

2009 CFM Program Book

WORKS OF MERCY: ACTS OF LOVE

Be merciful even as your Father is merciful. – LUKE 6:36

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. – MATTHEW 5:7

Man attains to the merciful love of God, His mercy, to the extent that he himself is interiorly transformed in the spirit of that love towards his neighbor.

– POPE JOHN PAUL II, *RICH IN MERCY*, 14

It is by the Works of Mercy that we shall be judged. – DOROTHY DAY

Christians are called to lives of active love. When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment, he said it was to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. The second, he said, was to love your neighbor as yourself. The account Jesus gives of the Last Judgment in Matthew 25:31-46 sets forth ways in which we are called to demonstrate this love for one another. Catholic tradition defines the actions by which we come to the physical and spiritual aid of our neighbors as the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy (CCC #2447). This 10-meeting CFM program book invites families to grow in faith by putting Christian love into action as mercy-workers using the Observe-Judge-Act method.

The Works of Mercy provide not only a means of personal transformation, but social transformation as well. As we act, we grow in faith as well as love, as individuals and as a community. It is in confronting seemingly overwhelming problems such as hunger and homelessness, in reaching out to those who are experiencing doubt, and in offering our prayers for others that we answer our call to discipleship.

It is often in the everyday acts of love within our homes, neighborhoods, and churches that we are mercy-workers. We put our faith into practice by answering a child's call for a drink in the middle of the night, comforting a grieving neighbor, or donating clothing to a family dealing with the consequences of a devastating fire. By putting our faith to work through action at home, next door, or around the world, we are humbled by our limits and emboldened by the gifts we have been given to share.

We are called to see Jesus in everyone we encounter, especially those most in need of God's love. It is the hope of CFM that the small group discussion guide which follows will help Christian families meet the ongoing challenge of living our faith as we meet the hungry, the sick, and sorrowful, responding with open hearts

to their material needs and their spiritual yearnings – responding with Works of Mercy, Acts of Love.

[SIDE BAR LISTING WORKS OF MERCY]

The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities. Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead (CCC #2447).

As listed in the online Catholic Encyclopedia found at www.newadvent.org, and modified slightly in light of biblical and doctrinal references, the enumeration of the works of mercy used in this program guide is as follows:

The Corporal Works of Mercy

- To feed the hungry;
- To give drink to the thirsty;
- To clothe the naked;
- To shelter the homeless;
- To care for the sick;
- To visit the imprisoned;
- To bury the dead.

The Spiritual Works of Mercy

- To instruct the ignorant;
- To counsel the doubtful;
- To admonish sinner;
- To bear wrongs patiently;
- To forgive offences willingly;
- To comfort the sorrowful;
- To pray for the living and the dead.

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FROM THE EDITOR:

This CFM program book is designed so that groups can focus on the Works of Mercy in a way which best reflects their concerns and the needs of their communities. For example, we have placed the chapter, “Pray for the Living and the Dead,” early in the book so that groups will encounter this chapter in proximity to All Saints Day and All Souls Day, November 1 and 2, respectively. The chapter, “Bury the Dead, Comfort the Sorrowful,” is placed later in order to potentially coincide with the Easter celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. However, these chapters can be used in any order the group prefers.

Also, while it is traditional to address the Spiritual Works of Mercy separately from the Corporal Works of Mercy, human beings are both physical and spiritual, and our needs and responses to one other cannot be so neatly divided. We decided to intersperse the chapters dealing with the Spiritual Works of Mercy and those dealing with the Corporal Works of Mercy in order to capture this unity of body and spirit.

1. IT IS AN ACT OF LOVE TO: Instruct the Ignorant and Counsel the Doubtful

OPENING PRAYER

Dear God, Help us to look to the Holy Spirit to guide us as we strive to love as Jesus loved. Help us to acknowledge our own needs for knowledge, guidance, and encouragement as we work to share your message of service and hope with each other. When we see others searching, uncertain, and doubtful bless us with the humility, patience, and compassion we need to help them. Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.

Mark 16:14-20

I myself feel confident about you, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another.

Romans 15:14

Share a moment when you witnessed the good news being proclaimed with confidence.

When have you proclaimed the good news with confidence?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

The Spiritual Works of Mercy are acts of compassion by which we respond to the spiritual needs of our families and our neighbors. By instructing the ignorant and counseling the doubtful we reach out to touch others' minds and hearts. As Christians, we are to proclaim the good news, offering one another the peace and freedom we have been given by advising out of sincere concern, as Jesus did.

It may seem that such work is best left to someone else, such as a trained catechist, a priest, or a professional counselor. However, we are all called to instruct the ignorant and counsel the doubtful in Jesus' name (Romans 15:14). If we leave this entirely to others, the needs of many people will not be met. We all experience ignorance of some sort. Yet, our Christian faith challenges us to come out of the shadows of ignorance, to seek the truth, and to share that truth with others.

Christians are to be a light to the world, sharing our knowledge and our understanding of right and wrong, or morality, especially with those who have not been given access to the truth. We live in an age marked by secularism and moral relativism. News stories abound about sexual scandals, corporate corruption, greed, political abuses, family disintegration, and social apathy. In such a world, Christians are called to instruct and lead first and foremost by example. As St. Francis of Assisi is noted for saying: "Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words." Followers of Jesus have a duty to denounce and reject injustice, sin, and social evil as we proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in word and action.

This duty can be carried out only by learning and sharing the core tenets, practices, and devotions of our faith. For many of us, when we were baptized our parents received a candle lit from the paschal candle blessed during the Easter vigil. This candle represents the light of faith that must be passed on in the domestic church, the family. Pope John Paul II in his encyclical, *Familiaris Consortio (On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World)*, highlights the fundamental role of parents as mentors and nurturers of faith:

"Christian marriage and the Christian family build up the Church: for in the family the human person is not only brought into being and progressively introduced by means of education into the human community, but by means of the rebirth of baptism and education in the faith the child is also introduced into God's family, which is the Church."

As Christians, we have a responsibility to grow in the knowledge of our faith's teaching, and to share this knowledge in our homes, our churches, and our communities.

OBSERVE

1. How did you learn about your faith as a child? How are you learning as an adult?
2. How have you been the recipient of the counsel of another? How have you counseled someone else?
3. List the personal qualities, preparation, and resources needed to instruct and counsel others.
4. In what ways does CFM respond to the call to instruct the ignorant and counsel the doubtful?

JUDGE

1. What are Christian parents obligated to teach their children? To what degree can this obligation be passed on to other people and organizations?
2. How can and do Christians change the world by instructing and counseling others?
3. When offering advice to another how do you know when counsel from a priest or professional should be sought?
4. How could your church community or CFM group better support families in educating children about their faith?

ACT

1. Share your faith with your children and grandchildren, passing along prayers and religious traditions from your childhood.
2. As a group, sponsor an opportunity for others to learn more about Scripture, church doctrine, or Christian tradition. Or, as individuals or couples volunteer to teach religious education classes, participate in RCIA, or help with marriage preparation.
3. Fill in any self-perceived gaps in knowledge or capability that keep you from reaching out to others. For example, participate in a Bible study, work on your active listening skills, and set aside time for prayer.
4. Invite other families to join CFM.

CLOSING PRAYER

God, in a world beset with ignorance, questioning, and confusion. Our Christian tradition offers ways for us to be confident disciples, loving as Jesus loved in our everyday lives. Thank you for the opportunities we have to be mercy-workers in your service, sharing the hopeful message of your everlasting, all-encompassing love with each other. Amen.

2. IT IS AN ACT OF LOVE TO: Pray for the Living and the Dead

OPENING PRAYER

The Apostles' Creed

We believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

Ephesians 6:18-20

For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sin.

2 Maccabees 12:44-46

For whom do you pray?

How does our relationship with others extend beyond earthly existence?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

Throughout the Gospels we read of Jesus withdrawing to quiet places to pray to his Father. In prayer, Jesus praised God and lifted up to God the needs of the people. Jesus uses parables and his own example to teach his followers of the need for us to “pray always and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1). The *Spiritual Work of Mercy, Pray for the Living and the Dead*, joins us in prayer with Jesus as he intercedes on our behalf: “In the age of the Church, Christian intercession participates in Christ’s, as an expression of the communion of saints” (CCC #2635).

When Jesus walked the earth, people rushed to bring the sick, the needy, and the hurting to him to be healed. Do we rush the suffering to Christ today? We can do this in prayer. Intercessory prayer can be challenging. We pray and yet it may appear our prayers are not answered. It can seem like God is not listening. However, Jesus exhorts us to pray with perseverance and trust in God. In the parable of the friend who comes at midnight, Jesus tells how the man keeps knocking on the door of his friend even though the friend is not inclined to wake up and respond to his request for help. Jesus assures us: “I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs” (Luke 11:5-8). God hears our prayers and, in faith, we trust that God’s answer will come in a way that is for the good.

Not only the living, but those who have not yet attained their heavenly reward need our intercession. It is our calling to pray for them as it will be for others to pray for us. And, when souls ultimately reach their heavenly reward, their intercession is that much more powerful. We proclaim our belief in the communion of saints each time we pray the Apostles’ Creed. We believe that we become one body in Christ at Baptism and continue sharing that common life even beyond death. We express our connectedness with one another as the communion of saints: the faithful on earth, the souls in purgatory, and the saints in heaven. We further believe that there is an exchange of graces and blessings within this fellowship.

Pope Paul VI, in his 1968 encyclical *The Credo of the People of God*, states: “The union of the pilgrims with the brethren who have gone to sleep in the peace of Christ is not in the least interruptedThose in heaven place their merits at our disposal.” In celebrating the feasts of All Saints and All Souls, we remember those who have died, those in heaven and those in purgatory, and are reminded of our own obligations to live faithful lives of love and service. What a gift of support God has given us in the Communion of Saints!

OBSERVE

1. What has been your experience with intercessory prayer? When have you prayed for others or known that others were praying for you?
2. When and how do you and your family pray?
3. Research church teaching on purgatory (see, for example, the Catechism of the Catholic Church; the online Catholic encyclopedia at www.newadvent.org; or the encyclical letter issued by Pope Benedict XVI in 2007, *Saved by Hope*).
4. Find out more about the Mexican holiday, Day of the Dead, or another cultural tradition that remembers those who have died.

JUDGE

1. What are the benefits of prayer?
2. How can you pray for those you do not know?
3. How can you pray for someone you do not like, do not agree with, or even someone who has caused you pain?
4. What could you do in remembrance of your deceased loved ones?

ACT

1. Keep an intercessory prayer notebook with you to jot down prayer requests. Set aside a specific time each day to intercede. Or, create or join an online prayer list and pray for the intentions of its members.
2. Evaluate the role of prayer in your life and in your family. Determine what you and your family can do to strengthen your prayer life. Commit to some positive change.
3. Have a Mass offered for a loved one, living or deceased.
4. Plan an All Saints/All Souls Day prayer service at your church. These feast days are celebrated on November 1 and 2.

CLOSING PRAYER

Offer an opportunity for intercessory prayer, answering each request with, “Lord, hear our prayer.”

Conclude with the Prayer for All Saints Day from the Liturgy of the Hours:

Father, all powerful and everliving God, today we rejoice in the holy men and women of every time and place. May their prayers bring us your forgiveness and love. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

3. IT IS AN ACT OF LOVE TO: Feed the Hungry

OPENING PRAYER

As we gather together, we pray for those who face this day hungry; those who will perish this day due to the lack of food; those who will suffer this day due to malnutrition; those who struggle to feed themselves and their families.

Inspire us, Lord, to discern wisely the causes of hunger, to judge rightly the way to conquer the challenge of hunger, and to act boldly to combat hunger around us and in our world.

Lord, make us instruments of your peace and love to those who hunger this day. Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, ‘This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.’ But he answered them, ‘You give them something to eat.’ They said to him, ‘Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?’ And he said to them, ‘How many loaves have you? Go and see.’ When they had found out, they said, ‘Five, and two fish.’ Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve

baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

Mark 6:32-44

What happens in this passage in addition to attending to the physical hunger of the crowd?

What happens when you sit down to a meal with your family beyond the satisfaction of physical hunger?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

Hunger is a pervasive problem in today's world, imperiling especially the lives of the young, the old, and the infirm. Given the breadth of the problem and its connection to poverty and inequality, addressing it can seem as overwhelming to us today as feeding a crowd of 5000 with five loaves and two fish did to the disciples. However, like the disciples, we are called to action.

The following are statistics on world hunger from the World Food Program and the Office of the U.N. Secretary-General:

- From 2007-2008, the number of undernourished people in the world rose 40 million to 963 million (more than the combined populations of the United States, Canada, and the European Union).
- The majority of undernourished people live in developing countries, with about 65 percent living in India, China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Ethiopia.
- Hunger and malnutrition are the primary risk to health worldwide, greater than AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis combined.
- Economists estimate that every child whose physical and mental development is stunted by hunger and malnutrition stands to lose 5 percent to 10 percent in lifetime earnings.
- The total food surplus of the United States alone could satisfy every empty stomach in Africa; France's leftovers could feed the hungry in Democratic Republic of Congo and Italy's could feed Ethiopia's undernourished.
- 25,000 people die from hunger each day. A child dies every six seconds of malnutrition or starvation.
- A number of factors, including high energy and fertilizer costs, sent global food prices soaring to all-time highs in 2008. In March the price of rice hit a 19-year high while wheat climbed to its highest level in 28 years.
- Food riots erupted in the spring of 2008 in Haiti, Mexico and Senegal. The World Bank estimated that social unrest, as a consequence of the world food crisis, could spread to 33 countries.
- There is enough food in the world today for everyone to have the nourishment necessary for a healthy and productive life.

In May of 2008, on the Feast of Corpus Christi, Pope Benedict the XVI declared: “The Creator and Lord of all things became ‘a grain of wheat’ to be sown in our earth, in the furrow of our history; he became bread to be broken, shared, eaten; he became our food to give us life, his own divine life... Those who eat the Bread of Christ cannot remain indifferent before those who, even in our days, lack daily bread...The Church does not only pray ‘give us this day our daily bread,’ but, following the Lord's example, works in every way ‘to multiply the five loaves and two fish’ with countless humanitarian efforts and sharing so that no one remains without the necessities of life.”

The tired mother nursing her child at 3:00 a.m. feeds the hungry. The busy family gathering for dinner feeds the hungry. The group collecting food for women at a shelter or for a local social service agency feeds the hungry. The community forming a food bank or soup kitchen feeds the hungry. An individual contributing to organizations which fight poverty and inequality across the globe feeds the hungry.

OBSERVE

1. Research and share statistics regarding hunger in your community. Who is hungry? Why do they not have enough food?
2. What services and programs are available in your community to feed the hungry? Share any stories about creative ways this problem is being met.
3. What is being done in your community to address the causes of hunger?
4. Research organizations which confront the issue of world hunger such as Bread for the World and Catholic Relief Services’ Operation Rice Bowl. How do they address the causes and consequences of a lack of adequate food?

JUDGE

1. What is your responsibility to those who are hungry?
2. How can this responsibility be better met in your family, community, and in the world?
3. What connections are there between sharing the Eucharist and sharing food?
4. What does trust in God have to do with feeding the hungry?

ACT

1. As a family or group, adopt a family that is struggling to put food on the table and deliver a meal or food to the family.
2. Volunteer at a local soup kitchen or food bank. If there are none in your community and the need exists, work with others to meet this need.
3. Contribute your time, talent, and treasure to the work of a national or international organization which is responding to the challenge to feed the hungry.
4. Reflect on the ways you serve the needs of those in your life who are hungry, and resolve to do these small things with great love. Reflect on the ways your hunger is met and accept these gifts with gratitude.

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer with particular emphasis on our petition to "give us this day our daily bread."

4. IT IS AN ACT OF LOVE TO: Give Drink to the Thirsty

OPENING PRAYER

Creator and Father of all, you blessed us from the beginning with life giving water and continue to send the rains and snows to replenish the earth. Help us find ways to meet the need of all living beings for water. Give us, who have been baptized with water and the Spirit, the ability to reach out to fulfill the words of Jesus your Son and to give drink to the thirsty out of love for our brothers and sisters in need. We ask this through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

But he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you

get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?’ Jesus said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.’

John 4:4-15

How does Jesus respond to thirst?

When have you experienced water as a gift?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

When we fill a glass from the water faucet or reach in our refrigerator for a bottle of water to quench our thirst – most likely several times a day – we may not give it a second thought. However, millions of people don’t have adequate access to this basic, life-sustaining element.

According to WaterPartners International, data from 2008 gives us these facts to consider:

- Each year more than five million people die from water-related disease.
- 2.5 billion people still lack access to improved sanitation, including 1.2 billion people who still have no facilities at all.
- Every 15 seconds, a child dies from a water-related disease.
- Millions of women and children spend several hours a day collecting water from distant, often polluted sources.
- At any given time, half of the world’s hospital beds are occupied by patients suffering from a water-related disease.

Water flows through the Bible as a symbol of God’s power and love. In the Catholic tradition, the rich biblical symbolism of water finds expression in the prayer over the baptismal water in the Rite of Baptism:

“Father, ...in baptism we use your gift of water, which you have made a rich symbol of the grace you give us in this sacrament. At the very dawn of creation your Spirit breathed on the waters, making them the wellspring of all holiness. The waters of the great flood you made a sign of the waters of baptism, that make an end of sin and a new beginning of goodness.

“Through the waters of the Red Sea you led Israel out of slavery, to be an image of God's holy people, set free from sin by baptism. In the waters of the Jordan

your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Spirit. Your Son willed that water and blood should flow from his side as he hung upon the cross. After his resurrection he told his disciples: 'Go out and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit'....”

Jesus used the simple act of giving a drink of water to the thirsty as an example of how we serve him when we respond to the needs of others (Matthew 11:42). Organizations such as Catholic Relief Services (CRS) are devoting great energy to the problem of water scarcity. They help to drill wells and support better agricultural practices. Local water supplies need attention and communities across the country are applying innovative technologies to make sure there is enough water for human and other ecological needs. Caught up in the redemptive flow of God in the world through Christ, the Living Water, we continue Jesus' ministry of bringing life to others who are thirsty for salvation by responding to their most basic needs – by giving drink to the thirsty.

OBSERVE

1. How much water does a person need each day? Visit www.fema.gov/plan/prepare/water.shtm to learn about the suggested storage amount per person in case of emergency.
2. Review your household use of water. How much water do you use and what do you use it for?
3. In your area, what does it take for waste-water to be made usable again? How much does this process cost?
4. Find out who controls or owns the sources of water in your community.

JUDGE

1. Is your use of water responsible given your actual need?
2. What amount of water should each person be entitled to?
3. Is there an acceptable amount of water that can be “wasted”?
4. How might society go about making sure everyone has enough water?

ACT

1. Use water responsibly. For example, stop purchasing bottled water and fill reusable containers instead or try taking shorter showers; install water-saving plumbing fixtures in your home.

2. Modify your use of water contaminants by trying household products made to be gentler on our water supply. Volunteer to monitor nearby rivers or streams for pollutants and organize efforts to address any problems that exist.
3. Visit Catholic Relief Services or another internationally active relief organization online and find out how to support their efforts to respond to the water crisis.
4. Place a holy water font at the entrance to your home. Use the holy water to mark your comings and goings and remind you of our baptismal call to bring the living water of Christ to all those we meet.

CLOSING PRAYER

As St. Francis prayed: “Praised be You my Lord through Sister Water,
So useful, humble, precious, and pure.”

We thank You God for one tiny drop of water collected with thousands of drops
which nourishes future harvests to feed us and all creatures.

We thank You for one tiny drop multiplied which quenches our burning thirst.

Compassionate God, Creator who breathed over the waters,
we seek forgiveness for our mindless use of water.

We beg for wisdom to know how to conserve and cherish water.

Transform us into living streams of water flowing with life, hope, and love for
earth and all people.

We pray in thankfulness for Your life sustaining generosity. Amen.

5. IT IS AN ACT OF LOVE TO: Clothe the Naked

OPENING PRAYER

Dear God, You have taught us that the search for justice begins by recognizing the poor. Only in relationships based upon mutual recognition can human persons respect themselves and extend that respect to others. As we faithfully examine the call to clothe the naked, let us begin by acknowledging the dignity of every human person regardless of position or possession. Help us to look to Jesus Christ as we work to turn away from the sin of indifference and toward lives of grateful, compassionate action. Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

Jesus said to the Pharisees: “There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man’s table. When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he cried out ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.’ Abraham replied, ‘My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here whereas you are tormented.’ He said, ‘Then I beg you, father, send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.’ But Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.’ He said, ‘Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ Then Abraham said, ‘If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.’”

Luke 16:19-31

How does the rich man view Lazarus in life? How does the rich man view Lazarus in death?

Which character do you identify with? Why?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

We certainly address the need to clothe the naked in our homes: from the “expressive” teen to the squirming toddler on Sunday morning; from budgeting for back-to-school clothes to going through our closets periodically to donate what we no longer need or want to others. But how do we go about giving out of our substance, and not just out of our surplus, in a way which communicates our love of neighbor in a spirit of respect and generosity?

Few people in the United States are literally naked. However, many do not have the clothes they need to deal with extreme weather conditions, the addition of a baby to their family, or to go on a job interview. To truly address the impact of poverty on individuals and on society as a whole, we must accept the responsibility of developing an empathetic approach to individual and social challenges.

The St. Vincent de Paul Society is a volunteer lay organization with over 175 years of experience in helping individuals and families in need. The organization has

perfected a system which begins with an assessment of needs and distribution of vouchers. Using these vouchers, individuals can go to any St. Vincent de Paul shop and select what they need, including clothing, coats, and shoes for the entire family. This is different than handing someone a box of clothes already chosen for them. In choosing for themselves, people have a sense of control and ownership at a time when they may feel powerless in many aspects of their lives.

Human dignity is the foundational principle of Catholic social teaching. We are created in the image of God and therefore human life is sacred, deserving of our respect and service. This inherent dignity demands that each person has those things they need to live a truly human life. Clothing that is clean and in good condition, and that is appropriate to the weather and social situation meets this requirement. Organizations providing laundry and shower facilities to the needy also contribute in necessary ways to our efforts to clothe the naked.

In his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul writes: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal 3:27). In Baptism we “put on Christ,” we are clothed in his righteousness and commit ourselves to his compassionate mission of love. Christians are called to clothe others, and Jesus tells us that when we clothe those who are naked and unprotected we clothe him.

OBSERVE

1. Assess the clothing in your closets and drawers. What is your household clothing budget per year?
2. What do you do with clothing you no longer need or want?
3. What organizations are active in your community to respond to people’s need for clothing?
4. Define “well-dressed.” Ask a child or teen as well as an older adult what this term means to them.

JUDGE

1. What is the purpose of clothing?
2. How does a person’s appearance influence your perception of and ultimate response to that person?
3. If you or a member of your family needed clothes, what would you hope a local charity would provide?

4. What can you do to help those in need of clothing beyond providing them with clothes?

ACT

1. Organize a clothing drive in your parish or diocese. Visit www.cfm.org for ideas on “Undie Sunday.” Collection of undergarments for both children and adults is a vital need for most clothing charities.
2. Volunteer to help at a clothing bank or thrift store in your community organizing clothing or serving patrons.
3. Talk to your children about the importance of seeing the person behind the fashion – or lack of fashion.
4. Donate clothing, or work in another way to serve the needy, keeping your own sense of dignity and hopes for your family in mind. Try to consider each person you serve as Jesus.

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear God, let us not exalt ourselves for the material goods we have appropriated. Let us embrace our nakedness before God as a means to let God’s love fulfill our every need. Let us recognize the holiness in everyone we meet – regardless of their clothing, their status, or their possessions. Lord God, let us acknowledge our common dependence on you and our mutual responsibility to each other as a sign of your grace. Amen.

6. IT IS AN ACT OF LOVE TO: Shelter the Homeless

OPENING PRAYER

Dear God, In the comfort of this meeting place, we pause to give thanks for warmth and shelter, and to remember those who do not enjoy these basic things we take for granted.

Open our hearts to the vulnerable and dispossessed among us. Lead us to care for one another as you care for us, to share our wealth as you share blessings with us. Grant us earthly warmth and lodging and a spiritual place prepared for us that we may dwell in the House of the Lord forever. Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.

2 Samuel 7:10-16

In this passage, what does God promise?

Have you ever felt “homeless”?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

How many people in the United States experience homelessness? This is a complicated question to answer. Most studies take a “snap shot” of homelessness at one point in time by counting people who are in shelters or on the streets. In early 2008, HUD reported a point-in-time estimate of 759,101 people experiencing homelessness on a single night in January 2006 (The Second Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, March 2008, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Community Planning and Development). Looking at data compiled over a longer period of time, the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty states that approximately 3.5 million people, 1.35 million of them children, are likely to experience homelessness in a given year. This translates to approximately 1% of the U.S. population experiencing homelessness each year.

Homelessness can be a brief experience or an ongoing condition. It can result from natural disaster, family disintegration, or economic crisis. Studies indicate a dramatic increase in homelessness in the United States over the past two decades. Families with children are among the fastest growing segments of the homeless population. Two trends largely responsible for this rise in homelessness are a growing shortage of affordable rental housing and a simultaneous increase in poverty. (National Coalition for the Homeless, NCH Fact Sheets on Homelessness, August 2007). The collapse of the housing market, foreclosure crisis, economic downturn, and tightening of available credit for home loans added to the number of families without secure shelter in 2008.

Increasing access to affordable housing and preventing homelessness are key components of Catholic Charities USA's Campaign to Reduce Poverty in America. This multi-year initiative aims to cut poverty in half by 2020 by urging Congress to prioritize the needs of the poor in policy decisions. Each year, Catholic Charities provides more than half a million people housing services ranging from affordable housing production to homeless street outreach to foreclosure prevention based on the fact that stable, affordable housing is critical to the health and well-being of families (www.catholiccharitiesusa.org).

Las Posadas is a traditional Mexican Christmas festival during which the faithful reenact Joseph and Mary's search for lodging in Bethlehem. They knock on the doors of "inns" only to be told there is no room for the Holy Family. For many individuals and families in the U.S. this feeling of rejection and insecurity is very real today.

OBSERVE

1. As a family, describe your home. What would you miss most if you were suddenly displaced from your home?
2. Find estimates of the number of homeless individuals in your community. How many of these are men; women; children? What resources are available to them?
3. What sorts of housing options are available in your area? What organizations provide affordable housing? What support is offered families facing foreclosure?
4. When have you been offered shelter by someone else? When have you opened your home to another?

JUDGE

1. Does everyone have a right to safe and affordable housing? Explain your answer.
2. What is the difference between a house and a home?
3. What qualities should the Christian home, the domestic church, offer to its inhabitants and visitors?
4. What more can your community do to address homelessness?

ACT

1. Organize a parish effort to provide shelter and support to a local family in need.

2. Donate money or volunteer with an organization that cares for homeless or displaced persons such as Habitat for Humanity. Explore the possibility of going on a domestic or international mission trip to help with housing needs.
3. Appreciate the warmth and welcome of your home. Talk with your family about ways to work together to keep your home clean and organized.
4. Open your home to someone in particular need of hospitality.

CLOSING PRAYER

For all women and men, boys and girls who are homeless this day,
That they may find refuge.
Lord, hear our prayer.

For those sleeping under bridges, on park benches, in doorways or bus stations,
That they may find rest.
Lord, hear our prayer.

For those who can only find shelter for the night but must wander in the daytime,
That they may find security.
Lord, hear our prayer.

For families broken because they could not afford to pay their rent or mortgage,
That they may find hope.
Lord, hear our prayer.

For those displaced by natural disaster,
That they may find peace.
Lord, hear our prayer.

For those who find themselves far from friends and relatives, from the familiar,
That they may find community.
Lord, hear our prayer.

And, for those of us with warm houses and comfortable beds,
That we not be lulled into complacency and forgetfulness.
Lord, hear our prayer.

Jesus, help us to see you in the face of every homeless person, everyone in need of our hospitality, so that we may be empowered to bring justice and peace to the world. Amen.

7. IT IS AN ACT OF LOVE TO: Bury the Dead, Comfort the Sorrowful

OPENING PRAYER

Merciful God, the death of your Son, Jesus, broke the bonds of death for us and opened for us the way to everlasting life. We pray for our loved ones who have gone before us into your care. We miss them. Still, we trust your unfailing love for them and rely on your strength to sustain us as we continue to live in your saving hope. Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

“On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast.... And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death for ever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, ‘Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.’”

Isaiah 25:6a, 7-9

How does God wipe away our tears?

How do you wait on the Lord?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

It is an act of mercy to honor the body of the dead with special prayers and rituals. In *Reflections on the Body, Cremation, and Catholic Funeral Rights* (1997), the U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops note that in burying the dead we remember: “This is the body once washed in Baptism, anointed with the oil of salvation, and fed with the bread of life. This is the body whose hands clothed the poor and embraced the sorrowing” (According to this document, cremation is now allowed as long as the remains are treated with the same dignity).

It is also an act of mercy to comfort those who are affected by death. Bereavement and grief are natural processes which must run their course. The time it will take to complete this process varies from person to person. There is no time limit which is appropriate for all.

When a loved one dies, we who remain may experience a multitude of emotions. We may feel overwhelmed or hopeless. Our faith may be tested. C.S. Lewis described the flood of emotions he felt upon the death of his wife, in *A Grief Observed*, “No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same

restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing.... At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be about me. I dread the moments when the house is empty. If only they would talk to one another and not to me” (1).

There can be comfort in the prayers, rituals, and customs surrounding the funeral. These traditional practices allow family members to be carried forward in the arms of those who are not so profoundly affected. When we visit the funeral home, send flowers and food, and help with expenses, we “suffer with” those who mourn, the real meaning of the word “compassion.”

However, it is in our faith that the true comfort of the bereaved lies. The hope that distinguishes Christian grief has its basis in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. St. Paul, in his letter to the Thessalonians proclaimed: “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died” (1 Thess 4:14). Paul adds, “Therefore encourage one another with these words” (1 Thess 4:18). Christians are called to respectfully bury the dead and compassionately comfort the sorrowful.

OBSERVE

1. What services are offered by churches, funeral homes, and cemeteries in your community?
2. What are the funeral customs of your culture? Research the funeral customs of another culture.
3. Share an experience at a death or funeral of a loved one.
4. What do you tell children about death?

JUDGE

1. Should it be difficult for Christians to talk about death? Why or why not?
2. What can we do for the living when someone dies? How do we comfort the sorrowful?
3. How does hope of life after death bring comfort as we face death?
4. How should we live if we have hope of life after death?

ACT

1. Commemorate the anniversary of a death with a card, donation in the person's name, or visit to the family.
2. Volunteer to serve at a parish funeral as a reader, music minister, or usher. If your parish has a bereavement ministry, participate, perhaps by helping with a funeral luncheon.
3. Provide a meal for a family who has experienced a death.
4. Make prior arrangements for your funeral or do this as a couple.

CLOSING PRAYER

Into your hands, O Lord, we humbly entrust our brothers and sisters who have died. In this life, you embraced them with your tender love. Welcome them into paradise, where there will be no sorrow, no weeping nor pain, but the fullness of peace and joy. We pray also for all who have experienced the death of a loved one. May we find ways to be sources of comfort and support to them. And in our time of grief, send us brothers and sisters in faith to comfort us in turn. We ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son, and in the name of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

8. IT IS AN ACT OF LOVE TO: Care for the Sick

OPENING PRAYER

Loving Father, Have mercy on those who are sick. Open our hearts to Jesus' message of healing and to the ways we can comfort one another during times of illness. Help us to allow the Lord's healing touch to flow through our hands, to comfort those who are ill, who have loved ones who are ill, and who care for the sick and dying.

Father we ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered round him; and he was by the lake. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, 'My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.' So he went with him...

When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to

them, 'Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.' And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, 'Talitha cum', which means, 'Little girl, get up!' And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement.

Mark 5:21-24, 38-42

How do the people in this passage respond to the child's illness?

How does Jesus respond?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

Through the centuries the church has recognized the importance of caring for the sick. The late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin said one of his basic convictions about the ministry of health care is the idea of "being there." "Illness is a kind of human exile," he wrote in *A Sign of Hope: A Pastoral Letter on Healthcare* (1995). "We must recognize the absolute necessity of being present as a community to others in need." Christians are taught to have the utmost respect for the sick, suffering, and dying.

Scripture speaks clearly of Jesus' loving response to the sick. Jesus spoke with the sick, touched them, was an instrument of healing for them. Jesus sought healing for the entire person -- spirit, soul, and body. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: "His preferential love for the sick has not ceased through the centuries to draw the very special attention of Christians toward all those who suffer in body and soul. It is the source of tireless efforts to comfort them." [CCC #1503] Through his Body, the church, Jesus continues to minister to the sick.

The Catholic Church has historically been on the forefront of care for the sick and suffering, opening hospitals, clinics, and chapels in places of care. Countless religious men and women have dedicated their lives to the care of these people, great saints such as St. John of God and St. Jeanne Jugan among them. A particularly cherished dimension of the pastoral care of the sick and dying for Catholics is the celebration of the sacraments of the Church. For the sick and suffering, and those who care for them, Eucharist and Anointing of the Sick are tremendous opportunities for consolation, comfort, and healing.

Through this window of Christian care for the sick and suffering the world sees our faith. In his message for the World Day of the Sick in 2002, Pope John Paul II stated: "Faith teaches us to seek the ultimate meaning of suffering in Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection. The Christian response to pain and suffering is never one of passivity...the Church goes out to meet the sick and suffering

bringing them comfort and hope...It ultimately involves the unselfish gift of self to others, especially to those who are suffering.” Providing care for the sick is a daily reality for many families. The experience of the caregiver can be challenging in many ways and also demands a compassionate response from us. We are all called to participate in the care of one another in time of need so that the world may continue to find Christ in our actions.

OBSERVE

1. Describe the effects of illness on you and your family, whether minor or serious.
2. Name a person you know who deals with a serious illness. Observe the impact of the illness on both the individual and the members of the family.
3. Research the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick and share the information you find.
4. What do your church and community do to assist those who are dealing with illness? Investigate the parish nurse program offered in some churches. Are respite care services provided in your community?

JUDGE

1. How do you live this work of mercy within your own family?
2. What help can you offer a person outside your family who is ill? What can you do for the family of an ill person?
3. How can your church better minister to the sick?
4. Are there enough healthcare resources for the ill and their families in your community?

ACT

1. Offer to do a task for a person who is chronically ill such as shopping, errands, cleaning, respite for caregivers, or another form of service.
2. Volunteer to bring meals to families of the sick in your church. If this ministry does not exist, offer to organize such an effort.
3. Volunteer to serve as a Eucharistic minister to those in your parish who are unable to come to church.
4. Support the work of caregivers in your parish by including them in the Prayers

of the Faithful. Explore the website catholiccaregivers.com.

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: Lord God, you call us to be your healing presence to others. Hear our concerns for those among us who are sick.

Allow time for people to mention those who are in need of prayer. After each name is mentioned respond: "Send your healing spirit, O Lord."

At the conclusion the leader says:

We pray for these and for all the sick. We pray also for those who care for them that they may be filled with your spirit of love and tenderness as they minister. And, we pray for the wisdom and strength to care for the sick and suffering in our own lives. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.

9. IT IS AS ACT OF LOVE TO: Visit the Imprisoned

OPENING PRAYER

Jesus, united with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
Give us your compassion for those in prison.
Mend in mercy the broken in mind and memory.
Soften the hard of heart, the captives of anger.
Free the innocent; parole the trustworthy.
Awaken the repentance that restores hope.
May prisoner's families persevere in their love.
Jesus, heal the victims of crime. They live with the scars.
Lift to eternal peace those who die.
Grant victims' families the forgiveness that heals.
Give wisdom to lawmakers and to those who judge.
Instill prudence and patience in those who guard.
Make those in prison ministry bearers of your light,
for *all of us* are in need of your mercy! Amen.

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SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

From the belly of the fish Jonah said this prayer to the Lord, His God:

Out of my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me;
From the midst of the nether world I cried for help and you heard my voice.
For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the sea, and the flood enveloped
me; All your breakers and your billows passed over me.

Then I said, “I am banished from your sight! Yet would I again look upon your
holy temple.” The waters swirled about me, threatening my life; the abyss
enveloped me; seaweed clung about my head. Down I went to the roots of the
mountains; the bars of the nether world were closing behind me forever, But you
brought up my life from the pit, O Lord, my God. When my soul fainted within
me, I remembered the Lord; My prayer reached you in your holy temple.

But I with resounding praise, will sacrifice to you; What I have vowed I will pay:
deliverance is from the Lord.

Then the Lord commanded the fish to spew Jonah upon the shore.

Jonah 2: 2-11

What is your recollection of how Jonah finds himself in the belly of the whale?
Who put him there – God or Jonah himself?

How does Jonah respond to his situation?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

An examination of prison ministry in the United States reveals that visiting the
imprisoned takes many forms. Some people go into prisons and form
friendships with the men and women there. Many write letters to prisoners
they've never met. Some help prisoners continue their education in prison,
some offer spiritual direction and opportunities for Bible study, while others
provide training for jobs. Some people focus on advancing legislation aimed
at improving our system of justice.

The United States Council of Catholic Bishops have observed the following:
“In the United States, history tells us that the prison system was, in some
ways, built on a moral vision of the human person and society—one that
combined a spiritual rekindling with punishment and correction. But along the
way, this vision has too often been lost. The evidence surrounds us: sexual
and physical abuse among inmates and sometimes by corrections officers,
gang violence, racial division, the absence of educational opportunities and
treatment programs, the increasing use of isolation units, and society's
willingness to sentence children to adult prisons—all contributing to a high
rate of recidivism. Our society seems to prefer punishment to rehabilitation
and retribution to restoration thereby indicating a failure to recognize

prisoners as human beings” (*Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*, 2000).

Of course, Christians cannot tolerate behavior that threatens lives and violates the rights of others. We believe in responsibility, accountability, and legitimate punishment. At the same time, Christians do not give up on those who violate the laws communities put in place to protect human life and rights. Both victims and offenders are children of God, with inherent dignity that must be respected and protected. The USCCB continues with a Catholic vision of criminal justice: “It recognizes that root causes and personal choices can both be factors in crime by understanding the need for responsibility on the part of the offender and an opportunity for their rehabilitation. A Catholic approach leads us to encourage models of restorative justice that seek to address crime in terms of the harm done to victims and communities, not simply as a violation of law.”

The following is a personal reflection from a prison chaplain which offers us a unique and particular perspective of what it can mean to “visit the imprisoned.”

What actually is prison ministry? It is the ability to minister to people who, due to many different circumstances, find themselves locked up in a center where literally just about every freedom you can think of is taken away. We as baptized Christians are called to “Act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with our God” (Micah). Prison ministry is one very powerful way to do that.

Prison ministry has taught me to be less judgmental, for there by the grace of God, maybe could go I, and to appreciate the gift of freedom. Most times people who are incarcerated just want a sympathetic ear – someone who will listen to them and not judge them for the mistakes they have made. They get enough of that on a daily basis, mostly from themselves.

It never ceases to amaze me just how honest inmates are. Part of ministry involves challenging them when they seem to need it. They appreciate your time and the effort you took to come and spend time with them.

Never once have I visited a group that I haven’t been thanked a number of times for coming. Most of the time, they are willing to take full responsibility for being where they are. But they have not always learned the lessons they need and are not always ready to put the past behind them.

There are many repeat offenders and it’s true that sometimes they have to hit rock-bottom before they get it and are ready to fight hard to try to turn their lives around. Many of them are married, with children. Often times they are the second or third generation of family that find themselves behind bars. It is very hard to break that cycle when that is the only kind of life they have ever known. I continue to be astounded and moved by the deep faith that many of these individuals have. Even in the midst of their dire circumstances they still put their faith and trust in God.

Some feel that God has put them there for a reason and they are open to learn from the experience. They challenge my faith at times. It is easy to have faith

and trust in God when things are going along o.k., but when we are faced with adversity how capable are we of maintaining our complete trust in God?

OBSERVE

1. If possible, talk with someone who has been in prison. How did this experience affect them and their families?
2. What freedoms are given up by the imprisoned? What freedoms are given up by victims?
3. What prison ministries are active in your community? How do they serve the families of those who are imprisoned?
4. In what ways can people be “imprisoned” beyond being housed in a jail?

JUDGE

1. What should our attitude be toward those who are imprisoned?
2. How does Jesus call us to “visit” the imprisoned?
3. How do you see prayer as impacting those who are imprisoned?
4. How could prison ministry be more effective in your community? How could your church support the homebound or others whose lives are in some ways “prison-like”?

ACT

1. Many diocesan offices around the country have prison ministries which offer retreat opportunities for those in prison. Call and find out how you can help at their next event. This may be in the form of writing letters, baking cookies, or putting together supplies.
2. Offer to pray for those in prison and their victims. Find out the names of your local prisons and set time aside to pray for those who are now living there, their families, and those whose lives they have impacted with their actions.
3. Familiarize yourself with the position of the Roman Catholic Church on the issue of capital punishment.
4. Put into action a parish response to the needs of those who suffer lives of limited freedom due to illness or other emotional or physical constraints.

CLOSING PRAYER

The prayer below was written by an anonymous inmate. It is suggested that one member of the group read the prayer aloud.

In every need let me come to You with humble trust saying,
Jesus, help me!

In all my doubts, perplexities, and temptations,
Jesus, help me!

In hours of loneliness, weariness and trials,
Jesus, help me!

In the failure of my plans and hopes; In disappointments, trouble and sorrows,
Jesus, help me!

When others fail me, and Your grace alone can assist me,
Jesus, help me!

When I throw myself on Your tender love as a Brother and Savior,
Jesus, help me!

When my heart is cast down by failure to see any good come from my efforts,
Jesus, help me!

When I feel impatient, and my cross irritates me,
Jesus, help me!

When I am ill, and my head and hands cannot work and I am lonely,
Jesus, help me!

Always, always, in spite of weakness, falls and shortcomings of every kind,
Jesus, help me and never forsake me!

Amen.

10. IT IS AN ACT OF LOVE TO: Admonish the Sinner, Forgive Offenses Willingly,
and Bear Wrongs Patiently

OPENING PRAYER

God our creator, over the ages you have formed us as a people, entering into our history, guiding us from slavery into freedom, from darkness into light. When the world was broken, you sent Jesus to restore your creation, and to bring us back to you. Even as we acknowledge our sinfulness, we celebrate your forgiveness. You call us to be reconciled with yourself and with each other. Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:12-17

How does our own relationship with God affect our relationship with others?

What are some ways you nurture your relationship with God?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

We are called to admonish the sinner, forgive offenses willingly, and bear wrongs patiently. In his book, *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism* (2004), Jesuit Father James F. Keenan says these three spiritual works of mercy promote reconciliation, which can only begin when we first appreciate our own need for reconciliation with God. No Christian marriage, no Christian family, no Christian community can exist without reconciliation.

In Luke 17:3, Jesus exhorts his followers: "Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive." Tough love is a form of admonition. A parent treats a child sternly with the intent to be helpful in the long run. There is a risk of alienation. A father forgives and welcomes back a prodigal son. But the brother of the prodigal one needs to be reconciled as well. The Gospel account teaches us of the father's forgiveness of the son, but leaves us to ponder the relationship of brother to brother. Scripture abounds with examples of Jesus' day-to-day practice of patience with disciples who questioned him, feuded amongst themselves, and failed in loyalty.

In a “protest song,” or a prophetic witness, Bob Dylan admonished the “Masters of War” -- those who profited from the sale of arms and munitions. Mary Winnecke, a woman from Indiana whose daughter was murdered, pleaded for her killer's life. She made the decision to forgive him in the face of the worst wrongdoing imaginable. St. Monica prayed for years for her son, a public sinner. Her patient but insistent prayer was answered by the conversion of her son, Augustine.

To reconcile means to restore the relationship that was lost, but reconciliation comes at a price. Dietrich Bonhoefer says:

“Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

“Costly grace is the hidden treasure in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has....Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of His Son.”

Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted discussed our call to merciful Christian action in a 2008 article in *The Catholic Sun*: “Christ has reconciled us to the Father and to one another through His Cross and He has commissioned us to continue His mission, not in some idealistic, abstract, or artificial construct but in the concrete circumstances of a fallen world. The work of reconciliation demands honest speaking and patient listening, with rich helpings of prudence and courage.”

OBSERVE

1. What are the risks we take when correcting someone else? What are the possible benefits of “admonishing the sinner”?
2. Reflect on a moment of forgiveness in your life. If you were forgiven, what was the effect of that experience? If you forgave another, what was the effect of that experience?
3. When have you been challenged to “bear wrongs patiently”?
4. How are these spiritual works of mercy practiced within parish communities and within society?

JUDGE

1. What is the difference between helping someone see their errors and pronouncing judgment?
2. What barriers keep you from being able to forgive others? What barriers can keep us from receiving forgiveness?
3. Are there appropriate limits to our patience with others?
4. What place do these spiritual works of mercy have in a healthy Christian marriage?

ACT

1. Correct others through prayer, example, and love. Find a way to begin a conversation that can lead them to prayerful consideration of their choices and actions.
2. Seek to be reconciled with a person you have offended. Recognizing that sin is before all else an offense against God (CCC #1440), celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation.
3. If you are struggling to be patient with or to forgive another, seek the counsel or spiritual direction of someone who can help you find peace.
4. Teach your children the spiritual works of mercy “Admonish the Sinner,” “Forgive Offenses Willingly,” and “Bear Wrongs Patiently.” Discuss ways they could practice these works in their daily lives.

CLOSING PRAYER

God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of your Son you have reconciled the world to yourself.

We ask your help as we work to correct one another with humble hearts, forgive one another with open hearts, and bear with one another with patient hearts.

We ask for pardon and peace, and the grace to be agents of reconciliation in the church and in the world.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Offer each other a sign of peace.