

Program of Life

The goal of every baptized Christian is to be 'transformed' into Christ. This requires a concrete plan and constant effort, since the effects of original sin remain within us. The Program of Life is a tool which helps us to discover and uproot that vice (called the "dominant defect") which most hinders this transformation by developing a guide which will promote its opposing virtue.

Creating a Program of Life

The dynamic of the construction of a Program of Life is:
know yourself, accept yourself, improve yourself.

1) Analysis and Definition of Self

Set aside time to reflect on yourself. You will already have examined your conscience for the purpose of receiving the sacrament of reconciliation, but the reflection we are talking about here is to go beyond the individual faults you commit and to discover behind them the type of person you are, the root causes of your individual failings and strengths you have to draw on.

It may help to consider these areas as you try to detect your positive and negative traits:

- your habitual behavior as regards God
- your habitual behavior as regards others
- your habitual behavior as regards yourself.

It is common to find the root of your faults in a combination of the following three points, generally with one standing out: *Pride, Vanity, Sensuality.*

A. PRIDE

Our security and self-esteem is based on ourselves.

Self-importance (haughtiness):

- too high an opinion of myself
- annoyance with those who contradict me
- judgmental
- putting others down; gossiping about them
- slow to recognize my own mistakes, or to see when I hurt others
- inability to seek and give forgiveness
- insincerity in order to hide my own faults
- hypocrisy
- rage when others don't thank me for favors
- unwillingness to serve
- impatience, distance and brusqueness in my daily contact with others
- thinking I am the only one who knows how to do things right
- unwillingness to let others help; inflated idea of my own intelligence and understanding, dismissing what I do not understand or see differently
- not feeling a need for God, even though I do say prayers.

Self-love:

- not accepting contradictions
- becoming angry if I don't get my way or am not taken into account
- nursing grudges, even in small matters
- rebellion against what I don't like
- never taking orders
- inflexible in preferences
- putting myself and my things first
- indifference towards others and their needs; never putting myself out for them
- centering everything (conversation, choices and so on) on myself and my likes
- Calculating in my relations with God and with others.

B. VANITY.

Our security and self-esteem is based on others because of what they think of us.

- seeking admiration
- thinking I am best, know most, am always right.
- excessive concern about physical appearance.
- human respect (being guided by the opinions of others rather than by principles)
- some types of shyness
- sacrificing principles in order to fit in
- placing too much a premium on popularity and acceptance.
- Easily discouraged by failures
- Always wanting to be the center of attention, at times stretching the truth, or lying outright, or being uncharitable in my words in order to achieve this.

C. SENSUALITY.

Our security and self-esteem is based on things.

Laziness:

- always seeking the most comfortable and least effort.
- not going the extra mile for others
- last-minute in everything; shoddiness; complaining
- excessively affected by minor discomforts; inability to sacrifice, doing only what I like most.
- Not doing my part at home. Expecting everyone else to serve me always.

The rule of feelings:

- daydreaming, with self at center;
- unable to control my thoughts when they attract me, even if they are not good.
- Doing and eating only what pleases.
- Uncontrolled and overpowering curiosity, wanting to see and experience everything and every pleasure.
- Seeking pleasures, even to the point of endangering purity with thoughts and actions.
- Acting out my feelings, frustrations and desires, with no regard for conscience, God or others.
- Only working with those I like, being easily hurt, fickleness.

Over-sensitivity and emotionalism:

- Giving primacy to my feelings such that my daily work depends upon my emotional state—whether I feel like it, whether I like the person I'm dealing with, if I like my task;
- being easily hurt by others
- passing easily from friendship to animosity with others
- needing to be liked and to feel the affection of others.

2) Set a Goal

Once you have detected your underlying weakness (dominant defect) and its most common manifestations, you will need to work to acquire its opposite virtue to uproot it.

Your IDEAL is always Jesus Christ because the aim of the Program of Life is to transform yourself into Him. So you should see him in the light of the virtue you most need (service, trust in God, integrity, patience or, as in the example, humility):

eg. Jesus Christ, meek and humble of heart

A MOTTO may help you remember your ideal. Choose something memorable that has a deep impact on you.

eg. "I have come not to be served, but to serve"

2) Choose the concrete means to attain it.

The PROGRAM involves a clear definition of some concrete ways to practice the virtue you wish to conquer in order to keep moving towards Christ, your ideal. These means should be in direct relation to the concrete manifestations of your dominant passion. They should be concrete and mostly able to be practiced daily since this will foster a continuous growth in sanctity.

The program requires a lot more thought than would first appear. 'Just do the opposite of your failings' is too much, and too general. You have to examine and zero in on the important elements, the one or two keys to most of your failings.

All three of the following areas should be included:

1. *Relation with God*: cultivate union with Jesus Christ in the Eucharist by means of daily Mass, receiving Holy Communion, or simply making a visit.
2. *Relation with Others*: Learn to build friendships and bring them to Christ.
3. *Relation with Self*: Identify the means you will practise daily to acquire a firm, strong, constant will.

For example: you have discovered a long list of things that tell you pride is your problem. You examine yourself further and discover the following key elements:

1. *Relation with God*: I really don't give him time, I sped the minimum with him a week, I do not let my beliefs influence my job and my moral decision.
2. *Relation with Others*: High-handed, abrasive, I use them.
3. *Relation with Self*: I don't admit my mistakes. I expect others to adapt to me.

Now you are in a position to choose a few, very effective means, and concentrate on them, knowing that they will give you maximum results. Continuing with the example:

General: I need to choose a spiritual director so I will not lose the momentum of my good resolutions.

1. *Relation with God*: I need to begin praying every day. I will start every day by praying from a prayer-book an act of faith, hope and love, and I will try to mean it. I will go to Mass 3 times each week. I will increase my prayer life as my spiritual director sees prudent. Every time I pray I will ask God to change my heart to become more like Christ.
2. *Relation with Others*: I have to think of others first: "Love your neighbour as yourself." At home and at work I will begin thanking people for what they do for me. I will seek to be a good influence, and not be ashamed to give to others what I have received.
3. *Relation with Self*: I will make an examination of conscience at the end of the day and seek advice from my spiritual director to overcoming my faults. I will remind myself that all the good qualities I have received from God are in order to server others.

Use of Your Program

-Don't forget to write the program out clearly and look over it with your director.

-Look over your program for a few minutes daily during your morning prayers. It will help you to use it as a guide during your nightly examination of conscience.

-When you go to spiritual direction, take your program with you so you can talk to your director about how it's going.

Outline for the Program of Life

IDEAL—

MOTTO—

OBSTACLES—Root sin:

Manifestations of root sin:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

PROGRAM—Opposite virtue:

Means to form this virtue:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

Points should be concrete and practical.

Some Example Programs of Life

Example 1: Pride

IDEAL—Christ seeing all from the perspective of his Father.

MOTTO—Jesus meek and humble of heart

OBSTACLES—Root sin: **Pride**

Manifestations of root sin:

1. Being critical. (especially of ... when ...)
2. Not listening to people and trying to convince them that I am always right, especially ...
3. Not being consistent in saying my prayers. Not “feeling a need” to pray.
4. Always rationalizing. Making excuses for myself. (especially at work) Not accepting things by faith.
5. Not being sensitive to the needs of others and being patient, especially with ... when ...
6. Never admitting I am wrong. (especially to ...)

PROGRAM—Opposite virtue:

Supernatural Spirit – Life of Faith

Means to form this virtue:

1. Meditate 15 min. every day, conscious that I depend on God to be able to accomplish anything in my life, making a special focus on the Incarnation and our Blessed Mother’s faith.
2. I will make an effort to live the supernatural aspects of the Mass, and attend two weekday Masses.
3. To see Jesus Christ in other people and accept them as they are and not as I would like them to be, especially ... when...
4. Not taking myself too seriously. I will place everything into the proper perspective (of Christ) by giving love and understanding more importance than being proved right in an argument. I will also listen more in conversations, especially with ...
5. Make sure that all of my decisions are based on supernatural criterion and that I do not rationalize especially when....

Example 2: Vanity

IDEAL—Christ crucified for love of me

MOTTO—Who is in the center?

OBSTACLES—Root sin: **Vanity**

Manifestations of root sin:

1. I can be really hurt if people do not treat me with respect, especially ...
2. I am always thinking and talking about myself and the things that I do, especially with ...
3. I can not say “no” to anyone, and always allow people to use me, in particular ...
4. I am afraid to stand up for what I believe, not wanting ... to think I am a religious fanatic.
5. I always worry that if I discipline my children they might not love me.
6. I love and live for compliments and appreciation for my talents, especially ...

PROGRAM—Opposite virtue:

Personal, passionate love for Jesus Christ

Means to form this virtue:

1. Meditate daily on the passion looking for the fruit of being convinced of Christ’s love for me and that I do not need to look for it in any other place.
2. Come to grips with my feelings of rejection. Bring my most painful memories of rejection (especially ...) to Christ and realize that HE was there all the time loving me.
3. Attend Mass twice during the week (Tues. & Thurs.) and focus on the personal sacrifice of love that I receive from a Christ who dies for me.
4. Before accepting any projects or get involved in anything, I will first think about it then and then analyse if it is for God’s glory or my own.
5. See all that happens within my family as coming from the loving hands of God and whatever I do to them, I do to Christ.
6. I will avoid speaking about myself, concentrating rather on others and offering up all my own successes to Christ in secret as my gift to him.

Example 3: Sensuality

IDEAL – Christ, whose only food was the will of his Father.

MOTTO—Thy will be done! (not mine)

OBSTACLES—Root sin: ***Sensuality***

Manifestations of root sin:

1. Laziness, always putting things off, esp. exercise.
2. Disorganization and disorder. I do whatever is “immediate”.
3. Only do things when I “feel like it”. Moodiness controls me.
4. Anger and impatience if I do not feel good. I cannot handle pressure.
5. I live to shop, the only thing that picks me up.
6. I always delay prayer and am inconsistent with God.

PROGRAM—Opposite virtue:

Means to form this virtue:

Self-Discipline and Love for Christ.

1. I will meditate 15 min. a day, especially on Christ and his total self-giving to others.
2. I will make a plan for my spiritual life (Rosary, exam, spiritual reading....) and follow it closely and putting it first, not last.
3. I will make up a schedule to live by and follow it. Do not do what is the immediate thing. Accomplish what is on the list. See it as God’s will for me.
4. Read “First things first” every day for 15 minutes.
5. I will be aware of my sentiments and moods and try to make sure that they do not get in the way of what I should do. I will try to put on Christ’s sentiments and see all through a supernatural point of view.
6. When I do not want to do something, offer it up for some specific intention, knowing that this is my most powerful weapon.