



Missionaries of the
Holy Spirit
in the Family

Couples Discernment Guide

2027 Chapters

Thank you for your interest and discernment about the **Missionaries of the Holy Spirit in the Family!** This discernment packet has been created to be a formal guide for your discernment process with MHSF.

The purpose of discernment is to help provide clarity, peace, and prayer for you and your spouse as to committing your time to this particular apostolate. Joining MHSF will help you to discover and have your unique path to holiness revealed. Each couple will have the encouragement to intentionally live this out in the world around them at home, in the Church, and in the culture.

This discernment guide will walk you through what you can expect in your discernment, and as preparation for giving your best “yes” or “no” to the mission and vision of our apostolate.

Just follow the steps in concordance with the couple leading your chapter and you'll know where you are on the pilgrimage of discernment! Come, Holy Spirit!

*Chance & Lora Unger
Father Ben Holdren*

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Our Mission & Vision

The vision of MHSF is in our name: to create and build up **missionaries** in and for **the family** through the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. MHSF began as a spirit-filled response to these words:

"To the injustice originating from sin-which has profoundly penetrated the structures of today's world-and often hindering the family's full realization of itself and of its fundamental rights, we must all set ourselves in opposition through a conversion of mind and heart, following Christ Crucified by denying our own selfishness: such a conversion cannot fail to have a beneficial and renewing influence even on the structures of society.

What is needed is a continuous, permanent conversion which, while requiring an interior detachment from every evil and an adherence to good in its fullness, is brought about concretely in steps which lead us ever forward. Thus a dynamic process develops, one which advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God and the demands of His definitive and absolute love in the entire personal and social life of man.

Therefore an educational growth process is necessary, in order that individual believers, families and peoples, even civilization itself, by beginning from what they have already received of the mystery of Christ, may patiently be led forward, arriving at a richer understanding and a fuller integration of this mystery in their lives."

(Familiaris Consortio, 9)

MHSF seeks to facilitate a conversion of mind and heart for married individuals by illuminating marriages with the Truth of the Church's revelation, in order to help their family reach "full realization of itself."

Couples who commit to our two year formation period begin "from what they have already received of the mystery of Christ" in the sacrament of marriage, and are led, through ongoing education and the forming of intimate friendships, to "a richer understanding and a fuller integration of this mystery in their lives."

The purpose of MHSF is to aid in sanctifying the Church, the culture, and the world from the inside out, starting at home. We want to help married couples live out their unique path of holiness, and for the fruits of that to spread throughout the domestic church and the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

Individuals entering the priesthood or religious life receive years of formation to help them understand the calling of their specific vocation and to prepare them to live that vocation faithfully. Before entering marriage, couples receive a small fraction of that preparation, although understanding and faithfully living the call of marriage is foundational to the health of the Church,

as it is from the vocation of marriage that all other vocations flow. As the family goes, says Pope St. John Paul II, “so goes the nation, and so goes the whole world in which we live.” (*Homily*, 30 November 1986)

We can think of MHSF as a seminary for those in the marriage vocation. The Latin word ‘seminary’ means greenhouse. A greenhouse provides a place of protection for a seedling. Within the walls of the greenhouse, through proper nourishment, nurturing, and light, it grows deep roots and begins to become what it truly is. As it becomes strong, it can be transplanted outside and will be able to withstand the storms of life.

Through human, spiritual, intellectual, and apostolic formation, spouses receive the wisdom and beauty that God has revealed about marriage. Through meaningful relationships with other couples, they realize it is normal to receive God’s plan for marriage and family and so be fully alive. As St. John Paul II was fond of saying, “Family, become what you are.” (*Familiaris Consortio*)

Our History

MHSF and its formation was a “call within a call” for the co-founders, Chance & Lora Unger. After a family tragedy, the question arose: is it possible to live a married life worthy of heaven in this life? Has Christ given us the possibility of sainthood through marriage? The upfront and clear answer is of course yes, but how does one do that?

“We were faced with a sense that we were called to help establish something new to help address our own poverty in marriage: how do we live out concrete holiness in a real, authentic manner? We had a few friends in the parish, and got involved, but nothing really amounting to deep friendships. And even with the best intentions, we felt like we had no direction or resources to grow in virtue and holiness alongside other families.”

As it turns out, this experience is a common one. Resources and content abound that provide clear, inspiring, and educational content for married couples. However, the norm of developing a strong community and accompaniment for married couples after marriage is sparse. Most families are left to figure it out on their own.

There is an essential need for the Church to invest in and accompany married couples as they begin and enter into this great sacrament. The Church calls this period of deep reflection, prayer, and formation while within marriage “mystagogy”.

What came out of our experience, was a call by the Lord to begin this process, and that is now known as **the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit in the Family**.

The vision of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit in the Family (MHSF) is in our name: to create and build up **missionaries** in and for **the family**, through the transformative power of the Holy Spirit.

We help to **create an environment** where intimate friendships can safely and powerfully grow and establish a place where couples can be known and loved uniquely.

We seek to illuminate marriages with the Truth of the Church’s revelation, where hearts are filled with the Light of the Holy Spirit, being **formed and transformed** by this Beauty.

Couples who commit to our two year formation period will **discover** and have their unique path to holiness **revealed**. And each will have the encouragement to intentionally live this out in the world around them at home, in the Church, and in the culture.

Please visit <https://www.mhsfonline.org/who-we-are> and watch our introduction video.

The Meaning of our Logo

The Missionaries of the Holy Spirit in the Family are founded upon the reality of Christ's promise in the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit (in the form of a dove) comes as the Helper, bringing true life and love to the Sacrament of Marriage. He is our main focus, and our aim. The Holy Spirit acts within the domestic church (the greenhouse) causing growth of love between husband & wife and their entire family. The Holy Spirit enables the family to “become what you are”, as St. John Paul II taught, restoring the primordial covenant of marriage.

The Greenhouse has a twofold meaning. The first is of the “domestic church”, the place where children receive the first proclamation of the faith and the fundamental community or cell of the parish, the diocese, and the universal Church. Secondly, the Latin word for ‘seminary’ means greenhouse. MHSF is a seminary of sorts for those who desire to fully live out the beauty of the Sacrament of Marriage. A greenhouse provides a place of protection, proper nourishment, nurturing and light. The seedling can grow deep roots in order to become what it truly is. As it becomes strong, it can be transplanted outside where it will then be able to withstand the storms of life.

The Vines within the greenhouse symbolize God's original plan for man and woman in the garden of Eden as the two are at the service of unity, becoming one flesh in the mutual exchange of love, and at the service of life as they are fruitful and multiply. It also symbolizes the growth that occurs in the seminary of MHSF. The vines intertwine producing an almond shape, which in sacred iconography is known as the *mandorla*. It symbolizes the marriage of divinity and humanity which happened in the person of Jesus Christ at His Incarnation. The Sacrament of Marriage represents this in the indissoluble communion of the two persons who have entered a covenant of their whole lives.



Missionaries of the
Holy Spirit
in the Family

The logo was envisioned by Father Ben Holdren, and Lora & Chance Unger and was created by Mackenzie Bartek and Tess Sousek.

MHSF Formation

MHSF chapters follow a curriculum that guides every individual through one's relationship with God, one's true identity (found through that relationship), and living out one's vocation (mission) in marriage.

Couples are given the gift of time through our formation, and will spend approximately two years learning and integrating the truths of our faith into their marriages and lives. MHSF chapters gather monthly for a period of (almost) two years answering two basic questions:

1. **Objectively, we ask the question: "What are we?"**- Couples will be steeped in the Church's teaching on the family, and the family according to what God has revealed.
2. **Subjectively, we seek: "How do we become that?"** - This is our response to Truth. Once we know what the family is, each family can begin to live as they are uniquely called.

Year One of formation sets a strong foundation for human, intellectual, and spiritual formation. It emphasizes group meetings, small group time, and spousal discussion, along with prayer, adoration, and confession.

Year Two takes a more dynamic approach. A greater emphasis is placed on apostolic formation and living out one's vocation in a more intentional manner. Group meetings and discussion will continue in year two, but with more opportunities to put the formation into practice.

The monthly gatherings last about three hours and include:

- A communal meal
- Spiritual formation
- Small group discussion and discussion between spouses
- Time with our Lord in adoration and confession

Several topics of formation include: personal and spousal prayer, incorporating Holy Scripture and the sacraments into the domestic church, liturgical living, interior healing, surrender and detachment, charism discernment, developing a family mission & rule of life, a consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Church teaching and documents including Scripture, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *Familiaris Consortio*, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, and the *Theology of the Body*

Optional events include additional opportunities for: men's & women's small groups, an annual couples retreat, social events such as an annual Valentine's day meal, social with the Bishop, and overnight retreats at Our Lady of Good Counsel Retreat House, among others.

MHSF Workbook Curriculum & Content

Year 1 (12 months, January through December)

Session 1: Welcome to MHSF & Sharing Graces

Session 2: Who is God?

Session 3: Personal Prayer

Session 4: Discernment of Spirits

Session 5: Who Am I? (Identity)

Session 6: Obstacles to Prayer

Session 7: Spousal Prayer

Session 8: Who is the Holy Spirit?

Session 9: Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Session 10: Surrender Retreat

Session 11: Charisms Introduction

Session 12: Discerning Your Unique Call (Charisms Part 2)

Year 2 (8 months, January through September)

Session 13: The Mission of the Laity

Session 14: God's Plan for Marriage & Family

Session 15: Family, Become What You Are

Session 16: Serving Life

Session 17: Participating in Society & Sharing in the Life & Mission of the Church

Session 18: Theology of the Body

Session 19: Establishing Your Family's Mission

Session 20: Rule of Life

Session 21: Chapter Social & Consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

In accompaniment with the **MHSF Workbooks**, the following are the books & resources that will help to guide your formation.

Year One:

I Believe In Love (Jean C.J. d'Elbée)

In the School of the Holy Spirit (Jacques Philippe)

Spousal Prayer (Deacon James Keating)

A Family Guide to Spiritual Warfare (Kathleen Beckman)

Year Two:

Fruitful Discipleship (Sherry Weddell)

Familiaris Consortio (Pope St. John Paul II)

Eating the Sunrise (Christopher West)

Envisioning a New Normal

It is estimated that of all churches in the United States, 3 out of 4 lack notable marriage ministry or have any kind of ministry for newly married couples. Upwards of 94% of mainline churches put zero dollars towards specific marriage ministry. (Barna Group Survey, 2019)

How would it look in your marriage to live like a saint? And what does that look like concretely in your unique circumstances? What would your parish or community look like with families who were fully living out their sacramental vocation? What would your home look like?

Consider the long term and eternal impact of couples and their families striving for real, authentic, concrete holiness. Some of the most significant changes in a culture or environment happen over a long span of time. The primary goal of MHSF is to provide a formation model, an environment, and a community that fosters growth and a depth of vulnerability in married life through the Holy Spirit.

The template for this model is taken directly from Scripture & the life of the Church to establish real, lasting habits of holiness starting at home, with ripple effects in the daily norms of their parish and community.

We asked several spouses and priests who have joined MHSF to share a brief testimony about its impact on their marriage and in the Church. Below are some of their responses:

What families are saying...

“Married couples don’t receive very much formation as they navigate and prepare for their vocation. Although, we know it is a lifelong journey there are so many ways that MHSF has jump started these necessary conversations in our marriage. It’s something of a gift to hear formation together with your spouse, turn to each other and have a conversation, and turn to your peers and expand on the conversation. We are so thankful to have a space to create a culture of prayer in our family and to have others striving to do the same.”

“Marriage and family life includes many daily obligations that demand much of our attention. MHSF served as a continual retreat to step out of the day to day activity and revisit the bigger vision of the meaning of our vocation.”

“Our participation in MHSF reminded me of how important marriage is to my own sanctification and salvation as well as my spouses and families. Before MHSF I viewed marriage a little bit like “second option” behind being a priest or religious, but going through the formation opened my eyes to marriage and family as a true vocation that can have a profound impact on the world around me.”

“MHSF has helped us to see each other through the eyes of God.”

What priests are saying...

“MHSF has been a massive gift not only for individual couples, but even in my own vocation. It's been exciting and life-giving to see faith grow in my couples and how MHSF has brought spouses even closer to each other, but more importantly desiring more of God. It has restored hope for humanity in my heart and helped me enter deeper into my spousal relationship with my Bride, the Church. Seeing my couples pray with each other, pray in front of the Blessed Sacrament more and desiring to pray with and over each other fills my heart with the pride and joy that a father has of his children. With the MHSF formation already planned out, it's not taxing on the priest's schedule. It's prepped and wrapped up as a gift, but is up to the priest to open and unleash it for himself and his parish!”

“MHSF gives a pastor the space to engage a small group of intentional disciples to build up the families of his parish and initiate them in the ministerial life of the Church. Spending just one night a month, you will give the couples in your parish an excellent way to grow in their faith in God and openness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. And you will receive so much more in return: new friendships with families in your parish, new disciples for Church ministries, and a bonus dinner and holy hour at the monthly gathering as well! This ministry has given me an amazing opportunity to encounter young families and grow within an intimate group of disciples, and I pray it will give the same opportunity to your parishes.”

Financial Commitment in Your Formation

MHSF is an incredibly valuable experience for families, and just like any other type of formation there are costs to allow for that to happen. Participation in MHSF will include some fees, which we have outlined below. These fees for missionaries help cover the costs of book and print materials, fees for programs, retreat costs, and some general administrative fees.

Below is a list of formation materials that are a part of being involved with MHSF:

- **MHSF Workbook Part 1**
- **MHSF Workbook Part 2**
- **Online Content:**
 - Monthly Formation Emails
 - Formation Videos
 - Audio Formation
- **Year One Reading Resources:**
 - I Believe In Love (Jean C.J. d'Elbée)
 - In the School of the Holy Spirit (Jacques Philippe)
 - Spousal Prayer (Deacon James Keating)
- **Year Two Reading Resources:**
 - Fruitful Discipleship (Sherry Weddell)
 - Familiaris Consortio (Pope St. John Paul II)
 - Eating the Sunrise (Christopher West)

Total fees for the two years of formation will cost \$350 per couple.

(This adds up to about \$8/month per person.)

This membership fee includes all costs of materials received, retreats and events, digital content, shipping, and other costs. Once an MHSF chapter's couples have been finalized, payment can be made either:

- By the local parish on behalf of each couple,
- by each couple separately, or
- with aid from other groups (such as local Knights of Columbus, etc.)

There have been a variety of ways other families have offset any financial burdens and joined MHSF. If such a burden exists, please reach out to us.

Thank you for making this a prayerful part of discernment and helping us create a sustainable model of MHSF!

Moving Forward

Thank you for prayerfully considering joining us in this mission of creating and establishing a “new normal” in marriage & family. Taking adequate time to pray, discuss, and discern MHSF is the first step moving forward. It’s a true honor to have you learn and be open to joining our mission! May God’s will be done.

As a part of discernment, be sure to communicate either your “heck yes” or “holy no” to your MHSF Lead Couple. Below are the practical steps and timeline you can expect into further discernment and the commencement of your chapter.

- ☐ 1. Read through the *MHSF Couples Discernment Guide*.
- ☐ 2. Attend (in person or digital) *MHSF Discernment Event*. (Hosted by MHSF Lead Couple)
- ☐ 3. Give your official “heck yes” or “holy no” to the local MHSF Lead Couple.

If “no”- these are holy, too! Thank you for discerning intentionally, and be encouraged that your call to a holy marriage takes on so many unique forms. Be assured of our prayers for you!

If “yes”- Welcome! We’ll have a few preparatory items for you to help get ready for your formation.

- ☐ 4. Read through and complete your *MHSF Welcome Packet*.
- ☐ 5. Provide registration information to your MHSF Lead Couple in a timely fashion.
- ☐ 6. Check your email for communication from MHSF about 1 month before you begin.
- ☐ 7. Begin your MHSF Chapter. (January)

From personal and lived experience, as well as the testimony of the many couples who have gone before you, MHSF has been a profound blessing in the lives of those who rightfully discern “yes”. The Lord has great plans for your marriage and family. Thank you for taking the time to be intentional about discernment with MHSF!

Be assured of our prayers for you!
Family, become what you are.

-Chance & Lora Unger
Father Ben Holdren
Co-founders, MHSF

Discernment Questions for Couples

Thank you for your careful discernment of becoming Missionaries of the Holy Spirit in the Family! Please take the time to pray about the desires of your own hearts and the path that God is calling you to at this time in your life.

These questions may help guide your discernment as a couple. We are grateful to have you and are praying for you! Feel free to reach out if you have questions as you discern. We look forward to chatting with you soon. God Bless!

Desire

What are the current needs and desires of your family?

Does the vision and mission of MHSF align with these current desires?

Would your family benefit from the formation, community, and “normal” offered by MHSF?

Do both husband and wife share in the desire to join the mission of MHSF?

Time

Are you able to commit to a monthly meeting?

If not, are you willing to lessen current commitments to make MHSF meetings a priority for your family?

Openness

Are you willing to allow the Holy Spirit to work in your life and in your marriage?

Are you open to sharing your own personal experiences with other married couples seeking to grow in holiness?