

# Padre Pio Prayer Groups

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you his peace!

*Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy (Leviticus 19:2). Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48).* The “vocation” to holiness and “perfection” is a call directly from God. Life is a sign of God’s love for and trust in us, and his confident view for the future we are created to build. The world, this “Theater of Redemption” as Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen entitled it, is the place that prepares us for the fulness of Life with God. He knew us before we existed and God has a part for us to fulfill in the Divine Plan for creation. We are “destined” for greatness in God’s time, a “destiny” however that we can refuse with the gift of our free will. We are “called” (vocation means “to be called”) to be and act in God’s Name. After our assent to God’s invitation, we are “commissioned” to fulfill some specific purpose in our individual life for the glory of God and good of others as well as ourselves. Is this not the essence of holiness: to live unconditionally and totally in the will of God? Each “yes” we offer to what we believe to be God’s will, is a step further in holiness and perfection.

How do we begin to reflect on the call to holiness (or perfection in the scriptural sense) and our responsibility to become holy (perfect)? Where do we turn to find the tools necessary to achieve this loving yet unconditional command that God’s Word requires of us: *Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect?* (Matthew 5:48). Who can help us work through our difficulties and journey with us that we might become fully the children of God we were called to be? Does being a Spiritual Child of Padre Pio require more than just gathering for a monthly meeting? What was Padre Pio’s expectations for a Spiritual Child of his? Have we lived up to those expectations, or have we substituted his heart’s desire for our convenient personal image and practices? Do we believe our membership in the Association of the Padre Pio Prayer Groups to be our response to a call to holiness as well as to an apostolate? Do we consider ourselves as apostles of prayer and reform? Do we have a spiritual schedule that offers us tools for personal growth in the Lord as Catholics committed to our Faith? As you can note, there are a number of questions we can ask ourselves concerning our call to holiness.

The Padre Pio Prayer Group Association has much to offer both its members as well as the local churches where the members gather for prayer, reflection, and the service that is the fruit of these. We, the Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, have a mission entrusted to us by our Founder in response to the heartfelt desire of the Holy Father, Pope Pius XII. These hopes and desires have been repeated and approved by his successors. The only way we can effectively fulfill our mission is for us to understand what has been entrusted to us and to be faithfully committed to living it out each day.

The Spiritual Children who entrusted themselves to the guidance of Padre Pio did so because of their desire to lead a fuller life in the Spirit. Padre Pio was not a “pushover”. Nor did Padre Pio accept hysterics or fanatics who came to him for “direction”, but only wanted approval of their own methods, rather than be challenged to grow. His sole purpose in accepting souls and leading them was so that they, with his assistance, could become saints. Those who have read biographies of Padre Pio or who may have known him, know well that unless one was sincerely committed to the journey to holiness he would not have any meaningful relationship with that person. Holiness is not a “popular thing” for people “to do”. It is not a question of being with the “in crowd” of some church society. **Sanctity is the consequence of a personal decision one makes to be fully directed by the Spirit of God through a process of daily conversion.** While many use the usual means the Church offers, - Eucharist, Reconciliation, Prayer, Sacrifice, and so forth - a Spiritual Child of Padre Pio seeks to deepen that experience by placing himself or herself under the direction of a priest, where and when possible, who is willing to assist them in the process.

For the reasons just stated, each Padre Pio Prayer Group has, or should have, a priest Spiritual Director. The difficulty in having a priest for spiritual director has become more pronounced in these past years. Some Prayer Groups no longer have a priest Spiritual Director and are looking for a priest to be with them. Others have a Spiritual Director who is sporadically with them, but not always available because of ministerial responsibilities. When the optimum situation is not available and the greater effectiveness of the Group is affected, continue the practices of the Association as best you can. Do not relinquish what you are able to do because of what cannot be done at the moment or for a time.

The Spiritual Director of each Prayer Group is an essential presence that encourages, instructs, guides the members. Unfortunately, at times, Prayer Group Spiritual Directors are thought of merely as priests who “pray with us”. Some may consider the spiritual directors as “spiritual therapists” with whom their “directees” make “regular appointments”, sometimes weekly, to unburden themselves, with very little or any progress beyond just a “telling of one’s woes” or annoyances with others (This is not spiritual direction. This is more of self-pity or gossip). Other spiritual directors are thought of as “gurus” or “infallible spiritual guides” from whom some hope to know the “secrets of the spirit” and “be told” everything they are to do, leaving nothing to grace and free will. There are also some spiritual directors and group leadership persons who are involved in promoting locutions, apparitions, miracles, and lose sight of the purpose of the Prayer Groups; this attitude does not help the Group grow in faith and love for the Eucharist and Our Lady but only causes the Group to get sidetracked during that minimal monthly period of time intended to help them pray and grow in the journey of faith, which these extraordinary moments in our history only confirm, when studied and approved by the Church. Some are well-meaning individuals who, like the people with whom they share the Prayer Group experience, are devoted to the memory of Padre Pio, but are not committed to the process envisioned by our Founder to help those who accept the challenge to deepen their spiritual lives. There is also the sad occasion of someone accepting to direct the Prayer Group in order to have a service group within a given faith community; it seems as though there is little concern in the Group’s spiritual development as such, but only in its ability to fulfill some particular need or purpose. These are but a few examples that have come across the desk that concern me and should concern those few Groups that may be experiencing them.

There is no intent to single out anyone or Group, much less to offend anyone. Nonetheless, it is necessary to point these realities out as a definite danger to the spiritual growth of the members of the Association when the primary purpose of their participation is not growth in the spirit. I have personally met only very few Spiritual Directors, but have spoken with a good number of others and, thank God, they are wonderful, caring, and very spiritual and apostolic men. It is precisely here that we see where the value of the Spiritual Director lies. A spiritual and apostolic man is one who can see both sides of the coin of holiness and thus be an effective presence in directing others in the faith. **Unless our prayer is enfolded in our lives, and our lives resound in our prayer**, our spiritual life is stunted. The Prayer Group needs a priest who is willing to share the spiritual journey with the members of the Group. The spiritual director/assistant, whoever it may be - priest, religious, qualified spiritual assistant - realizes that holiness is never fully achieved until we enter the everlasting embrace of the Eternal Father, through the blood of his Son Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and we can add, through the almighty intercession of Our Lady, as well as the intercession of the saints, angels and souls to whom we pray. The process is not impossible nor is it difficult, but it is demanding. It demands that we desire this holiness so much that we are willing to give our all for it.

August celebrates two significant feasts: the Transfiguration of Jesus on Mt. Tabor and the Assumption of Our Blessed Mother into heaven. It is interesting to note that both deal with the divine and the human, the soul and the body, the invisible and the visible, the immortal and the mortal, the perfect and the flawed. One is seen as the fruit of the process of the other. The Transfiguration that dazzles the apostles is the transformation of the body that the Apostles walked and talked with during their years with Jesus. The Assumption of Mary’s physical body into the realm of the spirit is the celebration of the transformation of the material body of Mary that grew old and was subjected to life’s many changes into a fully spiritual entity. No person can be truly holy without being truly human - human as God intended at the beginning of time and not as we have become through the abuse and misuse of our free will. These two feasts should be an encouragement for us to continue our endeavors to grow in the spirit, regardless of our weaknesses, faults, and even sins. They should encourage us to strive more intensely to live the spirit of the Association every day of our lives rather than just once monthly.

As we grow with the encouragement and assistance of each other and our spiritual guides, we understand better the need to be vigilant over one’s self at all times, without scrupulosity or undue exaggeration. We are nurtured by the Word we read and nourished by the Eucharist in which we participate, daily if and when possible. We begin to see others with the eyes of Jesus and speak to the heart of others with the compassion and practicality of one who lives in the world but is not of the world. The more we advance in the spirit, our prayer life offers deeper and more meaningful insights that help our life and our relationships with others. We become more selfless in service to God’s People, and are disposed to listen with an open heart to the sincere concerns of all our sisters and brothers, whether in the Group or elsewhere. We become more aware of our “being Church” and thus often seek greater involvement in the life of the Church’s ministry, liturgy, everyday life.

Our Prayer Groups are active cells of enthusiastic men and women who love and desire to honor Padre Pio. Through him they hope to be able to experience God’s loving presence in their lives. The Eucharist, devotion to Our Lady, and the sharing of our Catholic values brings us together in prayer and reflection. From the experience of our monthly meeting it is hoped that the desire for prayer and reflection will grow stronger and become a daily program for each one. You are a “spiritual family” not bound by vows or public promises, but solely by your love and devotion for Jesus, our Faith and our beloved Padre Pio. You are an example of what the everyday Catholic can be and do: find time to pray, reflect and allow that experience of God to flow over into acts of charity and service within the community. How Padre Pio desired to see his Spiritual Children glow like beacons of light in a world that was growing dim in its spiritual fervor! How Padre Pio demanded that his Spiritual Children not compromise their Baptismal promises and thus be examples and guides for

others! How Padre Pio rejoiced to know and hear that his Spiritual Children touched the lives of others and led them closer to Jesus and Mary! How Padre Pio wanted to see his Spiritual Children take up the **challenge to be Christ to the world!** This is the responsibility we accept in asking to be Spiritual Children of Padre Pio.

All of this may seem like too much. It may seem impossible. It may seem unattainable. If that were the case, then we would have to say that the Gospel is impossible to live. That would be a blasphemy! All things are possible when we believe in God and trust in his grace that can transform those who place their lives in His hands.

May God bless you; Our Lady guide, guard, and protect you; may Padre Pio watch over each one of you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care.

Peace and Blessings  
Fr. Francis A. Sario, O.F.M. Cap.  
National Co-ordinator