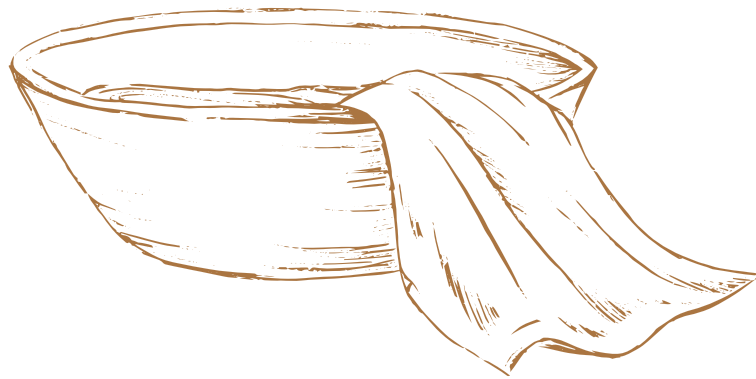


MERCY



Leader Guide



Faith and Family Life
Catholic Ministries

AN INVITATION

You have been invited to accompany your families in understanding and experiencing the heart of the Father. *Mercy* is the capacity of the heart to love and care for others. As human beings, we have the opportunity to incarnate who God is by the way we share mercy with the world. Families will begin this series by discussing what mercy is and how God desires that we serve others as if they were Christ. Families will learn concrete ways to live out mercy and care for others in their home and community.

The essence of the mystery of the Christian faith is mercy, which is made visible in Jesus of Nazareth. Mercy, at the center of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, reveals the very mystery of the Trinity. It is the ideal of evangelical life, the true criterion of the faith's credibility and the deepest storyline of the Church's story. (Directory for Catechesis 51)

The practice of mercy is already itself an authentic catechesis; it is catechesis in action, an eloquent testimony for believers and nonbelievers alike and a manifestation of the bond between orthodoxy and orthopraxy: "the New Evangelization . . . cannot but use a language of mercy which is expressed in gestures and attitudes even before words." (DC 51)

Catechesis is to teach believers to be "merciful like the Father" (Lk 6:36), both by fostering knowledge and practice of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy and by encouraging the search for new works that respond to the needs of the present. (DC 52)

A FEW TIPS

- By reading and experiencing the content yourself, you will be best equipped to accompany this program. We recommend first becoming familiar with the material before implementing it.
- Families can be placed in small groups of 3-4 families to share this journey with. Families can learn from each other as they recount their Family Meeting experiences. Companion Families can weave together these individual families into a small church community.
- Although *Mercy* is beneficial for a variety of age groups, this program would be a great fit for families with junior high aged children. For families with younger children we have provided ideas for how to adapt the experience in the parent guide.
- *Mercy* is designed to be led at-home, and can be accompanied by the At-Church Content. The At-Church Content includes 4 Sessions for parents and children. If

you are introducing families to ongoing formation resources for the first time, be sure to begin with the Blend Session.

- Check in with families regularly using our Family Follow Through system available on Martha or as a PDF. This helps with accountability. Share photos from the Family Follow Throughs in your bulletin, newsletter, emails, or bulletin boards.

AT-HOME CONTENT

Mercy is an at-home family experience about the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Over 15 Family Meetings, families will wrestle with and live out the command of Jesus: “love one another as I love you” (John 15:12). Each Family Meeting includes: a gathering ritual, opening prayer, check-in question, a teaching about a corporal or spiritual work of mercy, an activity that lives out the teaching, and a closing prayer. These meetings are designed to take 30-40 minutes each.

The gathering ritual includes meditating on an image of the face of Jesus and leading families in praying a Litany of Mercy. When families continually share in rituals of their faith, they can become more grounded in Christ and united as a family. This gathering ritual will help provide a regular rhythm to begin Family Meetings. The check-in is meant to get the conversation started between family members. The question is loosely based on the theme, and is one that is easy to answer.

Each Family Meeting includes a teaching about one corporal or spiritual work of mercy rooted in Scripture and Tradition with practical application. Families will create a set of St. Therese good deed beads that they will use throughout the series as they live out the works of mercy. The activity for each meeting also gives families several ideas for how to live out a spiritual or corporal work of mercy in their daily life at-home and in their community. To end each Family Meeting, a prayer is included for families to pray together.

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

Family Meeting	Theme	Activity
1	-Learning to see Jesus' face in the face of others. -God calls us to love and serve others. -The corporal and spiritual works of mercy. -Living merciful lives within our families.	-Make your own set of good deed beads.
2	-Overview of people experiencing food insecurities. -Jesus showed concern and took action to relieve hunger. Read Matthew 15:32. -God feeds us in many ways, particularly the Eucharist.	-Double your dinner recipe, and bless a neighbor or friend in need with a meal. -Donate to your parish food pantry or local food bank.
3	-Overview of Americans with lack of access to running water. -Review Isaiah 55:1 and John 7:37. -Jesus is the one who fills our longing and deep thirst- He is our living water!	-Help a sibling, parent, or grandparent who needs a drink. -Keep water bottles in your car in case an opportunity arises to share one with someone in need.

4	-God loves his creations, especially you and I. -Review creation story of Adam and Eve. How they sinned, which broke their perfect closeness with God and created shame. They created clothes to cover up their bodies.	-Older siblings can help younger siblings with getting dressed and tying shoes. -Help with laundry. -Donate clothes from your closet that you have outgrown or don't wear.
5	-Sometimes we are physically confined (for example: Covid-19, old age, lack of ability to move around). -Other times, we are in imprisoned situations that we cannot get out of without the help of another. -People in prison are still made in the same image and likeness of God.	-Visit a family member in prison or write them a letter. -Visit a local nursing home, or a lonely member of your family or parish family. -Offer to babysit for a mother of young children. -Offer your own prayer and sacrifice to those in need. Abstain from meat, sweets, coffee, etc. as a sacrifice for someone.
6	-Overview of homelessness rates in the United States. -Scripture reminds us of the importance and honor of hospitality. -Abraham and Sarah's story in Genesis 18:2-8. -Jesus was born outside of a home, and couldn't return home to Nazareth for 3 years.	-Show hospitality to someone who might need to feel the embrace of your home. -Find someone to shelter with love, kindness, and care.
7	-Discuss the impact of being sick and who cares for you when you are sick. -Review how Jesus heals St. Peter's mother-in-law. -Jesus is near to us in our sickness.	-Send a card to someone sick. -Call to check in on someone. -Send a care package in the mail. -Offer to run errands, help with yard work, drop off dinner, or offer to help where needed.

8	-Discuss what grief and grieving looks like and ways you can experience it. -Scripture shows us the goodness of the process of grieving in the story of Lazarus' death, John 11:3-35. -We are not meant to grieve alone. Jesus shows us what sorrow and compassion for someone looks like.	-Visit a cemetery and bring flowers to the grave. Talk about that person while you visit. -Write a letter to God or to a person who has died to express your thoughts and emotions.
9	-We are all imperfect humans who make mistakes. -God still loves us and desires to be close. -We can learn something valuable from past mistakes. -Discuss John 8:7-11. Jesus reminds the Pharisees (and us) that none of them are without sin.	-Encourage a sibling, child, or friend when they make a mistake to do better next time. -Pray with your family or friends to remember God's great love for us. -Go to Reconciliation with your family this week.
10	-Discuss what qualities good teachers possess. Share about your favorite teacher and what made them great. - Jesus is "Rabbi", the Teacher. -Nicodemus was humble and curious before Jesus (John 3:1-2). We, too, are called to be this way towards Jesus so that he can teach us God's way.	-Take time to be curious and learn more about your faith. Read scripture, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, talk to your Pastor or your parents. -After, share what you've learned with others! -Help instruct others in daily life.

11	-It's okay to have questions and difficulties in our faith. We can use this as an opportunity to explore our faith, seek truth, and talk to God. -Jesus meets us where we are with love. He wants to help us understand. -Thomas doubted Jesus' rising from the dead (John 20:25-28). Jesus walked with Thomas from doubt into faith, and He desires to do the same with us!	-Counsel the doubtful with love instead of frustration. -If you have doubts in your faith, talk about it with God, your parents, godparents, or another faithful adult you trust.
12	-We are united in Baptism with other Christians through the Holy Spirit in us. -We can pray for the living and dead to show love to the other members of the Body of Christ just as we do to our own family. -Our final goal is heaven- we need heavenly help! -Discuss what purgatory is and how our prayers can assist souls on their journey to heaven.	-Spend time in prayer asking God to bless and protect all the members of the Body of Christ. -Pray with your family for specific intentions. -Pray the Hail Mary and Rosary. -Attend Mass, where heaven and earth meet, and the whole Body of Christ joins together to praise God.
13	-During the Passion Narratives from Holy Week, we are reminded how human Jesus also was. We see how much suffering He endured emotionally and physically (Mathew 27:30-32). -Jesus met Simon of Cyrene, who helped Jesus carry the weight of the cross. -We can comfort someone going through sorrow by carrying their burden with them.	-Read a story or sing a song to a sibling who is feeling sad. -Send a care package to a friend who is having a hard time. -Call and check in on someone who may need it. -Spend time with someone doing their favorite thing, even if it's not yours.

14	-Forgiveness can be hard. -When we hurt and refuse to forgive someone, it ends up harming us and our relationship with God. -Because God forgives us, we are also called to forgive.	-If you are struggling to forgive someone, try and remember all the times you made mistakes. -Remember God's great and forgiving love. Think about His forgiveness in the sacrament of Reconciliation. -Pray and ask God to help you with what you are struggling to be able to forgive.
15	-We have all been wronged at some point by others. How do you want to react? -In Matthew 5:43-48, Jesus reminds us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute you.	-Say a prayer the next time you've been wronged, and ask God to give you the grace to respond how he would want you to. -Go to Adoration to receive Jesus' patience, love, and mercy.

AT-CHURCH CONTENT

It is important to have families gather periodically throughout the *Mercy* process. The goal of gathering is to:

- Find out what is going well and what families are struggling with in the Family Meetings.
- To encourage, deepen, and support their experience of the Family Meetings with any tips, inspiration, or information.
- To meet and hear from other families on a similar journey. There is wisdom in any room of families, especially parents!
- To give children a positive and meaningful experience at-church.
- To pray together - for each other and for the entire community.

This resource has been provided to support you in facilitating family Sessions held at-church throughout the *Mercy* experience. The Sessions are designed to have parents and children together. There is plenty of content to fill a 1-1.5 hour time frame in the Sessions. Session 1 is designed to be used between Family Meeting 4 and 5. Session 2 is designed to be used between Family Meeting 8 and 9. Session 3 is designed to be used between Family Meeting 11 and 12. Session 4 is designed to be used after Family Meeting 15. They may also be used between other Sessions. If you are introducing families to ongoing formation resources for the first time, be sure to begin with the Blend Session available before Session 1. This experience will help provide a framework for both the purpose and direction of this stage of formation. An important part of these Sessions is the witness of a member of your community who regularly lives out works of mercy. You will need to identify and invite them ahead of time. If they are not available you may be able to record their witness to share with the families. More details of who to ask can be found in each Session.

There are supplies that need to be pulled together to help bring these Sessions to life. We have given you supply lists. We feel it is critical to set holy spaces to lead families into deeper intimacy with Christ and themselves. We cannot overemphasize the impact of simple but beautiful decor, great hospitality, and intimate prayerful spaces. Your attention to detail tells everyone this is important, we prepared for you!

We realize families are in different places and stages in their own faith journeys. We have written sessions we feel best take into account today's families. It is our hope that these Sessions meet them where they are at and slowly lead them into something more. Feel free to scale the material up or down. It is most important that families leave with a positive experience of Church and community, feeling like they have a place in it.

ACCOMPANIMENT TEAM NEEDS

We realize each of our directors have different gifts; some are wonderful teachers, some are storytellers, others are better facilitating small groups, some are gifted in finding others to present material. Use your strengths to lead your family Sessions, and look for others who can take the pieces you are not as confident in. It takes a team!

Facilitator:

- Choosing a facilitator to lead your Sessions as an MC from the front is an important decision. There will be other voices like witnesses, but it is necessary to have a central person to be the stabilizing and guiding voice in the group. They will introduce and weave together the content for each Session. This person should be warm, engaging, confident, and it helps if they have a good sense of humor. This person needs to be open and non-judgmental. It will be their voice that will help the group grow together.

Companion Families:

- We recommend placing 1 companion family in each small group of 10 families, if possible. This will help provide a relatable connection to the parish community. Companion families will focus on building relationships and supporting the facilitator in guiding the at-church Sessions. Make sure companion families feel comfortable with the flow of each Session. Leave time at the end of each Session with the companion families to evaluate the experience. To make this a great experience for all, we must be checking in regularly and making any needed changes as soon as possible. Invest in time with your companion families. Having a strong team of people committed to the same mission helps everyone. Offer time to get to know one another, provide skills training, and spend time in prayer together. We want our families to feel like they are being invited into a group that has been preparing for them and enjoys each other.

Hospitality:

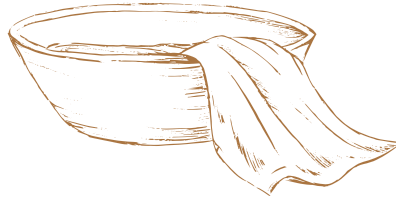
- Hospitality is about much more than setting out cookies and water bottles. Great hospitality is the root for the growing that will take place. Having a team that interacts well together, and welcomes you into their community, will help the families get comfortable almost immediately. This will produce greater engagement in the Sessions. This type of hospitality requires the facilitator and companions to become friendly with the families before they ever begin. It includes being “real” through sharing, vulnerability, and laughter from the minute your families arrive.

- How the room “feels” is also an important part of the hospitality recipe. Covered tables, simple centerpieces, and the glow of a few candles will encourage the families to lean into the conversation, like a great dinner party. Take the time to set the room in advance, so that families walk into a space that feels prepared for them. A prayer table up front with changing images each Session can also be a small voice speaking into the room. Find creative people in your community who have a heart for families and let them loose to work their magic.

Intercessors:

- Having intentional intercessors who are praying for your families and your ministry is an important step to staying on mission. Prayer always needs to be integral to the work we do. People in your parish community who take the time to talk with Jesus often and who understand the struggles and difficulties facing families are perfect to help in this role. These prayer warriors can be organized as a group, or can individually come before God for the needs of the parish families each day. Prayer can be specially centered around this time of growing in mercy.

MERCY



FAMILY FOLLOW THROUGHS

Time with family is precious. Following through with this family experience tells your child this is important. With your child, please complete the following tasks after each meeting to turn in.

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Family Meeting 1 - Email a picture of your completed good deed beads.

Family Meeting 2 - Email a picture of or write a small reflection about your family living out the corporal work of mercy: feed the hungry. Your reflection can be about how your family plans to live out this work of mercy or what you learned as a family from this meeting.

Family Meeting 3 - Email a picture of or write a small reflection about your family living out the corporal work of mercy: give drink to the thirsty. Your reflection can be about how your family plans to live out this work of mercy or what you learned as a family from this meeting.

Family Meeting 4 - Email a picture of or write a small reflection about your family living out the corporal work of mercy: clothe the naked. Your reflection can be about how your family plans to live out this work of mercy or what you learned as a family from this meeting.

Family Meeting 5 - Email a picture of or write a small reflection about your family living out the corporal work of mercy: visit the imprisoned. Your reflection can be about how your family plans to live out this work of mercy or what you learned as a family from this meeting.

Family Meeting 6 - Email a picture of or write a small reflection about your family living out the corporal work of mercy: shelter the homeless. Your reflection can be about how your family plans to live out this work of mercy or what you learned as a family from this meeting.

Family Meeting 7 - Email a picture of or write a small reflection about your family living out the corporal work of mercy: visit the sick. Your reflection can be about how your family plans to live out this work of mercy or what you learned as a family from this meeting.



Family Meeting 8 - Email a picture of or write a small reflection about your family living out the corporal work of mercy: bury the dead. Your reflection can be about how your family plans to live out this work of mercy or what you learned as a family from this meeting.

Family Meeting 9 - Email a picture of or write a small reflection about your family living out the spiritual work of mercy: admonish the sinner. Your reflection can be about how your family plans to live out this work of mercy or what you learned as a family from this meeting.

Family Meeting 10 - Email a picture of or write a small reflection about your family living out the spiritual work of mercy: instruct the ignorant. Your reflection can be about how your family plans to live out this work of mercy or what you learned as a family from this meeting.

Family Meeting 11 - Email a picture of or write a small reflection about your family living out the spiritual work of mercy: counsel the doubtful. Your reflection can be about how your family plans to live out this work of mercy or what you learned as a family from this meeting.

Family Meeting 12 - Email a picture of or write a small reflection about your family living out the spiritual work of mercy: pray for the living and the dead. Your reflection can be about how your family plans to live out this work of mercy or what you learned as a family from this meeting.

Family Meeting 13 - Email a picture of or write a small reflection about your family living out the spiritual work of mercy: comfort the sorrowful. Your reflection can be about how your family plans to live out this work of mercy or what you learned as a family from this meeting.

Family Meeting 14 - Email a picture of or write a small reflection about your family living out the spiritual work of mercy: forgive injuries. Your reflection can be about how your family plans to live out this work of mercy or what you learned as a family from this meeting.

Family Meeting 15 - Email a picture of or write a small reflection about your family living out the spiritual work of mercy: bear wrongs patiently. Your reflection can be about how your family plans to live out this work of mercy or what you learned as a family from this meeting.