

A detailed botanical illustration of red flowers, possibly poppies, with green leaves and stems. The flowers are rendered in a rich red color with fine lines indicating texture. The leaves are green with prominent veins. The background is a light, textured paper.

# THE RULE

FAMILIES OF ST. JOHN PAUL II

September 2023

Cover image: *Study of Peonies*, Martin Schongaue

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# FOREWORD

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When a young man wants to become a priest, he always has time to discern if this is what God is calling him to do. When he acquires some level of certainty, he asks a bishop or superior of an order if they would allow him to enter the seminary. Here the young man is trained, educated, and accompanied for several years. He is taught philosophy, theology, and everything else he will need to accomplish his ministry. But above all, he takes on a spiritual and human journey. He needs to learn how to pray, how to obey, how to lead, how to love, how to sacrifice, and so on. But he especially needs to know the One for Whom he is supposed to do all of this and more: Jesus Christ.

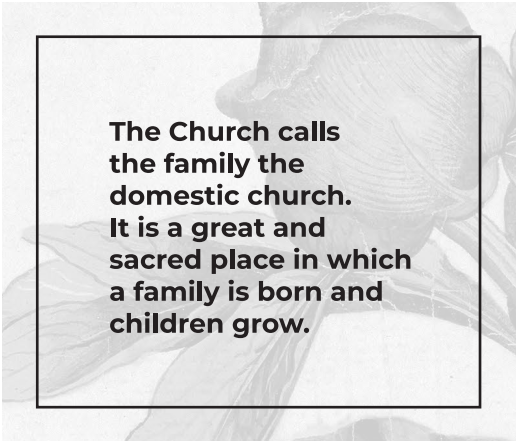
When a young man and woman want to marry, at first they experience something similar. They fall in love and start a period of discernment, which is their courtship. When they are certain this is the person with whom they want to live for the rest of their lives, usually the man proposes. At this point, a lot of energy is put into organizing the actual wedding and reception, but not as much energy is put into preparing for everything else that will follow. And yet, marriage is not an easier vocation than priesthood. Human nature indeed helps in the process, while a priestly vocation seems to be less natural, but nature can only help to a certain point.

In preparing many couples for marriage and talking to many others after marriage, we, the priests at Nativity, have seen a lot of needs we want to help address.

For example, there is a great hunger and desire to be accompanied on this journey. This doesn't mean having someone telling you what to do, but instead means being guided on this journey, which is significantly more difficult than it was in years gone by. One of the reasons it is more difficult is the mobile society in which we live. Very often in the past it was common to see a couple getting married with both sets of parents close by, so that when the first child was born, their grandparents would

swoop in and babysit and help in so many ways. And the same was true with aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters; there was a strong family network. While this still takes place in some blessed cases, very often it doesn't. Couples getting married are frequently all on their own. They count only on themselves as resources, and they have very little idea about what the adventure going forward could look like. They know it is something great. They know they are beginning something extraordinary. Fr. Michael's father always used to say to his kids, "We are not here founding a family, we're founding a dynasty that will spread throughout all of history, and what happens here, what happens in this house, is the foundation stone of something truly great."

The Church calls the family the domestic church. It is a great and sacred place in which a family is born and children grow. What should that be like? What are some of the elements? What are the ways we can help and support each other, as families and as a community? To live the adventure of founding something really great, how do we make a culture of the family? What is the culture of a family? Is it a closed culture or is it open? And if it is open, what is it open to? What does it look at? What is its ideal and goal?



**The Church calls the family the domestic church. It is a great and sacred place in which a family is born and children grow.**

We want families to be able to find support in each other and company for the journey. So even if the husband's parents are in New York, and the wife's parents are in Chicago, and the couple is here in Denver, we still have a community, a place of belonging, where Christ is physically present in our midst.

We called this initiative the Families of St. John Paul II because this great saint believed the life of the Church would be renewed through the family, and he dedicated a huge amount of energy during his pontificate

to caring for the family. He founded the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies of Marriage and Family, and he wrote extensively about the topic. He took care of the family in many various ways because the family in society is the school of humanity. It is the place in which humanity grows and encounters Christ. It is the place we come to know Christ, to grow up in Christ. It is the place in which we receive the transmission of the faith and receive the gift of Baptism and the growing life that comes from Baptism. We have no doubt whatsoever that St. John Paul II is watching over us and this initiative. We think that in many ways this initiative is an example of what he was seeking to do.

In this booklet, we explain what the Families of St. John Paul II looks like, its structure, and all its components. We hope and pray that this may bring new life to our parish for the greater glory of God.

THE PRIESTS OF THE FRATERNITY  
OF ST. CHARLES BORROMEIO

# RULE

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## The Couple

The Families of St. John Paul II initiative is meant to support the life of the couple in their desire to live more intensely their vocation and relationship with God. For this reason, each couple commits to a rule of life that is summarized as follows.

### | Spiritual Foundation

#### **Prayer**

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* begins by saying, “The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God” (CCC 27). Our very nature is this infinite desire or need for God. Whether we are aware of it or not, this is who we are, and it is expressed in everything we do or think. Prayer is the action that allows us to fulfill our own nature.

In a sense, the whole Bible is the description of this dynamic of desire. God created us in perfect harmony with Himself, but because of original sin, we lost our original connection to God and became restless and in need of healing. In the history of salvation, through Jesus’ Passion and Resurrection, God makes that healing possible. The Bible ends with this very simple and beautiful prayer in which the healed humanity says, “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22:20).

How do we pray? The quick answer is, “It doesn’t matter, as long as we do it.” This is the most important aspect of prayer. To pray is a school of prayer, which means we learn as we do it. It is true that some things are helpful while we go to this school of prayer. Here are some suggestions:



- Prepare for a moment of prayer with a quick opening prayer. We need God’s grace to relate to Him, and we need to ask Him for that grace. We should always offer our prayer for a clear intention, which makes this moment more intense for us.
- Do not be afraid of distraction. It is almost inevitable that we won’t focus on God for the whole time we pray. Distraction can be a very special opportunity to re-consecrate our time and ourselves to God. For example, we can offer Him the reason we were distracted, or we can ask Him to convert us.
- Allow the Church to teach us how to pray. The Tradition of the Church identifies many helpful prayers: the Liturgy of the Hours, the Rosary, the Divine Mercy Chaplet, and Adoration, for instance. To pray with our own words is perfectly fine, but we may risk talking only to ourselves, about ourselves.
- Finally—and this is the most difficult part—give it time. Being faithful in the little things over time will help us achieve great results.

### **Couple Prayer**

Couple prayer is born from one very simple awareness: we don’t have what it takes to be spouses or parents.

In the book of Tobit, Tobiah wants to marry Sarah, but she had been cursed and her previous seven husbands had all died on the first night of marriage. Tobiah, though, trusting God, is not afraid of marrying her. “When the girl’s parents left the bedroom and closed the door behind them, Tobiah arose from bed and said to his wife, ‘My love, get up. Let us pray and beg our Lord to have mercy on us and to grant us deliverance.’ She got up, and they started to pray and beg that deliverance might be theirs. He began with these words: ‘Blessed are you, O God of our fathers; praised be your name forever and ever. Let the heavens and all your creation praise you forever’” (Tob 8:4-5).

Tobiah and Sarah did not have what it took to get rid of the curse, so they prayed to God about it. Our conjugal prayer has to be the same. We need to have the awareness that without God we are doomed. Statistics show that Catholics divorce at the same rate as anybody else. Yet with

God everything is possible, even to love someone for the rest of our life. Statistics also show that divorces in families that pray together are almost nonexistent. However, prayer is not just about avoiding the risk of divorce, it is first and foremost a call to grow in holiness, love, and familiarity with God.

Jesus told us, “Again, amen, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18:19-20). In order to make our prayer stronger, we don’t have to say it louder, we have to pray with someone else. The reason we pray together, therefore, is above all to ask for God’s help and presence.

### **Family Prayer**

All too often, we priests happen to hear an older mother or father complaining because their children do not practice their faith anymore. Often they say they took them to Mass every Sunday and even sent them to Catholic schools, and yet they lost their way. How come? Unfortunately, there isn’t a simple solution, but normally those parents were not able to communicate with their children a real relationship with God. To send kids to a Catholic school or to take them to Mass does not automatically provide that relationship. Of course, they provide the possibility for that encounter with God to take place, but they do not guarantee it. Nothing does. But there is a huge difference between providing a possibility for an encounter and showing them an encounter taking place before their eyes. This is what family prayer is.

If we pray often and are accustomed to personal prayer and silence, then when we pray together, it becomes a moment in which we allow God to enter our life and transform it.

If that is the case, it will somehow be visible and desirable for our kids too. Small children learn from adults by imitation much more than by being told. If you give a fake cellphone to a child, they will always go for the real one whenever they have the chance, because they recognize that it has real value for their parents. Therefore they want it for themselves as well.

So, the primary reason to pray with our kids is to educate them to pray, that is, to have a real relationship with God. This is only possible if family prayer is the result of personal work.

## **Silence**

Silence is not just a mere lack of words. This is necessary, but, above all, it is a time inhabited by a presence. What does this mean? Imagine a very good friend you haven't seen in a long time. On the way back from his honeymoon, he decides to visit you and introduce his wife. Think about how you would make preparations to receive them into your home and how everything in you and your house would be focused on them. For example, you would silence your phone and have the food on the table already, and your conversation would mostly involve questions directed to them.

The long-expected visitor is Christ, who visits us in our silence. We prepare ourselves and the house of our heart for this beloved and long-awaited presence.

Why is this dimension of silence so important? Because we are not used to listening to God, and we need to put in extra effort so it may happen. Saint-Exupéry wrote in *The Little Prince*, “And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.” There is something inside of us that needs to be opened up to be able to listen to God, and this doesn't happen very easily.

Silence should not be confused with other things that may look similar but are not. For example, silence is not studying, or it is not getting caught up on the latest of Scott Hahn's books. Silence is not just praying or talking to God. Silence is not just about taking a break or having a quiet moment. All these things can ultimately be about myself. Silence is a moment when we are “about” God. To pray, read, walk, think, etc. are all activities that can be helpful, but silence is not about what we do; it is about recognizing that Christ is present. All the above-mentioned actions can be done during silence as long as they are lived with the desire of recognizing Christ's presence.

## **Spiritual Reading**

A spiritual reading is a reading that helps in our spiritual life. The Bible is, of course, a great source from this point of view. Other readings include the lives of saints, writings of saints, theology books, books on the history of the Church, or the *Catechism* and other Church documents. A privileged place should be given to the reading of this booklet and other texts provided by the Families of St. John Paul II, which is our common work. When we choose a book, we need to carefully consider if it helps us in our spiritual life or not.

## **How to Live the Rule as a Couple**

### **Every Day: Prayer**

Every day, each member will follow this simple rule of prayer:

- The spouses say an Angelus together when they wake up. If it is not possible to pray together upon waking up, each spouse should pray the Angelus individually for the intentions of the other spouse and the family.
- The spouses take fifteen minutes—alone or together—to pray Morning Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours and/or to read the Bible or some other spiritual reading.
- At lunch, the spouses say the Angelus and the blessing before the meal.
- At dinner, the whole family says the Angelus and the blessing before the meal.
- At bedtime, the spouses say a few prayers with their children.
- The spouses say the Memorare together before going to bed.

## **Every Week: Mini-retreat**

Every week, each spouse—alone or together—will find the time for an hour-long mini-retreat, during which he or she will pray, read, and meditate. This is a chance to live a dimension of silence during the week. A weekly adoration hour can be conducive for this mini-retreat.

The mini-retreat should start with a moment of quiet prayer, like the Rosary or something else that helps put ourselves in the presence of God. During silence, it is very helpful to read the content of this booklet or other spiritual reading. We also invite couples to ask the priests or sisters for spiritual advice on how to approach and conduct this mini-retreat.

Sometimes, especially if we are not accustomed to it, it is difficult to practice silence for an hour or more. In this case, it is also helpful to add a little moment of contemplation of something beautiful, because this is a simple way to be in front of God as well. It could be listening to classical music, taking a walk in the park, or looking at the sun setting behind the mountains. As long as it is not lived as a distraction, moments like this can be helpful in building the spiritual stamina to do silence for an extended time.

### *Mini-retreat Requirements:*

- It needs to last at least one hour.
- It has to include:
  - A little bit of prayer, i.e. the Rosary or Adoration.
  - A little bit of reading and meditation on the Bible or other spiritual reading, such as the pages offered here by the priests.
- It could include a moment of beauty, such as a walk or listening to classical music.

## **Every Week: Calendar Meeting**

Every week, couples will sit down and review the upcoming week together. In this way, we help each other make conscious, intentional decisions about how we spend our time and what our priorities are as individuals and as a family. This meeting should be held at the same time each week, and it may be helpful to invite the oldest kids to attend as well.

## **Every Month: Couple Meeting**

There is no communion without communication. Husband and wife are called to a communion so deep that the two will become one flesh. Yet, this can be very difficult to accomplish, and even if the two are good at communicating, it can be very difficult to talk about important things regularly. For this reason, the couples who are part of the Families of St. John Paul II commit to active and regular communication by conducting a monthly couple meeting, during which the spouses talk about themselves and their family life. This meeting should have some sort of formality to it so the spouses are not victim to instincts and moods.

There are two purposes for the couple meeting. The first is to contemplate the wonders of God in our lives and therefore to give witness to them. The second is to identify if there are obstacles to those wonders of God in our life.

### *Meeting requirements:*

- *Preparation.* Personal preparation is essential. If we don't prepare for it, we won't bring much to it, and we won't expect much from it. It will become just another item in our to-do list.
- *No distractions.* When there are kids present, it becomes more difficult. Group members can help each other by babysitting for each other during the couple meeting. Also, turn off cell phones, TV, music, etc. If it is necessary, leave the house. The parish facilities are always available.
- *Duration.* The meeting should last for around one hour.
- *Prayer.* The meeting starts and ends with a brief moment of prayer.
- *Topics.* At the couple meeting, the spouses discuss one or two topics that have been decided from the list on the next page and prepared prior to the meeting. Not all the topics need to be covered every month, but at least every topic should be covered twice a year. Time will teach couples what needs to be talked about every time or less frequently.

- *Notes.* Have a notebook at hand. You may want to remember something your spouse shares with you or a decision you made together. If you write it down, it won't be "like tears in the rain" (*Blade Runner*).

### **Couple Meeting Topics**

- Faith
- Personal happiness
- Intimacy
- Mutual relationship:  
The way you treat each other. Do you allow time for your partner to express their feelings or concerns? How do you accept corrections? How can you improve your dialogue?
- Children
- Finances
- Health
- Work
- Extended family
- Difficulties
- Other topics:  
Leave time in the end for anything else you may want to share. The list provided is helpful, but cannot limit what you may want to talk about.

## *Meeting Format:*

### Opening Prayer

- The spouses say the Prayer to the Holy Spirit (pg. 30) together.
- The husband shares one way in which he felt honored by his wife in the past month, and the wife shares one way in which she felt honored by her husband in the past month.
- Then, the husband shares one way he felt he honored his wife in the past month, and the wife shares one way she felt she honored her husband in the past month.

### Review

- The spouses briefly review the notes kept from the previous meeting and see if there were any changes in the past month.

### Discussion

- One of the spouses announces the first topic.
- Each reads or expresses the thoughts they have prepared about it.
- The spouses freely discuss the topic.
- They write a few synthetic notes regarding the topic just discussed.
- They move on to the next topic in a similar fashion, until they exhaust their list.
- They check with each other to see if there is anything else either of them would like to discuss.
- The spouses identify at least one area of improvement and decide a step to take.

### Calendar Discussion

- The spouses review the upcoming events of the next month.
- They decide the date and the topics for the next meeting.

### Closing Prayer

- Depending on the time of the day, the spouses say The Angelus or a Memorare together.



# The Group

A family alone cannot easily withstand the challenges of the modern world. This is why each family will be part of a small group of four to six families in companionship on this journey. These groups will meet regularly every month and are invited to become a real community of friends in Christ.

## | Spiritual Foundation

When Christ ascended into heaven, he didn't leave behind rules or books. He left behind a group of friends: the Apostles. Friendship, therefore, is necessary to live a Christian life. To foster friendship, each group needs to take special care to share their lives and hold each other accountable.

### **Sharing**

Why do we need to share? To satisfy two needs of human nature. First of all, we are made in the image of God, Who is communion. We are not only meant to share in this communion with our spouses and children, but with everyone. It is part of the communion of saints in which we all participate. There is no communion without communication, and therefore it is extremely important to be able to express oneself—to share what happens in our life and what we care about or was impactful.

Secondly, we need to share because it helps us understand what is going on in our life. This is what St. Paul commands us to do when he says, “Test everything, retain what is good” (1 Thess 5:21). How do we do that? We need to express a judgment. There is a lot of stigma attached to the word judgment, since we don't want to and can't judge another person. But we do have to judge everything else. It is the only way to understand, learn, and mature in our life. Fr. Luigi Giussani defines this act of judging anything as “experience,” saying that, “Experience certainly means ‘trying’ something, but primarily it also coincides with a

judgment we make about what we try,” and “what defines experience is understanding something, discovering its meaning.”

To judge anything, I need criteria. For example, to judge the temperature of something, I need a thermometer. What is the ‘thermometer’ we use to judge what is going on in our life? In each one of us, there are certain pieces of evidence and needs that are part of our nature. For example, I need to love and to be loved, I know that life is better than death, I want to be treated with justice rather than injustice, I am made for beauty, I need to be happy, etc. If we bundle them all up together, we can call it, for instance, desire for gladness, or, with a biblical term, heart. The heart cannot be confused with feelings. The heart is the truest, deepest part of ourselves. It is what makes us humans and what makes me me. The heart is the criterion we need to use to judge what is going on in our life.

### **Accountability**

There is no real friendship if there is no possibility of mutual correction. If we love someone and see them doing something wrong, we want them to change. To love, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, is to will the good of the other. To allow that to happen, though, two things are needed. First of all, a person needs to be open to being corrected, to be vulnerable to the other, to desire such a kind of friendship. Secondly, the other person needs to be able to notice if there is something wrong going on with their friend.

By sharing with each other how we are living the Rule of Families of St. John Paul II, families create a moment of accountability that provides both of these aspects. In this way, a member is open to the other for correction and provides a context where that can take place.

### **Vacation**

Fr. Giussani used to tell this story about his first years as a high school religion teacher: He went to the principal a few times, asking permission to organize an overnight field trip. The principal always refused. Finally, Giussani said, “Look, the science teacher has a science lab, the music teacher has a music room; I need to take the kids away. The only way to verify if Christian life is possible is to live together.”

Life is always too busy or too distracting for us. This is why it is important to take some time away, in which it is possible to focus on the things that have a priority in our lives but are often left out. This was even important for Jesus himself. In the Gospels, there are many references to moments in which he went away either by himself or with just the Twelve. He always went to an isolated place. Most notably, we can say that he started his mission with a retreat, the forty days in the desert right after his baptism, and he ended it with another one, his night of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. For these reasons, we want to have some time every year to go away and stay together.

## **How to Live the Rule as a Group**

### **Secretary-family**

Each group chooses a family as secretary-family to facilitate the common life. The task of the secretary-family is of service, not of leadership, to help the common life. After a year, the group chooses another secretary-family, which can be the same as the previous year or can change.

#### *Secretary-family Duties:*

- Remind everyone of the upcoming group meeting.
- Remind the group what pages they are supposed to read.
- Remind the group when the next half-day together is going to be.
- Help choose the dates for the next group meeting.
- Initiate and facilitate planning the annual vacation.
- Communicate with the priests if any changes to the Rule are being considered.
- Relate to the group the priests' comments on the changes to the Rule made.

## Group Meeting

The purpose of the small group meeting is to foster friendship and solidarity among families.

Every group will meet for a meal at one of their homes on a monthly basis. It is important to share a meal and to rotate the host family. They should all eat at the same table, even if it is a bit cozy. There should be no children. Dinner should be such that the host family can sit at the table the whole time, either by self-service or having all the food on the table at once.

### *Meeting Requirements:*

- *Meal.* When we break bread together, we enter into communion with each other in a natural way. It is not by chance that Jesus' most important gesture was accomplished during supper.
- *Common prayer.* Friendship is not just about liking each other. Instead, it is built on the foundation of wanting to follow Christ together. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry said, "Love is not just looking at each other, it's looking in the same direction." This is true for friendship as well. If we want to become true friends, we need to help each other to look at Christ. This is the purpose of praying together.
- *Sharing.* To grow in friendship, it is important to share our lives. Sometimes we do that by spending time together, sometimes we do that by communicating what is going on in our lives.
- *Accountability.* Friendship is not real if there is no correction. Being vulnerable with each other and being able to say when ourselves and others have failed in keeping the Rule will become a powerful weapon in front of our weaknesses and the temptations of the world. Accountability should take place to some degree with our whole group of families, but it may also require the intimacy of a smaller subgroup.
- *Brevity.* The group meeting should not last longer than two or two-and-a-half hours in order to preserve the meaningfulness of our conversations.

## *Meeting Format:*

### Dinner

- The host family leads the Angelus and blesses the meal, then gives direction with regard to how the meal is going to be served.
- Each member shares their highs and lows and considers what God is telling them through each. The high is the most beautiful moment of the past month, while the low is the opposite. It is important to prepare our highs and lows beforehand and for each person to share for only three to five minutes.

### Discussion

- After dinner, all couples gather together in the sitting room. The host family leads the meeting.
- There is a moment of discussion on the assigned pages. The purpose of this moment is to understand the text and its connection to life.
- Then, there is a moment of accountability, during which the members tell the others how they are living the proposal of the Rule. This should also be a moment of honesty and openness to suggestions and corrections.
- Finally, the secretary-family goes over any practical issues, decisions, or announcements, such as when and where the next meeting will be or when the next half-day is.
- The host family asks each member if they have any particular intentions. Then they say the Memorare together for those intentions, thanking God for the gift of their spouses, their friendship, and the meeting they just had.

## **Vacation**

Once a year, usually during summer, there will be a moment of vacation for each group. In this moment, possibly accompanied by the priests or sisters, the families will be able to spend time together deepening their friendship.

### *Vacation Requirements:*

- *Duration.* The vacation should ideally last three or more days. In general, Friday through Sunday works well, but a longer vacation should be taken if possible.
- *Location.* Groups should choose a beautiful location for their vacation, such as a cabin in the mountains. Staying together in the same space fosters a sense of communion that is integral to our vacation. Nonetheless, the space should also afford each family the privacy of their own bedroom.
- *Meals.* The meals for vacation should be divided among the group in advance. For example, one family will plan and prepare Friday evening's dinner, while another family will plan and prepare Saturday morning's breakfast. As at the monthly group meetings, the meals should be enjoyed together around the same table, with all the necessary preparations done beforehand, so everyone can remain seated for the entire meal.

### *Vacation Format:*

Below is an example schedule for a three-day weekend vacation. This is to be adjusted as-needed by each particular group, but each vacation should include the same basic elements.

#### Friday Evening

- Arrival
- Angelus and blessing of the food
- Dinner
- Games or other evening activities
- Bedtime

## Saturday

- Morning Prayer
- Angelus and blessing of the food
- Breakfast
- Hike or similar activity
- Mass (can be celebrated during the hike)
- Angelus and blessing of the food
- Lunch
- Free time
- Angelus and blessing of the food
- Dinner
- Campfire and s'mores or other activities

## Sunday

- Morning Prayer
- Angelus and blessing of the food
- Breakfast
- Mass
- Departure

For more resources and ideas regarding the vacation, groups can reach out to the Families of St. John Paul II Secretary.

# The Community

A few times a year there will be a half-day together for all the Families of St. John Paul II. This moment is meant to unite the families, the priests, and the sisters as one community.

## | Spiritual Foundation

The half-days together remind us that what we live as a couple and in our small group is the same experience the Church lives as a community. We need to share, communicate with, and know each other, to learn to forgive and listen to others, and to know that the Lord is alive among us and that we are His people.

The Book of Revelation describes this joyful experience with the following words: “After this I had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb.’ All the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They prostrated themselves before the throne, worshiped God, and exclaimed: ‘Amen. Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving, honor, power, and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen.’” (Rev 7:9-12).

In a certain sense, every Christian gathering reflects this vision, because every time the Lord brings us together, we experience an anticipation of the Communion of Saints in Heaven. For this reason, at the half-days, we have a meal together, we sing—singing is an essential part of the heavenly liturgy, as an expression of joy and unity—and we play games!



Of course a prominent part of the half-days is the teaching from our priests, sisters, or people invited for the occasion. The teaching is the bread of the soul; it gives us nutrients to grow in our faith and our vocation. The topics are chosen after many conversations with the small groups, and they address the real difficulties and struggles of the families. There is always the possibility to ask questions and learn from the experience of other couples. Sometimes, especially after the end of the work on a proposed text, instead of a talk, we have an assembly to share the fruits of our reflections.

While the proposals for the couple and for the small group are offered specifically for the couple, the half-days and the vacation are moments for the whole family. Adults and kids play and sing together, living that “communion of generations” so dear to John Paul II in his *Letter To Families* (§10). During the talk, the kids are invited to attend a different activity prepared for them.



**Every time the  
Lord brings us  
together, we  
experience an  
anticipation of  
the Communion  
of Saints in  
Heaven.**

## How to Live the Rule as a Community

### Half-days Together

Each half-day includes a meal together, singing, games, and a moment for the children while the adults have their meeting. This meeting includes a teaching on an aspect of family life and a moment in which families can share their experiences. Over the years, the topics we have covered include: prayer, communication, education of the children, the relationship with extended family, use of time and priorities, and Christian witness in a non-Christian world.

#### *Half-Day Format:*

- Opening prayer: Angelus
- Everyone shares the same meal together; when possible, provided by the parish or prepared by volunteers
- Songs and games or similar activities
- A lesson for the parents and, in a different location, an activity for the children
- An open-mic session, during which it is possible for couples to ask questions and share examples from their own lives
- Announcements
- Closing prayer

# HOW CAN THIS RULE WORK FOR ME AND MY FAMILY?

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When couples join the Families of St. John Paul II and read through the Rule, many are overwhelmed by the amount of requirements listed here. Some immediately dismiss it as impossible to live. Others give it a try, but get discouraged when they fail to even pray the morning Angelus on a daily basis. Others still wonder why what is presented here is “better” than other Catholic traditions, such as the Mass. This section focuses on these questions and other issues families run into when trying to apply the Rule.

## **| What is a Rule and why is it important?**

A person training to become an artist begins by learning certain elements of art (color, line, shape, form, etc.) and principles of art (balance, contrast, rhythm, etc.). These elements and principles serve as the foundational building blocks and fundamental rules that an artist uses when composing their work. Only upon mastering these basics is an artist able to develop their own style and create masterpieces as beautiful and complex as the Sistine Chapel. Without these basics, on the other hand, an artwork becomes a jumbled mess with no true sense of beauty.

Similarly, a Rule of life gives us the basic tools and guidance for living in communion with one another and with Christ. Without a common guide, we can easily get lost or lose touch with one another. A Rule of life, however, helps us to live each day with purpose. It helps us to make intentional decisions that keep us on track and continually draw us closer to Christ. Praying the Angelus three times a day, for example, is a simple gesture that proves to be foundational to our faith—it repeatedly draws us back to the right path.

## **What if I “fail” or can’t follow the Rule exactly?**

The Rule is fundamentally not about “failing” or “succeeding” but about drawing us closer to our spouses, our children, our group, our community, and Christ Himself. If you are struggling with following the Rule, here are some practical suggestions:

- Try starting small. Take one part of the Rule—the part that seems easiest for your family—and try implementing it in your life. Be intentional about it, and don’t give up if you aren’t successful right away. Give it time. Once you are comfortable with one part of the Rule, you can then begin to add more.
- Practice accountability with your group. If you are struggling with keeping the Rule, try talking to someone in your group about it and find a way for them to support you in your efforts. The monthly meetings should also be used as opportunities to check in with each other about how the Rule is going for you and your family.
- Remember that the Rule will look different for every family. For example, couples with young children may have less opportunity to pray together, whereas couples with older children may be able to include the kids in their daily prayer. Each situation is different, and the Rule can be adapted according to these particular circumstances. Do what works best for your family.

## **What if I have a different personal tradition?**

The Rule proposes specific practices so that each family has concrete guidelines and all the Families of St. John Paul II can share in a common life together.

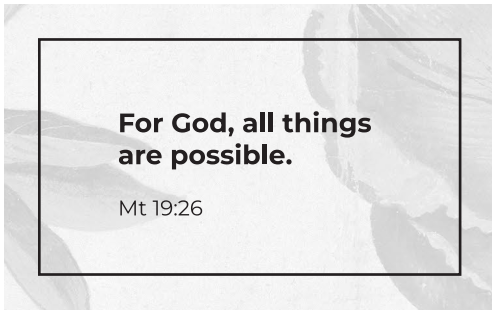
It does not mean that what is proposed here is “better” than other personal traditions. For instance, if an individual or couple goes to daily Mass or has a special devotion to the Rosary, the Rule should not negate these important traditions. Rather, the Rule should build upon the personality and traditions of each family, who should consider their particular circumstances when implementing the Rule. As an example, for the fifteen minutes of daily prayer, one person may read the Mass

readings in the Church before daily Mass, while another may pray the Rosary, while yet another will participate in evening prayer with a group of friends. Each is committed to living the Rule but in beautiful and varied ways.

### **Modifications**

As each person is responsible for his or her own relationship with God, so each group is responsible for the way they want to help each other in their life journey. If a group agrees upon a proposed change to the Rule, this is absolutely possible. In order to do so, though, the secretary-family must communicate any modifications to the priests. The priests will in return make their observations and recommendations, which the secretary-family will relate to the group for further discussion.

## **| Is it really possible to live this Rule?**



In the busyness of family life, it may seem impossible to take any time out for prayer, let alone to keep up with all the demands of the Rule. Yet the Rule itself helps us to prioritize our time in such a way that prayer and living intentionally together become our

primary focus, rather than something we try to squeeze into our already busy schedules. The Rule is not easy to live. It requires discipline, and it may require reorganizing our lives in a way we never have before. Like the development of any habit, it requires persistence over time. But it is possible. Each member of the Families of St. John Paul II is invited to recognize the beautiful possibility of living the Rule well.

# APPENDIX: PRAYERS

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## **Angelus**

L. The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary,  
All And she conceived by the Holy Spirit.

L. Behold the handmaid of the Lord;  
All Be it done to me according to Thy word.

L. And the Word was made flesh,  
All And dwells among us.

L. Hail Mary...  
All Holy Mary...

L. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God,  
All That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

L. Let us pray:  
Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts,  
that we to whom the incarnation of Christ, Thy Son, was made  
known by the message of an angel, may by His passion and cross  
be brought to the glory of His resurrection.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
All Amen.

## **Regina Caeli (Queen of Heaven)**

*Said during the Easter Season*

*English:*

L. Queen of Heaven, rejoice, alleluia.

All For He whom you did merit to bear, alleluia.

L. Has risen, as he said, alleluia.

All Pray for us to God, alleluia.

L. Rejoice and be glad, O Virgin Mary, alleluia.

All For the Lord has truly risen, alleluia.

L. Let us pray. O God, who gave joy to the world through the resurrection of Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, grant we beseech Thee, that through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, His Mother, we may obtain the joys of everlasting life. Through the same Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

*Latin:*

L. Regina caeli, laetare, alleluia.

All Quia quem meruisti portare, alleluia.

L. Resurrexit, sicut dixit, alleluia.

All Ora pro nobis Deum, alleluia.

L. Gaude et laetare, Virgo Maria, alleluia.

All Quia surrexit Dominus vere, alleluia.

L. Oremus. Deus, qui per resurrectionem Filii tui, Domini nostri Iesu Christi, mundum laetificare dignatus es: praesta, quaesumus; ut per eius Genetricem Virginem Mariam, perpetuae capiamus gaudia vitae. Per eundem Christum Dominum nostrum.

All Amen.

## **Memorare**

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thine intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my mother; to thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen.

## **Our Father**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

## **Hail Mary**

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed are thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

## **Glory Be**

Glory be to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

## **Hail Holy Queen (Salve Regina)**

Hail, holy Queen, mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn, then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us; and after this, our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

L. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.

All That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

## **Angel of God**

Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me here, ever this day be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.



### **Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel**

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle, be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray. And do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the Power of God, cast into hell Satan and all evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

### **Prayer to St. Joseph**

O blessed Joseph, faithful guardian of my Redeemer, Jesus Christ, protector of thy chaste spouse, the Virgin Mother of God, I choose thee this day to be my special patron and advocate and I firmly resolve to honor thee all the days of my life. Therefore I humbly beseech thee to receive me as thy client, to instruct me in every doubt, to comfort me in every affliction, to obtain for me and for all the knowledge and love of the Heart of Jesus, and finally to defend and protect me at the hour of my death. Amen.

### **Prayer for the Heart of a Child**

*Leonce de Grandmaison*

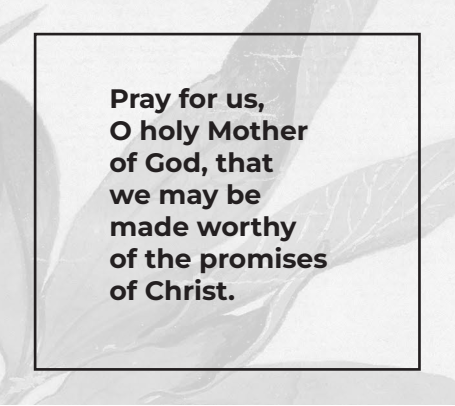
Holy Mary, Mother of God, preserve in me the heart of a child, pure and clean like spring water; a simple heart that does not remain absorbed in its own sadness; a loving heart that freely gives with compassion; a faithful and generous heart that neither forgets good nor feels bitterness for any evil. Give me a sweet and humble heart that loves without asking to be loved in return, happy to lose itself in the heart of others, sacrificing itself in front your Divine Son; a great and unconquerable heart which no ingratitude can close and no indifference can tire; a heart tormented by the glory of Christ, pierced by his love with a wound that will not heal until heaven. Amen.

### **Grace Before Meals**

Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive from thy bounty. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **Prayer to the Holy Spirit**

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful and kindle in them the fire of Your love. Send forth Your Spirit and they shall be created; and You shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations, through Christ Our Lord. Amen



**Pray for us,  
O holy Mother  
of God, that  
we may be  
made worthy  
of the promises  
of Christ.**





**FRATERNITY**  
of ST. CHARLES



**NATIVITY**  
OF OUR LORD