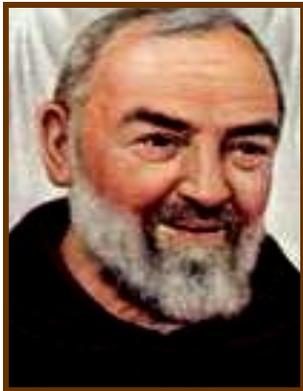


One day Padre Pio said: *If it were possible, I would like one favor from the Lord: I would want, if He said to me 'Go to heaven', I would like to have this grace: Lord, do not allow me to enter heaven until the last of my children, the last of those persons entrusted to my priestly care, have entered before me...* On another occasion, to one of his Spiritual Children, Padre Pio said: *I have made an agreement with the Lord that when my soul is purified by the flames of purgatory and is worthy to enter heaven, I will stand at the gates of paradise and will not enter until I have seen the last of my sons and daughters enter.* Through the Prayer Groups and the commitment of his Spiritual Children, Padre Pio was able to fulfill part of his great mission: to bring the world to God. He wanted all people to proclaim who this great God of mercy is.

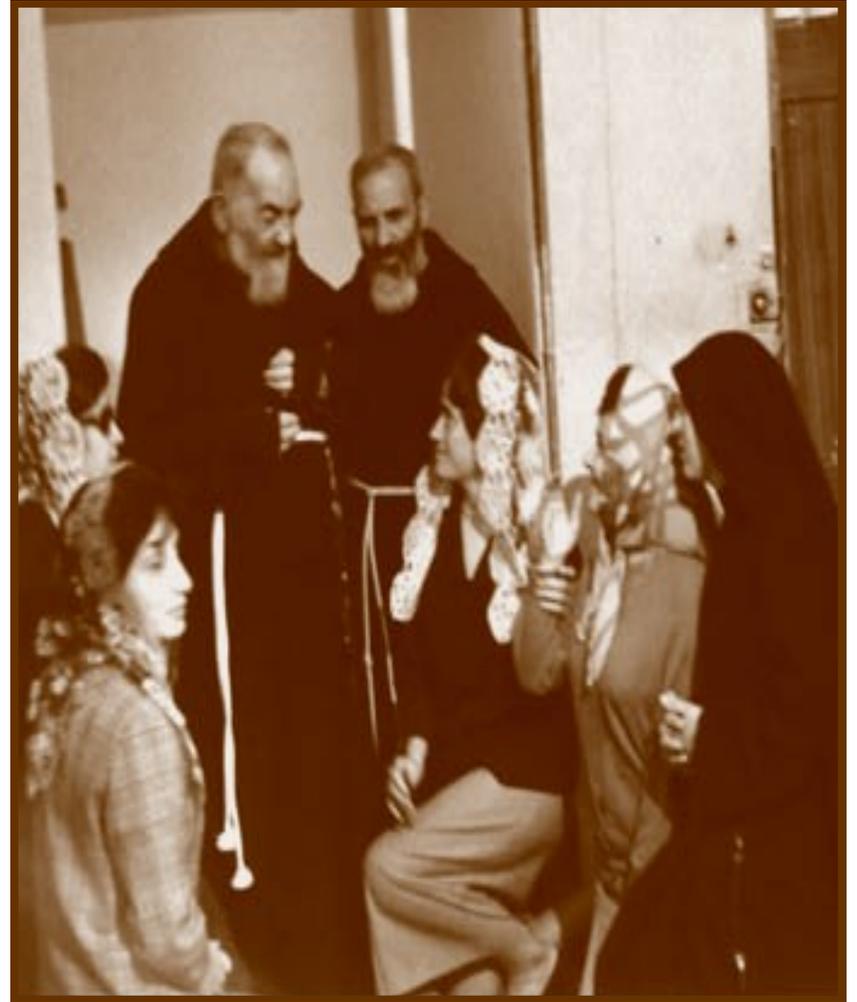
Before his death on September 23, 1968, Padre Pio gave a special blessing to the Prayer Groups, the sick, and all of his Spiritual Children. There were many representatives from around the world gathered at San Giovanni Rotondo to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the day on which Padre Pio received the visible Stigmata – September 20, 1968. It seemed an act of Providence that this great mass of people, for whom Padre Pio had been an instrument of Divine Providence in their journey back to the Lord, should have been present to receive his last blessing and attend his funeral.

Padre Pio's influence continues to this day. In the spirit of their holy founder, the Prayer Groups of Padre Pio and his Spiritual Children throughout the world continue to respond to the words of Our Lord: Truly I say to you, ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you...If you ask anything of the Father in my name He will give it to you. Let us remember that our prayers, like incense, rise to God. Let us ask for the grace to live in God's will and to be instruments of God's peace and love to those whom we encounter on life's journey.



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## **PADRE PIO PRAYER GROUPS**



**PADRE PIO MEETING WITH ONE OF HIS PRAYER GROUPS**

## **PADRE PIO PRAYER GROUPS**

Padre Pio, through the stigmata he bore and the life of prayer he led, understood the sufferings of the infirm, as well as the prayers of both the sick and the healthy. ***Let us gather periodically for prayer in common. Today's society does not pray, that is why it is falling apart*** (Padre Pio).

The idea of Prayer Groups was promoted and supported by Padre Pio because he envisioned them as God's instruments of relief for a suffering world. Knowing that alone he could do little for those who suffer throughout the world, Padre Pio organized the Prayer Groups so that they would be a source of constant prayer embracing all those around the world who were needy in either body or soul. The Prayer Groups, began along with the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza, found their unity in the spirit of their founder, Padre Pio. As they sprang up around the world, each Group in its own uniqueness would fulfill its mission in accord with the approval of the local bishop and under the spiritual guidance of a priest assistant.

Essentially centered on prayer and charity, the Prayer Groups were expected to grow in the spirit so often recommended and encouraged by Padre Pio: a spirit and attitude of respect and obedience for the Church. These groups of people that gathered for prayer under the guidance of a priest spiritual director had an absolutely private character to them. Some commented that in view of the private character of the Prayer Groups, there was no need to request ecclesiastical approval, since there is no need for Church approval to gather for prayer with a priest. The immediate and explicit response that Padre Pio made to this remark was undeniable: *If the local Church authority does not approve the Groups, there is only one solution possible: obey immediately and cease all activities, making absolutely no comments or remarks of any kind.* The conclusion was more than clear: *The Church is our common Mother, to whom we must be absolutely and devotedly obedient* (Guglielmo Sanguinetti). Padre Pio would often repeat to Giancarlo Setti, to whom he had entrusted the direction of the Prayer Groups in 1960: *They must be united, and must never tire of doing good, be obedient and respectful to the Hierarchy, and be firm and persevering in their commitment.*

When someone asked Padre Pio if they might establish a Prayer Group, but expressed uncertainties regarding obstacles encountered because of the lack of interest on the part of the clergy, Padre Pio's response was unequivocal and direct: *Do nothing without the permission of the bishops and the priests. Do everything in common agreement, and obey.* The need to gather at least once a month, to pray for the intentions of the Holy Father and to be a source of charity for all, were to be the essential characteristics of every Group.

## **SPIRITUAL CHILDREN**

All those belonging to the Prayer Groups throughout the world considered themselves Spiritual Children of Padre Pio. They looked to Padre Pio as a sure guide through life. They spontaneously sought him out either in person or by mail, in order to receive his counsel and directives. The first group of Spiritual Children can be said to have begun at San Giovanni Rotondo in 1917. They gathered around Padre Pio as their spiritual director. Padre Pio was given permission by his superiors to guide the many souls of San Giovanni Rotondo who were seeking his guidance in living a more perfect life. The local friary became the first gathering place for his Spiritual Children. They gathered to participate in his spiritual conferences in the visitors' area of the friary

The first Spiritual Children of Padre Pio would gather with their Spiritual Director usually on Thursdays and Sundays. He would speak to them of virtue and vice, weaknesses that had to be fought, good that we are called to live. His approach was simple and practical, rich in a wealth of experiences, directed toward the essence of the Christian life, spurring his Spiritual Children to generosity, encouraging them by his own mere conviction and personal example. He insisted much on obedience, trust in one's Spiritual Director, frequency in receiving the Sacraments, and the need for meditation and mortification.

The group of Spiritual Children grew. One day Padre Pio remarked to one of them: *Many, many, many more will come, but my arms will reach out to embrace the whole world.* Not only those particular souls who sought perfection, but also the penitents who received absolution in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, would ask Padre Pio to assist them in leading a better life. From 1914 until 1924, Padre Pio kept in touch with his Spiritual Children through letters. Some letters were rather lengthy and some were as brief as a slogan but they were always encouraging and enlightening for those who received them. The elements of his spiritual direction can be summarized in the following: a rapport of supernatural affection, a personal awareness and participation in the lives of his Spiritual Children, a continual discovery of the prompting of the Holy Spirit in the souls of his Spiritual Children, an uncovering of the insidious works of Satan in a soul.

Padre Pio fulfilled his ministry as director of souls expressing himself with frankness and sincerity, with few words but always to the point and convincingly. He accompanied his Spiritual Children throughout their lives. He was a true father: merciful and decisive, human and categorical, clear and quick. He would say that *I neither call them to me nor do I send them away.* To those who wished to be numbered among his Spiritual Children he would say: *I accept you willingly as my Spiritual Children, on the condition that you always be good and not give bad example before God and man, that you be examples of a good Christian life. Otherwise I also know how to use the whip.*