

University of Notre Dame  
Religious Bulletin  
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A Reply to Jane

Before me is a letter Jane wrote to a Notre Dame student. Her letter is really an appeal for prayers. Her general idea is most admirable, namely, to secure many prayers for peace in the world. But the way she wants her Notre Dame friend to pray is all wrong.

Jane is not to be blamed for her letter and her request. Her letter is similar to many that have been passing around the United States in the past few years. Her motive in sending out copies of the letter is the most sincere charity. What we want to do here is to show her, and you, what is wrong with the type of prayer she is promoting.

The first part of the letter is acceptable: "We are making a Novena that peace may be had around the world. It is not hard to say one 'Hail Mary' and one 'Our Father' for nine days."

The next paragraph is filled with untruth: "This (Novena) was approved by the Sisters of St. Francis, Buffalo, New York." The last letter of this kind that came to the attention of the Prefect of Religion was credited to the good Franciscan Sisters in Boston. A news column in one of our Catholic papers said the Sisters do not know how the letter started, nor how anyone could attribute it to them.

The letter states that "It is not a chain letter, but a Novena." That is disproved by the letter itself which mentions specifically all the elements of a chain letter, that is, a letter that one is to pass along to others with the request that they send copies to others. Listen to this chain language: "It is being started for the fourth time and is going around the world. Send a copy to four different people before the fourth day is up."

Chain prayer is wrong because it depends for its success not so much on God's goodness, but upon the magic effect of one unbroken series of prayers and upon numbers. Take a look at this promise. "The fourth day after you receive this letter a favor will come your way." This promise is meant to have a "come-on" effect, that is, "You had better join this chain club, otherwise you will miss the favor."

It would be different had God revealed to us that He wants us to re-copy and distribute the letter four times before the fourth day. But, nowhere has He made such a revelation. No chain letter ever mentions the source of these numbers. The Catholic Church is not opposed to the recitation of definite prayers for a specific number of days. Christ told the Apostles to pray for nine days, and then He would send the Holy Ghost to them. Christ also revealed that He would bring to Heaven those who received Holy Communion on nine consecutive First Fridays. Only when God mentions blessings to be obtained from prayer said a number of times may we promote the number element.

Destroy these chain letters when you receive them. Why? They tend to lead good souls to think that blessings come more from hitting the right numbers than from the merciful hand of Our Father in Heaven. We promise to pray for peace, Jane, especially by saying well the prayers after Mass which the Pope ordered said for the conversion of Russia, which spells peace.

PRAYERS: (Ill) uncle of Jim Clyne (Bad), dying. Eight Special Intentions.