

Information about St. Maria Goretti¹ for Instructors of Older Children and Youth:

IMPORTANT EDITOR'S NOTE:

This sheet is for instructors only and is offered purely as background information about this saint.

While this background information will help you to be better prepared to discuss the life of the saint, we recommend that you limit the details of the discussion with your students to the information included in the attached “Facts for students ...”

The *Touching Safety* program will feature two saints per year—one female and one male—to bring to life the lessons provided through this program. Each lesson is designed to provide students with awareness about certain behaviors that are inappropriate and/or blatantly wrong. Our purpose for including information about a saint in each lesson is to provide positive reinforcement—by giving children and young people examples of role models for “rightdoing” in relationships. We strive to provide an appropriate balance of both elements in each lesson for students.

Though we recommend including information about the featured saint in the lesson for your students, the saint material is an optional part of this program and is not required.

Maria Goretti was 12 years old when she fought off the advances of her attacker—a local farm hand. The attacker tried to rape her but Maria said “no” and screamed that the man was committing a sin and would be punished for his actions. Maria died a few days after the attack. But, before she died, she asked God to forgive her attacker.

After the attacker was convicted and sent to prison, Maria came to him in a vision. She was in a garden gathering lilies. She smiled and came to him asking him to accept the lilies. As he took them, each one was transformed into a still, white flame. The vision led to his conversion and he later testified at her beatification.

Maria’s life teaches us two important things:

1. We have the power to say “no” when someone tries to harm us, no matter how young we are.
2. When we are afraid, we need to tell someone who can do something about it—even if we are frightened or confused.

Here’s how you’ll use this information during the lesson:

- Ask a student (or students) to read the *student handout* aloud to your class. Then, ask for a few student volunteers to describe what they learned from the story about Maria Goretti.
- The key to this exercise is reinforcing the points that St. Maria teaches us about protecting ourselves while relying on our faith in God for guidance.

¹ Rabenstein, K., *For All the Saints*, © 1998; Breiling, M.M. *A Saint to Emulate*, Reprinted with permission, Catholic Family's Magnificat, October 1994-January 1995. www.ewtn.com.



Facts for students about St. Maria Goretti¹

Maria Goretti was a 12-year-old farm girl in Italy. From a very early age it was clear that she loved God and was devout in the practice of her faith. Maria had six brothers and sisters. Following her father's untimely death, a number of people came to the farm to help Maria's family tend to the crops.

Among those who came to help was a young man named Alessandro. He became infatuated with Maria, began to stalk her, and threatened to kill her if she told anyone. The other men who came to help with the farm had already caused problems for Maria's mother and the other children. Maria did not want to cause her mother any more pain, so she kept quiet about the young man's behavior.

One day, Alessandro pulled Maria away from her family and into a secluded area where he tried to rape her. Maria knew that he meant to harm her, so she began to scream and fight—but nobody heard her. She saved herself from being raped by yelling over and over that what the young man was doing was a sin and God would punish him by sending him to hell if he did it.

Although Maria saved herself from being sexually assaulted, Alessandro stabbed her many times in an uncontrollable rage. Her family found her bleeding on the kitchen floor. Although mortally wounded, she lived for a few days. During that time, she told everyone what happened and publicly forgave Alessandro for what he had done to her.

Alessandro was arrested and sentenced to 30 years in solitary confinement where he lived a life of anger and resentment. Then one night, about eight years into his sentence, Maria came to Alessandro in a dream. He said that she appeared in a field pickling lilies and that she came forward and handed them to him. As he took the lilies, they turned into pure white flames. Alessandro said he felt the peace of forgiveness.

As a result of this vision, Alessandro repented for attacking Maria and asked God to forgive him. He became a model prisoner and was released from prison three years early. He worked with Maria's family to have her canonized a saint, and for the rest of his life Alessandro worked as a gardener in monasteries near his home.

St. Maria Goretti's life teaches us that:

- If someone is threatening us, we need to tell a trusted adult. The adults in our lives want to protect us from harm. When we keep quiet or keep a secret because of our fear of causing trouble, we put others and ourselves at risk of future harm.
- We have the right and the power to say "no" when someone tries to touch our private parts or tries to harm us in any way.
- Our love of God gives us the courage we need to resist those who want to destroy our innocence or force us to behave in a way that is inappropriate or wrong.
- God asks us to forgive those who hurt us, even when they do it deliberately or for their own warped gratification. God does not ask us to condone their behavior or to excuse what they did. Our responsibility is to *forgive* those who harm us and to be an example of someone who can forgive and, at the same time, to *demand* that they repent and make amends for their actions.

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