

Encouragement

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PRAYER GROUPS.....

As this is the 100th issue of Encouragement I thought and prayed much about what to write and in a way celebrate this special issue. This is of course the month in which we pray for those who have died and we start with the feast of All Saints. Neither can we forget that we also commemorate Armistice Day on the 11th day. We are bidden to pray as Christians and we can do so in many different ways and actions. I thought that I would ask the Holy Spirit's guidance and three people without prompting suggested that I write about prayer groups, one man, one woman and one priest. So that is what I shall do. It is of course a subject close to my heart. I have in the past been a member of various prayer groups of different types and sizes, not always feeling equally comfortable in each. It is however helpful to understand what we think of when we think of a Prayer Group.

I wonder if people think of any church service as a prayer group? Those who attend these would probably not do so. What about a family praying together... are they not a prayer group... a familiar group praying together? There are also those who start work with a prayer and do so with others, again they are not necessarily thought of as a prayer group. Soldiers in the two wars often tell of a group praying together when the bombs fell. There is the famous story of soldiers on another hill outside Loreto praying that the bombing would not destroy the 'Holy House of Nazareth' (autobiography of Abbot Nicholas Holman) and indeed it was spared even though all else was destroyed. Others prayed that they would survive, and miracles did happen. Clearly any group that gathers together is a praying group of people. They can be large or small permanent or passing. But more often than not the word 'Prayer Group' is used to define a very specific gathering of people who pray for specific purpose, in a specific way at a specific time and at regular intervals...



There are so many types of prayer groups and with an infinite variety of purposes in terms of prayer. The most important aspect of any prayer group is that the members are united in the purpose for which they gather both in terms of the type of prayer but also the intention. In general intercession forms a major part of most prayer groups but the subject matter can be very different. Some concentrate on a theme such as people in poverty, homelessness, prisoners, loss of faith and family issues such as Mothers Prayer Groups. There are those that pray especially for peace or climatic issues. There are special groups for children such as the Children of Mary. There are also the groups for elderly citizens who may not meet together but spend part of the day praying at the same time. Divine Mercy prayer groups are such. Most groups in fact have an intercessory element.

There are also many different styles and types of prayer that are used. Many prayer groups pray the Rosary either in its entirety or a single decade.. Some have prescribed or set prayer like the Legion of Mary or The St Vincent de Paul groups who also serve the community. Groups often gather around a Saint and part of their prayer concentrates on asking for that Saint's intercession (Padre Pio Groups.) or are dedicated to a way of life such as the 'little way' of St Thérèse or devotion to the Holy Face of Jesus. Many groups use scripture often notably Ecumenical prayer groups, those with members of different denominations and they find a common bond in the examination of scripture both Old and New Testament. Some do Bible Study as such in order to better understand what we are called to live out.

The style of the prayer group may vary too. There are the groups that pray silently or reflectively speaking when prompted or who have a more meditative leaning, sometimes using the Ignatian method of prayer, building up an image from

"We should always show gratitude to God and each to other"

Special Pastor

"How do you pray when you are at your best? That way is the best for you"

William Johnston

scripture and identifying with a player in the scenes such as the prodigal son, or his brother, or their father. On the other end of the spectrum there are groups called 'Charismatic' who have a more exuberant way of prayer often using music and hymns as well as spontaneous prayer and letting the Holy Spirit lead their thoughts and words. Each has a different style of worship. The other way, a more contemplative way, is by praying silently before the Blessed Sacrament with few spoken word and with Adoration of the Mystery before them. There are those groups too that spend time listening to the Lord in Silence, learning how to pray in this way, using different methods of achieving this (John Main, Thomas Keating etc.). These methods of prayer and gathering are not mutually exclusive and many groups combine some of these elements while others keep to a formal style. What is more important is that **all agree on the way that the group prays** for discord and factions can tear a group apart. Importantly, especially this coming year dedicated to the 'Word', there are the groups dedicated to living out the Gospel through praying around scripture often known as 'Lectio Divina Groups' the 'Divine Lesson'. These have much silence but also a common sharing based on the scripture being presented. These often lead to a good understanding between the members and a bond of friendship.

But you may be asking why bother? Surely, I can pray by myself! I do not need to go to a prayer group. Of course, this is true at least in part. Indeed private prayer is vital to our spiritual wellbeing. Jesus often prayed on His own and told us to do so. We are however one body. We do not live in isolation from each other. We often have the same problems in life and the same difficulties. Sometimes we can feel very isolated as church members or as believers. We also need each other's understanding and support. Very few people have a complete comprehension of everything and the insights, actions of others can lead us to a place of deepening and commitment. It is important however, to be careful in our choice of prayer group. 'One size certainly does not fit all'. We should consider why we are joining a group and what we hope to gain from it and indeed give to it. The Lord leads us all in different ways. All prayer should enable us to love more. A good prayer group will encourage us to both persevere but also to grow, as well as love God and love our neighbour. We are all

made in the image and likeness of God but we need to see this likeness in our neighbour. As Catherine de Hueck Doherty said... *"The essence of prayer is to hear the voice of another, of Christ, but likewise to hear the voice of the other person I meet in whom Christ also addresses mine. His voice comes to me in every human voice and his face is infinitely varied"*.

We need each other. Moses could only achieve victory in battle for his people when he obeyed the Lord and held his arms high. When he tired Hur and Aaron gave him a stone to rest on and then held up his arms. (Exodus 17:8-13.) We are called to bring rest to others and sometimes to hold up their arms. So if you feel you would like a little more support or need to go deeper, consider joining a prayer group of some type. You will be blessed. Halina Holman

Pope Francis

The prayer that the Lord taught us is the synthesis of every prayer, and we address it to the Father always in communion with brethren. Here is the novelty of Christian prayer! It's a dialogue between persons that love each other; a dialogue that is based on trust, supported by listening and open to solidary commitment. It's a dialogue of the Son with the Father, a dialogue between children and the Father.

This is Christian prayer. (Ed.) Rome July 2019



Feast Days in November

1st All Saints (Holy Day of Obligation)

2nd Feast of All Souls

3rd Thirty first Sunday in Ordinary time

4th St Charles' Borromeo

8th Bl. John Duns Scotus

9th Dedication of the Lateran Basilica

10th Thirty second Sunday in Ordinary time

11th St Martin of Tours

12th St Josaphat, Bishop

15th St Albert the Great

16th St. Margaret of Scotland and St Gertrude

17th Thirty third Sunday in Ordinary time

21st Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

22nd St Cecilia

24th Sunday: Feast of Christ King of the Universe

27th St Catherine Labouré

30th St Andrew, Apostle



The History of The Host Apostolate...

Every step of our journey in life is, or should be, to act in accordance and response to a 'call', a 'vocation', a 'desire to serve'. The founding of The Host Apostolate is no different and while it is difficult here to express the many ways this was enacted in my life the following is a brief summary of the twists and turns in its development. As much as anything else it is presented as an encouragement to others who feel that they would like to do 'something' and feel that they are not wise, strong or courageous enough yet feel that call. The Lord does not call the wise, etc. but those with an open heart that know their need of His Grace.

Having founded a secular organisation, Charity, by that very call, for children in the mid-eighties, I became acutely aware that what we often neglect to give others is a spiritual gift as well as physical, emotional and psychological support... This became a strong conviction taught to me by the very children we were helping. The general and increasing secularisation of society started to take me to a new way of serving, and thinking. This was paralleled by a personal spiritual journey to 'places' that I had not ever envisaged... A growing urge to evangelise and yet serve gave birth to the first part of The Host Apostolate then called Tabor House. (1991-2). The aim was to take the Gospel to the market place by means of car boots and table top sales. Michael, my husband and I started a journey together being convinced that the Gospel of Love had to be taken out to people who may not have ever experienced it, but that it had to be practical too. We started to take whatever was needed in an area, especially where there was poverty or underprivilege, such as baby things, domestic items etc. as well as spiritual items and books which mingled nicely on our stall. We decided to sell many of our own things especially ornamental ones or in excess of need. At that time in Middlesbrough there was great unemployment and as we discovered, spiritual hunger. This work we continued as we moved home, to Retford and then London. We were also adding things such as cards and inspirational items that we and some members made ourselves. At that time we also had a practical purpose that our funds would go to help those who were unemployed use their artistic talents which may have lead them to employment, but at least made them feel valued and important. We provided many with the tools of the trade which enabled them to work and raise their self-esteem. (Chris, Catherine). We went to many car boots, especially those during the week when two of our teenage children were still at school. People became used to seeing us and often asked us to return which was not always possible.

I have many wonderful stories of both conversion and growth from those who were helped or supported by our work then. On and off this work continued throughout the

nineties in spite of many house moves and maybe because of them. We had by then registered our work as 'Tabor' and developed what would now be called a 'mission statement' but we called it merely 'aims and objectives. There seemed to be an interest in what we were doing. Life brings many surprises and challenges. My family were now adult and either in, or concluding their further education and we hoped to develop what we were doing. Michael's health started to deteriorate and so did my father's. My mother's death had taken us to London to help look after him - as well as my youngest daughter's acting aspirations. But now his needs were great and this took us to Huntingdon, to a bungalow next to a lovely church, given by providence and a kindly Priest.

In 2000 my father died at home with us and shortly afterward Michael had a brain haemorrhage. We also had to give up our car; I could not drive at that point. So the 'Car Booting' had to stop. So we pondered what now... had we got it all wrong... yet the call was still there. Before we left Huntingdon in 2002 the Lord had started to guide and teach us many things. The journey was changing and a new path was being shown to us, picking up the old and transforming it. We spent much time 'house bound' and we were being asked to listen and write much. The idea of a base house started to develop further. We also had a spiritual director, which was a blessing. We decided, though prompted, to move back to where we considered home. We had some good friends there who knew our journey. After many searches we found a lovely house in Middlesbrough. Much time was spent too, in regrouping our resources and there were exciting family things happening as the family were making their way forward. We also spent a time travelling, a time of solace and peace and recovery. Our perspectives as a result of Teachings and prayer had changed again and on the Feast of the Transfiguration, 6th August 2002 The Host Apostolate was born.

Its triple aims were Adoration, Evangelisation and Formation. We developed a rule of life and thought that we had found our base house, our home could be extended. We had opposition as any new foundation does and weathered many a storm throughout. The Lord however gave us such help at these times, as well as the strength to continue. When the Lord starts a work He will continue it and bring it to fruition.

Both our outreach and my writing were taking up much time - Michael always helping and supporting and providentially we were encouraged to do a computer course. Reluctantly, I very reluctantly, we both did it. I discovered to my surprise how crucial this was to be. A very good friend Dave Brown suggested a website and set it up for us. Both he and his wife Celine were great

personal friends. (Later sadly both he and Michael died in 2008 within two weeks of each other leaving us widowed but greatly supportive of each other.) Our aims to get a base house however were not flowering and we decided to leave our lovely home and move into the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. Bishop Dunn had shown interest in our work and there was a prospect of giving us a base. Sadly he died at the point where he was giving us a few places to consider. As it happened our move was fraught with difficulties and having found a home to buy, and with removal men at the door the sellers decided to pull out, effectively leaving us homeless in spite of a signed contract. So with a few hours to spare I found a 'letting' in Byers Green. We got the removal men to put our furniture in store and we set up taking only essentials and basics. It is amazing what one can do without! We could not bring ourselves to pull out of the sale as a couple with children were ready to move in. So in 2005 we moved and started to work again. We spent much time searching for a home to buy mostly in Ferryhill where we worshipped, and in Willington and Spennymoor. Once again event overtook us as Michael was diagnosed with leukaemia and lymphoma in April 2007. The house was not suitable for him and so we found a bungalow to rent in Ferryhill indeed a lovely one. This proved to be good home for us at the time and of course the church was close by and we were already part of the community there.

It was during this time that things started to develop in a new direction. As we had a website we were being contacted by people from different parts of the world. Some for prayer, some having read Rosebuds, on aspects of Virtues, (Sixteen Rosebuds of the Crucified Jesus) or asking for help of one kind or another. The first letter came from a lady in India and a first appeal from a priest Fr. Kwodwo Darko, who wanted a Sunday Missal. Indeed our Parish Priest helped with this very spontaneously. We took this as a 'one of' request but they were forerunners of what has now developed.

As Michael was so poorly at this time we worked at his pace and request. We were very blessed to be so well supported by our gentle Parish Priest - Michael received Holy Communion almost daily. Michael died in April of that year peacefully in Lourdes: His last journey. Another decision had to be made. I had hoped stay in Ferryhill. People were very kind to us there but in the June of 2009 the owner of the bungalow we had rented died and his son was determined to sell. I had to find another home. On the move again... Again I searched round Willington and a little further afield, to Langley Moor, finding a house needing much repair. I bought it. I started the repair work delayed until September, moving on November 11th. To my utter astonishment 'our' Parish Priest was also moving and took both Parishes, living in Willington. However it was at this time that the Host Apostolate grew further.

I had to decide whether to continue the work 'solo', so to speak. There were others who were interested and contributed at this time and the little Lay Association was growing. Chris Young who had been affiliated since the Tabor years and came with us, so to speak, used his own growing computer skills, and we produced many cards with quotations. Literature was being posted as requested. We as a group went to Ireland for the Eucharistic Congress. Slowly I was being invited to give retreats in various places... and I had been to Poland to the shrine of Divine Mercy within weeks of Michael's death (he would not let me cancel this planned trip for both of us) and we were greatly supported and encouraged by the Sisters there. In July 2011 the first Encouragement was written (by a member) and we printed it ourselves till the number grew to over 500 copies, now 1000. Many more are sent by e-mail all over the world. Slowly but surely the requests for help came in. I had not envisaged this development at all but was aware of the needs of poor communities worldwide. The Sisters of Kerala, Daughters of Mary, were the first, followed by some 'one-of' requests. Having sent catechetical material and devotional things to them, almost like a snowball rolling, other requests came to us - sometimes through meetings, sometimes by email. Indeed, the Sisters found us on the website. Amazingly, for it never ceases to amaze me, we now have projects in Pakistan, four in India, two in Nigeria and two in Uganda, these with Seminaries in both places. Parcels go out weekly to these places where there is both need and persecution of Christians. Our small book stalls raise income in various Churches, and we are funded by donations. We also have an active prayer group...I do not know the next steps, but we will do what the Lord bids. Despite developing Cancer myself, in 2014 the Lord still leads me onward.

Finally I would have loved to explain the many 'God Incidences' in our work but it is impossible in such a concise form. Immense gratitude to everyone who makes our work possible. To the very many who send and collect the items we send out in all forms, **thank you**. To those who make donations without which we could not print or dispatch items... **thank you**. **Blessings** to those who collect boxes and envelopes. Many thanks for all the stamps too! To those who listen to the telling of the facts, so patiently, forgive my zeal and thank you for **your** encouragement, support, prayers and love. To our wonderful printer **much gratitude** is due. A very great special thanks to Chris Young our Treasurer, dispatch and co-worker for often putting up with a demanding task master... Finally for all your prayer without which our work would fail I can only respond with mine and with love. One day our growing family will have a permanent 'base house' where we can all meet do our work and sing Gods praises.

Halina Holman, Founder

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