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 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.

Also, Small-group Leaders will want to register on our website AllHeartsAfire.org to receive helpful tips and ideas that will help them make the most of their small-group experience.

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 Coordinator will make any necessary announcements. For the meeting format for Session 11, see page 127 of the Group Companion Guide.

PART FOUR

CELEBRATION DAY

Your celebration day marks the conclusion of the ‘One Thing’ Is Three Group Study and the beginning of the ‘You Did It to Me’ Group Guide. Below you will find some tips and suggestions to prepare for your celebration, which should take place after Session 10 and before Session 11. During your celebration, participants would have time to sign and date their certificates with the Three Points of Communion. (If you want to keep it simple, you could even have a little celebration at the end of your Session 10 meeting and invite everyone sign their certificates then.)

Before the Celebration

In anticipation of your 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 or Adoration) on the day of your celebration. (It helps to plan this at the very start of the study.)
- Print up or order copies of the Three Points of Communion Certificate for each member of your group if they don’t already have them.
- If you wish, you may order small gifts for your group. We recommend ordering them by the third week of the study to ensure availability and that they are shipped in time.
- Arrange to have a reception after the ceremony. (If you’re doing this in your parish, make sure that you have the proper permissions for reserving the room, etc.)
- Invite family and friends to the ceremony and reception.
- You may wish to have each participant give a rose in honor of the Most Holy Trinity by placing them before the altar or an icon or painting of the Trinity. 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 or Adoration (if you can attend together) and recite the Three Points of Communion 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 The Most Holy Trinity.
• If you would like to share your celebration with the HAPPM® 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. You may also want to invite your family, friends, and the pastor to the reception as well.
• Structure the reception however you wish. Some ideas include asking a few group members to share their experience with the rest of the group or taking pictures.

After the Celebration

After the Celebration Day, the ‘One Thing’ Is Three Group Study is over, but ‘You Did It to Me’ Group Guide and the works of mercy are coming up next!

• Choose and begin your work of mercy as a group. To do this, please see Part Five.
• Help launch a Divine Mercy solemn celebration in your parish, as a group.
• Make sure all your participants who have gone through the 33 Days to Morning Glory and CHJ Group Retreats and The ‘One Thing’ Is Three Group Study send in their application to receive the Honorary Membership in the Association of Marian Helpers and free gifts.
• Continue to Stage Three of the Hearts Afire program.
• Get involved on the HAPPM® website. Read what other Coordinators and Small-group Leaders are doing. Look for updates on Stage Three.
• 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.
PART FIVE

CHOOSING A WORK OF MERCY

At the conclusion of The “One Thing” Is Three Group Study, you and your group will have the opportunity to choose a work of mercy. First, you will need to read ‘You Did It to Me,’ which is included in your packets. We recommend giving yourselves one month. It shouldn’t take a month to read the book, which is very easy reading and half the size of The ‘One Thing’ Is Three and includes pictures, but a month will give everyone time to begin to put the individual works of mercy into action. After a month, you will get together for Session 11, which is described in detail in the ‘You Did It to Me’ Group Companion Guide. Make sure you read that entire section before Session 11, which is only 2 pages long. Please note that the Coordinator will want to call the HAPP® team at 877-200-4277 to get recommendations for further group studies before the Session 11 meeting.

How to Choose a Work of Mercy

The first part of the Small-group discussion will be about highlights from each participant’s Action Plan and how each of them has been putting mercy into action. After each of the participants have had a chance to share, proceed to the discussion on the small-group work of mercy. Talk about each of the points on pages 119-122 of the Group Companion Guide. Remind your Small-group Leaders to have a pen and paper handy so they can record the various ideas. Then take a vote on the ideas. Note that everyone may not be able to participate in the group work(s) of mercy or to the same degree. That’s okay because those members can still join in the work of mercy through their intercessory prayer. After a small-group work of mercy has been chosen, the Small-group Leader can help lead a discussion on frequency, duration, etc., of that work of mercy. (See page 122 in the Companion for other ideas to consider.)

CONCLUSION

I hope this guide answered many of your questions and gave you a sense of the responsibilities of and options for Coordinators. If you still have questions, I encourage you to sign up as a leader on AllHeartsAfire.org, read our FAQ page on our website, or e-mail us at HAPP@Marian.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 Coordinator, I 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 seems to prefer to select imperfect people like you and me. All we have to do is give him our “yes,” just like Mary did.