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they are like pasture to the soul and a great support on the way to perfection”*

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FORMATION TEXT – LITURGICAL YEAR B

INTRODUCTION

Dear sisters and brothers,

The spiritual journey and testimony of the Padre Pio Prayer Groups, which originated from Padre Pio's charism, are fulfilled within the Church and in the service of the Church. In this regard, the introduction to the Statute reminds us that: "From their very beginning, the Prayer Groups were part of the Church, their natural Mother." For this reason, and because of the distinctive nature of being a Group - that is, a community gathered around a specific purpose - our formation is entrusted to the local Church, so that it may continually grow in living out its own charism and mission.

Therefore, this Handbook for the year 2026–2027 is not intended to replace the common journey that the Prayer Groups undertake within their respective parish communities. Rather, it seeks simply to provide a tool for fostering and evaluating those distinctive elements of Padre Pio's spirituality, which are then to be placed at the service of all the faithful.

In particular, following the three-year formation plan that we have proposed, this year's specific formation for the Prayer Groups aims to encourage everyone to study, listen, and meditate daily on the Word of God, according to Padre Pio's teaching: "...in prayer and meditation it is we who speak to the Lord, whereas in holy reading it is God who speaks to us." (Letters II, p. 130)

As in the previous formation texts, each meeting will begin with the listening to the Word of God. Beginning this year, in addition to the reflection on Sacred Scripture, our Handbooks will also include a passage taken from the Fathers of the Church, who constitute the authentic Tradition which believers in Christ turn to in order to reflect most fruitfully upon the Sacred Scriptures.

As for the excerpts from Padre Pio's Letters, this year we have chosen to focus on two letters that Padre Pio wrote to his first spiritual daughter, Raffaelina Cerase, in which he encourages her to read the "holy books." As we shall see, by this expression Padre Pio sometimes refers directly to Sacred Scripture, while at other times he uses it more generally to indicate spiritual reading. What is most important for us, however, is his desire to cultivate within the heart of his spiritual daughter an atmosphere of expectation and attentive listening to Our Lord Jesus Christ. We know that faith "comes from hearing"; this was the journey of the people of Israel (cf. Deut 6) and the constant proclamation of the Apostle Paul (cf. Rom 10).

With regard to the content of these meditations, we have deliberately chosen not to present specific methods of meditation. Instead, we simply include one of Padre Pio's letters in which he offers a precise guidance to Blessed Maria Gargani, one of his earliest spiritual daughters. For the rest, we entrust the task of educating people in the daily listening and meditation on the Word of God to individual spiritual directors and to the goodwill of each member.

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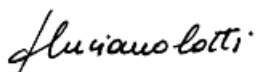
The purpose of these pages, rather, is to propose nine spiritual exercises designed to train the heart to welcome the Word of God. They have been developed by following the path outlined in the two letters that Padre Pio wrote to Raffaelina Cerase on 11 April 1914 (Letters II, pp. 68–71) and 14 July 1914 (Letters II, pp. 126–131). The context of these letters is fairly well known. We are at the beginning of Padre Pio's spiritual direction of this noblewoman from Foggia. She was a devout person who had already made considerable progress in her journey of faith. From their correspondence we learn that the Lord granted Padre Pio an interior knowledge of her soul, enabling him to perceive both her spiritual progress and the obstacles created by her anxious and melancholic temperament. For this reason, he realized that her many prayers and her daily participation in the Eucharist needed to be nourished by the Word of God and by other spiritual books. After the first recommendations contained in his initial letter, Raffaelina appears to have been somewhat reluctant to follow his advice. This explains the second letter, which is longer and more authoritative, becoming a genuine catechesis on the value and usefulness of Sacred Scripture.

In his instructions, Padre Pio reveals a profound spiritual pedagogy. His first concern is to begin with the heart, encouraging the formation of a heart that lives in adoration before God (Exercise 1: My Shekinah). He then seeks to center one's entire emotional life on the encounter with Christ (Exercises 2 and 3). This is followed by a path of virtue, in which one makes a definitive choice for Christ (the Exercise of Fidelity, the Exercise of Obedience, and the Exercise of Zeal for the Lord), ultimately leading toward contemplation and missionary discipleship, which are the focus of the remaining exercises.

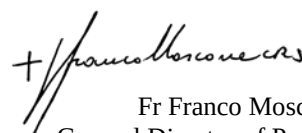
Naturally, the titles given to these various "exercises" are not taken from Padre Pio's own language. Rather, they represent an attempt to express his teaching in terms that speak to people today. The purpose of this Handbook is the same as Padre Pio's: to retrace, within our Prayer Groups, a journey of education for the heart to receive the Word. The goal is not merely to listen and meditate upon it, but to learn to live continually in communion with the Word, according to the tradition of the prayer of the heart and the great schools of Christian spirituality, of which Padre Pio's spirituality is a remarkable example.

Our heartfelt thanks go to all those who contributed to the preparation of this Handbook. We also entrust ourselves to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Grace and Woman of Listening, praying that she may make each one of us obedient listeners and humble adorers of the Word, which becomes flesh within us and gives life to the spirit.

San Giovanni Rotondo, Feast Day of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, 16 July 2026



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