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Guiding principles
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Spiritual Check-up for Religious

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CATECHETICAL GUILD

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Director

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
AND
A SPIRITUAL CHECK-UP
FOR RELIGIOUS

By

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FOREWORD

To the religious who is really in earnest about striving for perfection these *Guiding Principles* will be helpful as a norm according to which he can pattern his life. Furthermore, if used carefully and regularly, this *Spiritual Check-up* will aid him in determining the condition of his soul. It seems advisable to examine one's conscience according to one section each week and to review all sections at the end of every month. This will encourage vigilance in every phase of the religious life and, in the end, will insure reasonable progress towards perfection.

Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, may the Holy Spirit, the Author of all holiness, bless this booklet and make it bear fruit in the hearts of those who have vowed to become more like unto Jesus, the Model of all Perfection!

LAWRENCE G. LOVASIK, S.V.D.

Feast of the Epiphany, 1944
Sacred Heart Mission House
Girard, Pa.

A SUMMARY OF PERFECTION

O Lord Jesus, let me know myself, let me know Thee and desire nothing but Thee alone.

Let me hate myself and love Thee; and do all things for the sake of Thee.

Let me humble myself and exalt Thee; and think of nothing but Thee alone.

Let me die to myself and live in Thee; and take whatever happens as coming from Thee.

Let me forsake myself and walk after Thee; and ever desire to follow Thee.

Let me flee from myself and turn to Thee; that so I may merit to be defended by Thee.

Let me fear for myself, let me fear

Thee; and be among those who are chosen by Thee.

Let me distrust myself and trust in Thee; and ever obey for love of Thee.

Let me cleave to nothing but only to Thee; and ever be poor for the sake of Thee.

Look upon me, that I may love Thee.

Call me, that I may see Thee and forever possess Thee.

Amen.

—ST. AUGUSTINE.

(INDULGENCE OF 500 DAYS, a plenary indulgence under the usual conditions, if these invocations are devoutly repeated daily for a month.—S. P. AP. DEC. 17, 1932.)

PART ONE

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

I. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Under all circumstances I must maintain the firm resolution with the grace of God to become a saint, a truly great saint. *“You, therefore, are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* (MATT. 5, 48) These are urgent words of the Master. Furthermore, my calling demands it, for its chief purpose is that, through the observance of my holy vows and the Rule, and through the imitation of Christ, I sanctify myself. I must become a saint—nothing else matters.

To reach the goal I must use the following means:

1. A sincere and often-expressed desire for holiness of life. On all occasions which suggest that I direct my biggest and boldest petitions to my Savior (meditation, particular examen, during and after Consecration, at Holy Communion, Benediction of the Blessed

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Sacrament, during novenas, devotions, recollections and retreats), He must be able to notice in me a genuine hunger and thirst for true justice, for perfect contempt of the world, for absolute purity of conscience, for highest self-renunciation and holiness. If I do not yet feel this hunger and thirst in reality, I will at least rouse in myself a desire for them on these occasions.

It is the will of God that I become a saint. If it is also my will, and the object of my most ardent and enduring longing, nothing can keep me from reaching this goal. But I must maintain this desire as long as I live. It is a necessary and powerful incentive to keep up the fight against my inordinate affections, and it will surely lead me to sanctity.

2. The firm purpose to do everything in my power to completely satisfy the wishes of the Lord, to refuse Him nothing and to omit nothing that is apt to please Him.

This unreserved surrender to God must be with me a sort of fixed idea, a kind of holy passion. To live and breathe for God, to fulfill His every wish, is my first duty as a man and as a religious. I have absolutely nothing

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else to do in the world than His will. There is not a single affection for anything created, no matter how intimate or right in itself, that would justify the slightest resistance to the will of God. This was the motto of the Master; it must be forever mine also: "*My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, to accomplish His work.*" (JOHN 4, 34) There is really no rest except in God.

3. A brave and strong offensive against my inordinate inclinations, against everything in me which does not fully please God. My religious vocation also implies that I work for the salvation of souls. What are my chances to save other souls, to overcome in them what is evil, to conquer hell, the world, and the flesh? They are exactly as great as my daily victories over these enemies in my own soul. The devil will mock me if I myself am under his dominion and daily surrender to him. Therefore, I cannot make any compromises with him. To the same degree that I give in to an inordinate affection, I am in the servitude of Satan and he controls and handles me almost as freely as an organist makes the keys of his instrument do his bidding.

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The smallest thing is worthy of highest consideration. Experience shows that those, who out of love for God deprive themselves of many little things, usually possess an unusual degree of virtue. To go without small things for God's sake is highly meritorious. He who wants to live only for God refuses to accept all comforts and conveniences which can be surrendered. A true follower of Christ will aim to humble himself before others, to forget offenses without seeking revenge, to suffer with calm and even joy. To such a one, God can entrust His biggest tasks without fear. Such religious, full of the spirit of self-sacrifice, who live only for God and heaven, are the urgent need of our Holy Mother, the Church. The spouse of Christ, who was my first love, calls on me and expects me to show my professed devotion and loyalty. I will not disappoint her and put her to shame by my hesitation. Under the guidance of and in close union with the Master and the indwelling Spirit of God, and with the blessing of my heavenly Mother, I will conquer all difficulties!

II. PRINCIPLES FOR RELIGIOUS DEVOTED TO AN ACTIVE LIFE

If I want Jesus to be the life of all my works, I must make definite resolutions for intensifying my interior life and adhere to the following convictions:

1. In all my work our Lord is the principal agent; I am only His instrument.

2. God will not bless my work if I have confidence only in my own efforts, if I perform my work solely by natural activity, out of self-love instead of divine love—without truly depending on God.

3. Woe to me if I undertake work without being assured that such is the will of God, if I do not use the means of preserving or recovering interior life, if my interior life suffers because of my active life.

I will therefore act on the following principles:

1. I will not undertake good works through mere natural energy, but rather consult God first to determine whether it is His will.

2. I will not remain engaged for too long a time in excessive work which would leave my

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soul in a state of estrangement from God, or render it difficult for me to raise my thoughts to God occasionally.

3. I will follow a definite schedule, if possible; by all means, I will devote a definite time each day to prayer.

4. I will live always with the firm conviction that I can do nothing more important for my own soul and that of others than to cultivate my interior life. The more I have to do, the more I need that life.

5. I will strive to remain recollected during my work and under the influence of God's grace even though it be only by a short, yet sure, penetrating glance of my mind, a simple loving movement of my heart towards God.

6. I will regard morning mental prayer as an absolutely necessary foundation of my interior life, because union with our Lord is morally impossible without mental prayer. A religious is worth as much as his mental prayer is worth!

7. I will regard Holy Mass, Holy Communion, and other liturgical functions as the most fruitful sources of my interior life, because they unite me more and more to the life

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of the Church and thus enable me to put on Christ Crucified.

8. I will regard it as an indispensable duty to be habitually solicitous in keeping my heart free from the least sin and united with the Heart of Jesus through a deep personal love in all that I do, because He said, "*Abide in Me, and I in you . . . He who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.*" (JOHN 15, 4, 5)

9. I will ever regard it as true that whatever I may do for my own salvation and that of others, I risk building everything on sand if my activity is not based on a very special devotion to Our Lady, because she is both the Mother of God and the Mother of men; and God, having once wished to give us Jesus Christ by the Blessed Virgin, does not change the order.

III. A PERFECT RELIGIOUS

If I want to be a perfect religious I must:

1. Look at myself just as I am, in the spirit of true humility.
2. Look at life as it really is, remembering

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that this world will pass away while the next is eternal; that my greatest duty is to give glory to God and to save my soul.

3. Hate sin, even venial sin, as the greatest evil in the world and, therefore, avoid every occasion that will lead me into it; and if I should fall through human weakness, I must be sincerely sorry and penitent, and return to an even more intimate friendship with God.

4. Shun the world and its spirit, despise its interests and opinions, and never conform to its ways.

5. See the hand of God's Providence in all that happens, and with confidence abandon myself to His loving guidance.

6. Love God above all things and find delight in Him alone, and for His sake love my neighbor and His creatures.

7. Listen to the inspirations of God's grace, promote His glory among men, and work always with Him and for Him.

8. Love Jesus Christ and His most Blessed Mother with a deep personal love, and endeavor to live in constant union with them.

PRAYER FOR TRUE GENEROSITY

Eternal Word, only-begotten Son of God, I implore Thee, teach me true generosity. Teach me to serve Thee as Thou deservest to be served: to give without counting the cost, to battle without minding wounds, to work without rest, to sacrifice everything without expecting any other reward than to know that I have done Thy holy will!



I am all Thine and all I have I offer Thee, O most loving Jesus, through Mary, Thy holy Mother.

PART TWO

A SPIRITUAL CHECK-UP

It must be my aim and ideal to become a pious, steadfast, friendly, and Eucharist-minded religious and a faithful observer of the evangelical counsels.

I. A PIOUS RELIGIOUS

1. Has my hatred of sin decreased? Am I still determined to avoid every sin and to fulfill every wish of God, no matter how small, as long as I clearly recognize it as such?

2. Do I sincerely make my morning offering, especially at Mass, and renew my good intention during the day?

3. Do I perform my spiritual exercises punctually and completely? Do I make every effort to perform them well?

4. Do I prepare my meditation conscientiously and carry it out carefully? Do I try to pray fervently and devoutly during my periods of meditation? Do I make decided efforts to repel drowsiness and wandering of the mind?

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5. Do I practice my examination of conscience methodically? Do I seriously examine myself concerning every point?

6. Do I follow an approved liturgical method of attending Holy Mass and performing my Communion devotions?

7. Do I, in preparing for confession, make a thorough examination of conscience? Are my act of contrition and purpose of amendment sincere? Is my confession plain and intelligible?

8. Do I try to recollect myself a little before vocal prayers, and do I make quiet and determined efforts to dispel distractions? Do I observe a worthy posture and do I take part in the community prayers with a sufficiently loud voice?

9. Do I keep up my private devotions: to the Sacred Heart, to our Blessed Mother? my visits to the Blessed Sacrament? my Rosary? the Way of the Cross? Do I use ejaculatory prayers? Do I make an effort to be recollected and think of the renewal of the good intention?

10. In reciting the Office, do I try to observe the proper time as far as possible? Do

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I pray with understanding and dignity? Do I make an occasional effort, especially at the beginning of a new Hour, to recollect my thoughts?

11. Do I spend a little time daily in spiritual reading?

II. A STEADFAST RELIGIOUS

1. Am I still determined to reach a high degree of solid virtue? Do I really wish to make progress in my spiritual life? Am I resolute and persevering in combating my principal sin and evil habit?

2. Do I begin every piece of work promptly? Do I work haphazardly, especially on free days?

3. Do I, during my work, from time to time lift my heart to God, offer Him my endeavors and beg His help?

4. Do I make reasonable efforts to utilize my time while working and praying? Do I seek recreation only as a necessary relaxation and preparation for more work?

5. Do I lose much time by idleness, especially on free days?

6. Do I make constant efforts to imitate

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Christ, or do I live thoughtlessly and carelessly?

7. Can I claim a few traits revealing a similarity between my character and that of Christ, especially regarding love of my neighbor, obedience and patience?

III. A FRIENDLY RELIGIOUS

1. In dealing with my superiors, am I docile and tractable like a good child? Do I ever criticize their actions, taking it for granted that my knowledge of most things is greater than theirs?

2. In dealing with my fellow-religious, am I kind, ready to help? Do I treat them all alike at least, externally? Am I rude, impolite, too distant or too harsh in my judgments? Do I try to avoid hurting the reputation of others?

3. How do I observe the injunction of the Gospel: "*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you*" (MATT. 5, 44) ?

4. Do I try to give a good example to all, and as far as possible, to make them happy by sympathy, by kindly conversation, by will-

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ingness to render little services, especially when the latter are distasteful or unpleasant, by anticipating the wishes of my fellow-religious without making myself obtrusive?

IV. A EUCHARIST-MINDED RELIGIOUS

1. Am I thoroughly convinced that the Holy Eucharist should be the center of all my activity, all my devotion, all my apostolate?

2. Do I endeavor to foster a very personal and tender friendship with Jesus in the Tabernacle? Do I spend at least ten minutes each day with Him in heart-to-heart prayer? Do I make a longer visit (half an hour) on days when I have more time at my disposal? Do I occasionally make a private Holy Hour?

3. Do I follow a definite method of attending Holy Mass? Do I take an active and intimate part in the Holy Sacrifice by offering myself—my work, pains, and disappointments of life—with Jesus, my Victim on the altar, in order to share by my generosity and sacrifice in His life of immolation? Do I renew my oblation during the day? Do I show sufficient interest in the Church's Liturgy?

4. Do I regard Holy Communion as my

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Treasure, which suffices for all the needs of my soul? Do I prepare fervently to receive Holy Communion, even the night before? Do I spend a reasonable amount of time in thanksgiving after Holy Communion (at least ten minutes) and make good and zealous use of these precious moments? Do I continue my thanksgiving throughout the day by fervent ejaculatory prayers?

5. Do I endeavor to remain united with our Lord by making little acts of Spiritual Communion at definite intervals during the day, e. g., when the clock strikes, at the beginning of a new occupation?

6. Do I make determined efforts to become a saint by means of my Eucharistic devotion? Do I guard against mere routine and carelessness?

V. A FAITHFUL OBSERVER OF THE EVANGELICAL GOUNSELS

1. Do I observe sufficiently that dependence on the judgment and permission of my superior, which is the essence of the vow of Poverty?

2. Do I try to free myself from too great an

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attachment to the things in my daily use? Am I willing to give up some things? Do I cultivate the conviction that the worst in the house is more than good enough for me?

3. Do I try to suppress all inordinate sensuality by not always choosing what is most comfortable or convenient, by observing the rules of religious modesty? Do I immediately put away every indecent thought when I become aware of it? When reading, do I avoid what is plainly suggestive, or do I linger on passages more or less objectionable?

4. Do I do my best to mortify myself? Do I ever let a meal pass without some mortification? Is my conduct concerning particular affections (friendships) correct?

5. Am I conscientious in observing the order of the day? Silence? Punctuality? Do I always promptly stop working?

6. Do I make up for infractions of the order of things by accusing myself at the end of the day?

7. Am I trying to be a ready instrument in the hand of God by carrying out the mandates of obedience?

A SHORT SPIRITUAL CHECK-UP

(According to the Great Commandment)

1. Do I love the Lord my God with my whole heart, that is with undivided love, so that I love nothing created, except for God's sake, to please Him and because He wills that I love it and devote my interest to it? Do I love my parents, relatives, superiors, brethren, fellow-religious, subordinates, my vocation, my Office, my daily work, my home, my room, my books, the objects I use, purely for God's sake, so that I am ready to relinquish them all at any time, if God wills? Whatever is not loved and sought for God's sake is worthless, and only hampers the soul. *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart."* (LUKE 10, 27)

2. Do I love God with my whole soul, that is, with all my inclinations? To whom are my fondest thoughts directed? What do I hate and abhor most intensely? Whither do my yearnings and hopes, my most secret desires run in unguarded moments? What is the ulti-

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mate reason that I am filled with joyous courage at times and then again dejected, timid, sad? God is always the same; I may wholly rely on Him; no one who ever placed his trust in Him was disappointed. Are all the inclinations of my soul reasonably disposed? Are my fondest thoughts directed to God and heaven? Is sin my greatest aversion? If so, the whole interior man is in good order and I enjoy calmness and peace. *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole soul."*

3. Do I love God with my whole mind, that is, do I value His good pleasure, His satisfaction, His Sonship, His grace, His heaven, above everything else—above my convenience and hobbies, above all earthly treasures and advantages, above knowledge and friendship, above health and life? I am not allowed to love anything against God's will, nor esteem anything above Him, nor on a par with Him; but I must love all things in full accord with Him, in subordination to Him, for His sake. *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole mind."*

4. Do I love God with all my strength, that is, do I consecrate the exercise of all my

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strength to Him? My eyes, ears, tongue, hands, feet, my imagination, memory, understanding, will,—whom do they serve? From whom and for what purpose have I all these faculties? How unfortunate I should be if one of them were missing! How much more wretched if, possessing them all through the goodness of God, I should misuse them to offend Him! *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole strength.”*

5. Do I love my neighbor as myself, that is, do I respect and love him as God’s image and likeness, as God’s child, as the price of Christ’s Blood and the temple of the Holy Ghost? Do I wish him everything that I wish for myself? Do I treat him as I would have others treat me? Do I excuse my adversaries as the Lord excused His enemies on the Cross? Do I think and act thus towards *all* men, since all are God’s images and none is excluded from my love? *“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself!”*

SPIRITUAL VITAMINS

1. Consider only those things worth your while which refer to the one supreme business of your life—the salvation of your soul. *“Only one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the best part, and it will not be taken away from her.”* (LUKE 10, 42)

2. If you would hate any enemy, hate yourself! No hatred is more beneficial nor is there any enemy more dangerous to you than you yourself.

3. Christ became like you in all things except sin. Strive to become like Him. Man's greatest glory is to become like God. His greatest wealth is to have God as a Debtor.

4. What are you looking for in the world, when you are greater than the world? Nothing on earth is good enough for you, because, while all things are of little consequence, your soul is of highest importance—capable of possessing even God.

5. You should will all things that God wills. You cannot will anything better, because evil

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cannot come from the Highest Good.

6. Always have confidence in God who wants to help you, because He is all-good; He knows how to help you, because He is all-wise; He can help you, because He is all-powerful.

7. Do not divide your heart as if to give a part to God and a part to the world. "*No man can serve two masters.*" (MT. 6, 24) Nor is this division legitimate in a case where one must give either all or nothing.

8. "*A man is as he loves. Do you love the earth? You are earth! Do you love God? What shall I say? You are like God!*"—ST. AUGUSTINE.

9. Nothing is more precious than love, with which heaven is bought. Consequently, the greatest kind of extravagance is to love that which is vain or even harmful.

10. Do not fear God, if you can love Him; however, that you may learn to love Him, fear Him!

11. Why do you serve man more zealously than you serve God? Do you perhaps wish to benefit others and at the same time be a detriment to yourself?

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12. Store up treasures for eternity, not for time! Of all the earthly goods you may gather, you will be able to take with you absolutely nothing.

13. Just as no evil deed is without its punishment, so no good deed is without its reward. Why then are you not more zealous to do good?

14. Why do you fear man? God alone should be feared and loved, because He sees and knows all things.

15. Love of God reaches out for that which is difficult and arduous; love of self for that which is pleasant and vain.

16. Every deed performed as perfectly as possible will obtain for you a greater degree of grace and glory; it will afford glory and honor to God, joy to the Church Triumphant, merit to the Church Militant, solace to the Church Suffering, edification and grace to your neighbor.

17. You are obliged to strive for perfection under the pain of grave sin; but you will never satisfy this obligation or acquire virtues without great effort and diligence. As soon as you begin to grow lukewarm, your condi-

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tion is bad. If, however, you are fervent, you will find great peace, and your task will become easy on account of the grace of God and the love of virtue. You will always rejoice in the evening if you have spent the day profitably. Therefore, be vigilant! Arouse yourself! Admonish yourself! Whatever be the condition of others, do not neglect yourself!

18. Prayer is so displeasing to the devil that he strives with the greatest diligence to hinder it.

19. Care for God and God will take care of you!

20. Be a mother towards others, a judge towards yourself, a child towards God!

21. You are only as good or as great as you are in the eyes of God, not in the eyes of men.

22. Talk little, but do much!

23. You will never be more secure than when you foster a very tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

24. If you do not take yourself seriously, nobody else will.

25. The more one knows about himself, the less he says about himself.

PRAYER FOR ALL THINGS NECESSARY TO SALVATION

O my God, I believe in Thee, do Thou strengthen my faith. All my hopes are in Thee; do Thou secure them. I love Thee; teach me to love Thee daily more and more. I am sorry that I have offended Thee; do Thou increase my sorrow.

I adore Thee as the author of my first beginning. I aspire after Thee as my last end. I give Thee thanks as my constant benefactor; I call upon Thee as my Sovereign Protector.

Vouchsafe, O my God, to conduct me by Thy wisdom; to restrain me by the thought of Thy justice; to comfort me by Thy mercy; to defend me by Thy power.

To Thee I desire to consecrate all my thoughts, words, deeds, actions and sufferings; that henceforth I may think of Thee, speak of Thee, refer all my actions to Thy greater glory and suffer willingly whatever Thou shalt appoint.

Lord I desire that in all things Thy will be

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done, because it is Thy will, and in the manner that Thou willest.

Grant that I may always regard whatsoever is pleasing to Thee, despise what Thou disregardest, avoid what Thou forbiddest, and do what Thou commandest.

I beg of Thee to enlighten my understanding, to inflame my will, to purify my body, and to sanctify my soul.

Give me strength, O my God, to expiate my offenses, to overcome my temptations, to subdue my passions, and to acquire the virtues proper to my state of life.

Fill my heart with tender affection for Thy goodness, hatred of my faults, love of my neighbor, and contempt of the world.

May Thy grace help me to be submissive to my superiors, kind and courteous to my inferiors, faithful to my friends and charitable to my enemies.

Assist me to overcome sensuality by mortification, avarice by almsdeeds, anger by meekness, and tepidity by devotion.

O my God, make me prudent in my undertakings, courageous in danger, patient in adversity, and humble in prosperity.

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Grant that I may be ever attentive at my prayers, temperate at my meals, diligent in my employments, and constant in my good resolutions.

Let my conscience be ever upright and pure, my exterior modest, my conversation edifying, and my deportment regular.

Assist me that I may continually labor to overcome nature, to correspond with Thy grace, to keep Thy commandments, and to work out my salvation.

Make me realize, O my God, the nothingness of this world, the greatness of heaven, the shortness of time and the length of eternity.

Grant that I may prepare for death; that I may fear Thy judgments, that I may escape hell and in the end obtain heaven; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

—CLEMENT XI, 1721



