

St. Gerard's Society Handbook



*The Parish of St John the Baptist
Purley, Surrey*

**Almighty and ever loving Father,
This is eternal life
That we may know you, the one true God,
And Jesus Christ, our King, whom you have sent,
And the Spirit who dwells in our hearts**

**Inspired by the example of Jesus, Mary and Joseph
May we and our families
Live in the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
And gain everlasting happiness in Your Kingdom**

Foreword

*By the Reverend Canon James P. Pannett,
Parish Priest, Purley*

It is now over fifty years since the Society of St Gerard Majella was started in our Parish, and the first handbook was published. During these years the Society had endeavoured to provide mothers of Catholic children with all possible support. It gives mothers an opportunity to meet and discuss problems in an atmosphere of Christian love, thereby helping them to face the challenges of bringing up children in today's world.

Today more than ever mums need the encouragement and help of our Society, especially as many have to work outside the home and still cope with usual family life. St Gerard's exists to help mothers provide happy and holy loving homes for their families. It has led to many friendships between families, and has contributed to the life of the Parish.

Members of the Society attempt to give each other all the support that is necessary. In order to maintain a thriving Society the members must be prepared to give as well as receive, in terms of their time, energy and talents.

Other

Non-catholic speaks
Gossip
Suicide
Hope
Evolution
Euthanasia
Abortion
Hobbies
Conscience

Morals and Medicine
Pornography
Drugs
Environment
Population
Mental Health
Third World issues
Witchcraft
Superstitions
Samaritans

Examples of recent meeting topics

- ❖ Love & Commitment
- ❖ Breast Cancer Pink Evening – wear or bring pink
- ❖ All Saints & All Souls day – spiritual encounters
- ❖ Discipline
- ❖ Christmas Gifts – good, bad & the ugly
- ❖ Social – bring a dish / takeaway night

- Food Allergies
- Time Management tools for busy mums
- Christmas wishes
- Art Evening
- Reflexology
- Evening Walk
- Marriage within all faiths
- Easter / Christmas Crafts
- Group Mass

- Modern Catholic
- Who was St Margaret?
- Money Saving ideas
- Holiday Tips, best & worse & places to go (locally)
- Children – growing up too fast?
- Managing children's behaviour
- Dangers to children
- Children and the internet
- Recipes for meat-free Fridays
- 10 facts about yourself (guess who?)
- Christmas preparation
- Craft – making doorstops, flower arranging & cake decorating

- What's in a Name?
- New Mass Translations – Canon Frank talks
- Film Night
- Wedding in Jordan – one member discusses her experience
- Honour or Respect, Cultural or not
- Social – bring a dish and partner

Appendix One – Topics

Church

Children's first idea of God
Children's prayer books
Christmas traditions
Favourite/helpful Saints
St Gerard Majella
Devotion to Our Lady
Keeping Sunday Holy
Modern Catholic
Angels
How the Diocese is run
Catholic press & publications
Charity
Sacrifice
Faith – how strong are we? Do we question?
Explaining different religions to children
Vocations
Election of a Pope
Eastern Churches
Annulment of marriage & Divorce
No marriage
Women in church
Stigmata & Relics – pilgrimages
Church Architecture
Lent and Holy week
Are we more Catholic than Christian or vice versa?
Commandments
Government of the Church
Necessity of religion
Consubstantiation
The Creed
Lapsed Catholics
Adult Conversion

Women

Careers of women
Mother & Wife at work

Women's liberation

Family

Love in marriage
Money values in marriage
Responsibility towards elderly relatives
Holidays
Large Families
Coping with special needs
Adoption
Love and Commitment

Children

Behaviour issues
Discipline
Sex education in school and/or home
Dangers to children
Keeping up with technology
Internet safety
Death
Starting school
Children's leisure
Child Psychology
Youth organisations
School problems- parent/teachers, bullying, attitude to work, games etc
Healthy Children
Child sickness
Catholic Education
Pressures on children

Home

Religion in the home
Christmas preparations
Easter preparations
Mixed cultural marriage issues
Entertaining at home – without TV
Fourth Commandment – honour thy Father and Mother

St Gerard Majella - Patron of Expectant Mothers

Feast Day: 16th October

St Gerard Majella was born at Muro in Southern Italy in 1726. He was the son of a struggling tailor who died when Gerard was twelve. As a boy Gerard showed an extraordinary fondness for prayer, the Sacraments and long solitary visits to the Church. After his father's death he was apprenticed to a tailor where the foreman was a bully, and beat the boy cruelly. Gerard took it all, literally, with a smile. He forgave the foreman and even shielded him from punishment. Later he accepted employment that meant three years of drudgery and the lash of a bitter tongue. Again there was no complaint.

At twenty, Gerard was able to set up as an independent tailor, did his work well and cheaply, and showed himself strictly honest. "He never defrauded anyone of as much as piece of thread". All the time there was an unending prayer and fasting, despite his non too robust health.

When he was twenty-three he made his dramatic and finally successful bid to become a Redemptorist brother. His mother had locked him in his room to prevent him from following the Redemptorist missionaries. He improvised a rope from a bed-sheet and escaped through the window. He had pestered the missionaries all during their mission in Muro. Because of his obvious ill health they had done their best to put him off. He now pursued them for miles and when he caught up with them, knelt panting in the dust of the country road, renewing his request to be accepted as a Redemptorist brother. At last, because of his persistence and reputation for virtue, they agreed. He looked so frail that the Fathers thought he would prove a 'useless brother' as far as work was concerned.

The monastery was poor, life was hard, but to everyone's amazement Gerard 'did the work of four'. He was in turn gardener, sacristan,

St Gerard's Group Society Prayer

cook, tailor, refectorian, infirmarian, carpenter and doorkeeper. He was the ideal Brother - one who joined prayer and union with God to the work of his hands. He was especially kind to the poor. He had a special power to read the consciences of people. Again and again men were aghast as Gerard reminded them of secret serious sins unconfessed. To the scrupulous too he gave peace.

God seems to have given Gerard special power to help mothers. During his life he showed that gift more than once. Since his death his help has been so great to frequent that he is often called 'the Saint of Happy Deliveries'. Thousands of mothers have lived to thank and love this 'saint you can sit down and chat to'. Thousands of boys and girls have been given his name in gratitude.

When he was only twenty-nine, tuberculosis struck him down. He suffered much, but without complaint and died in 1755. Today in Muro there is a bronze statue of him.

God our Father, may your love fill the hearts and homes of all our families.

May we follow the example of Jesus, Mary and Joseph so that everyone may enjoy the peace and happiness promised by your Son, Jesus Christ.

St. Gerard, patron of family life and mothers, we ask you to join with us in our prayers, now and as we live out our daily lives

Amen

St Gerard Majella: Pray for us

(Saints Name): Pray for us

The Society of Saint Gerard Majella

Group Meetings

Most meetings begin at 8.30pm to 10.30pm and consist of:

- Opening Prayers
- Spiritual Reading
- Group Business
- Evening Topic
- Refreshments and informal discussion
- Closing Prayer

Opening Prayer:

Sign of the Cross
Hail Mary
Society Prayer (see below)
St Gerard Majella pray for us
(Saint) pray for us

Spiritual Reading / Thought of the Week, can be given by the hostess, who at their own choice reads a short passage from some suitable source.

Group business, which should be kept to a minimum, deals with Society news, arrangements for new members, and alterations to programmes etc. General programme planning should be confined to the first meeting of every term.

Evening topic covers an infinite variety of subjects of general interest to the Group. This could range from topical issues to craft activities or guest speaker etc (see Planning the Programme).

Refreshments and informal discussion normally organised by the host but members can bring their own refreshments if they so wish. This is a time to continue discussions or just catch up with each other

Closing Prayer The close must to a come on time, no matter how interesting the meeting is. The Leader should lead the group in saying the 'Our Father'

The Society of Saint Gerard in an association of mothers of Catholic families, all of whom have a direct share in the running and development of the Society. It is an adaptable body, responsible to the changing needs and aspirations of its members, and already has undergone some important changes since its foundation. This handbook lists some of these.

The Beginnings

In 1960, four women, under the leadership of Mrs Pat Mitchell, began to meet every fortnight in each other's homes to discuss various matters which they felt might help them in the roles of wives and mothers. Others soon joined them, and the problem at once arose of a group growing too large; the intimate character of the original group was in danger of vanishing and most members disliked having to speak before a large gathering

It was, therefore, decided to form other groups of approximately twelve people. The Bishop's approval was sought for the Society as a whole and a handbook and constitution prepared. The handbook was first published in 1961. It reflected a strong feeling that there should be no over-organisation and that only simple rules should be laid down for the guidance of those who, in other parishes, might wish to emulate the spirit of the Society's founder members and to establish similar groups for mothers of Catholic children.

The Aims

The aims of the Society are expressed in the Constitution; to foster the Apostolate of the Home by helping its members to infuse the spirit of Christ into their daily lives and into their homes, to fulfil their vocation as wife, mother and homemaker (with particular reference to the religious and moral education of their children) and to form friendships between members and their families.

Membership

Any mother of Catholic children may join the Society, even if the mother herself is not a Catholic. The President should be consulted about new members so that she may advise on the most suitable group. Members who are no longer able to attend regular meeting may continue their contact with the Society by becoming Associate Members. Members should be free to change groups if they wish.

The Council and Society Officers

The Council consists of President, Vice-President(s), Society Secretary, Treasurer and Group Leaders. The President, who is elected each year at the Annual General Meeting, may serve only two terms of office, but in the case of all other officers there is no limit on reappointment.

- ❖ The *President* takes the chair at Council meetings and at Society functions and acts as the focal point for the Society.
- ❖ The *Secretary* keeps minutes of Council meetings and deals with correspondence for the Society.
- ❖ The *Treasurer* is responsible for the Society funds.
- ❖ The *Vice-President* assists the President and deputises for her in her absence. A Vice-President also undertakes to keep Associate Members informed of the various group activities in mind and to ensure that they do not feel out of touch with the Society.
- ❖ The *Parish Priest* is the spiritual adviser for the whole Society and whenever time allows he is present at Council meetings and the Annual General meeting.

Functions

- ❖ Feast of St Gerard Majella, 16th October, Mass is offered for members.
- ❖ Annual General Meeting (AGM) is held normally at the beginning of the year (Jan) - a Mass precedes the meeting
- ❖ St Gerard's aims to hold a social activity once a year
- ❖ A day Retreat is arranged once a year and is open to all members
- ❖ Each group is free to organise functions on their own throughout the year to suit their own needs

Funds

The running expenses of the Society are met from the annual subscriptions of the members, the amount of which is reviewed during the Council meetings. Subscriptions are due each January, and are paid in by the group leaders at the first council meeting of the year. New members do not pay in their first year but will contribute in the January after their year has passed.

It is a very strict rule of the Society that the organisation shall not be used for fund-raising, and only money required for subscriptions and functions may be collected at meetings.

Meeting Dates

Regular meetings are important but the Society traditionally has breaks in line with the school holiday – Christmas, Easter & Summer holidays, including half terms. This, however, is for the individual groups to decide and some groups may continue meeting throughout the year.

Planning the Programme

At the beginning of every term, the group meets to draw up a list of topics (see appendix one) and venues. When deciding what they wish to do for the term they should bear in mind the aims of the Society. Invitations are extended to outside speakers of a wide variety of topics. Each of the groups is encouraged to organise a house Mass with the priest once a year. You can also invite the priest to the group for a spiritual discussion as this gives an extra dimension to the spiritual life of the group.