

Day of Mercy

A Four-Hour Retreat for the Year of Mercy¹

Art and Environment

- Prepare sacred space: on a table, place an appropriately colored liturgical seasonal tablecloth, a candle, an open Bible and a **small wooden cross** as a symbol of mercy---to be used in **Closing Ritual** (if possible, give each participant a small mercy cross, which is a cross within a cross, to use a focal point for prayer and Closing Ritual.)
- Have quiet inspirational music playing in the background.
- Arrange
 - a sufficient number of chairs for large group presentation
 - appropriate number of round tables in the room to encourage faith sharing at a later point.
- Consider the use of a chime, bell, or musical instrument to help people transition gently from one period of activity to the next. (eg. from small group to large group or lunch to next activity)



10:00-10:30am Welcome and Opening Prayer

- Welcome all gathered. Allow time for introductions and fellowship (you may offer beverages and morning snacks).
- Explain the course of events for the day (which follows below).
- Share the retreat theme—"Mercy"—and explain the following:
 - Pope Francis tells us: "We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity and peace.
Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Holy Trinity.
Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us.
Mercy: the fundamental law that swells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life.
Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness. (Misericordiae Vultus 2)
- Invite all gathered to join in the opening prayer together.

✿ ¹ Although it is presented here as a 10 AM to 2 PM experience, the time line can be adapted so that it could be presented using other time frames.

✿ This time of prayer may be offered in deaneries with one site offering a morning retreat; another site offering an afternoon retreat; and yet another offer it in the evening. Three different dates; three different time frames; three different locations.

✿ This resource is also available in Spanish.

Opening prayer

Dear Lord,

May we remember that your holy presence always shines within and around us.

If our daily choices are not what you wish for us,

or if we fail at being merciful and kind,

please help us to focus more on your power....

and our blessings...

knowing that as a child of God, you always offer us your mercy, love and healing.

We are connected to you,

the Source of all that is good and kind.

May we rejoice that you are within us

every moment of every day

lighting our path,

encouraging joy

and embracing us with your love. Amen.

(adapted from The Christophers)

10:30-11:15am Scripture and Faith Sharing

- Invite 3 readers to proclaim the following scripture passages (have a copy of the readings for each participant). Ask the group to pay close attention, as the passages are read, to a word or phrase or idea that stays with them or sparks a feeling or thought within them...then take 2-3 minutes after each passage to allow the group to reflect privately and silently on what they have heard.
- Following the participants' private reflection, invite them to separate into small groups of 4-5 to begin small group faith sharing on the passages, using the questions below for discussion (provide a copy of the faith sharing questions to each participant). You may wish to provide table facilitators who can help spark conversation, and assure that no one dominates the time of sharing.
- Ask the group to reread each scripture passage and then discuss the Faith Sharing Questions below.

Scripture Readings

1) Ephesians 2:4-7

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us,

even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ

(by grace you have been saved),

raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus,

that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

2) Titus 3:4-5

But when the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared,

not because of any righteous deeds we had done, but because of his mercy,

he saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the holy Spirit.

3) 1 Peter 1:3

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope

through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Faith Sharing Questions

1) Ephesians:

- How does God speak to you, in your life at this moment, when you think about the “great love” of God?
- In what way does God show you the “the immeasurable riches of his grace through his kindness?”

2) Titus:

- Paul tells us that God saved us, not by our own works, but by God’s own mercy. Imagine Jesus sitting next to you, telling you that he loves you and saved you through “the bath of rebirth” and the “renewal of the holy spirit.” What would you ask Jesus? What would you tell Jesus?

3) 1 Peter:

- It is God who caused us “to be born again” through his resurrection. Have ever experienced God in such a way where you felt “reborn?” If so, explain.
- How has Jesus been a “living hope” to you or someone in your family in the past?

11:15-11:30am Large Group Sharing

- Invite the small groups to gather into one large group for sharing.
- Ask: “ Would anyone like to share insights or questions from your small group sharing?”

11:30-11:45am Reflection Song by Matthew West: *Forgiveness* (or a Catholic hymn about mercy or forgiveness.) Matthew West’s song, *Forgiveness*, can be found on YouTube.

- At the conclusion of the song, ask participants what touched them about the lyrics or song itself. Share among the group.

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### 11:45-12:15 Break for Lunch

### 12:15-1:15pm Gather Participants for MERCY discussion and Scripture

- Ask the group to reflect on the word MERCY for a few moments and to think about synonyms for the word MERCY...such as, compassion, pity, forgiveness, kindness, sympathy, understanding.
- Discuss why we do not typically use the word MERCY in our everyday conversations. And why is it more likely that we use a synonym for MERCY.

Then ask the group which synonym do they practice most often when trying to live as a disciple of Christ.

- After the discussion, scripture and faith sharing follow.

#### Scripture and Faith Sharing

- Invite a person to proclaim the following gospel passage:

**Gospel Reading John 8:1-11**

*A Woman Caught in Adultery*

Then each went to his own house, while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?”

They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him.

Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”

Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him.

Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

She replied, “No one, sir.”

Then Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more.”

### **Faith Sharing Questions**

Guided Meditation: (invite the group to close their eyes for the next few minutes. Pause slightly in between questions.)

Say: “I invite you to imagine that you are part of the crowd listening to Jesus teach in the temple morning air.....what is the smell of the air?....what does the crowd look like?...what does Jesus look like?.....now imagine that someone abruptly stops Jesus from teaching....Jesus looks bewildered as do you and the crowd....

All of a sudden, the Pharisees appear in the crowd dragging a woman by her arms...they are yelling to Jesus that this woman has been found in the very act of committing adultery and they want her stoned...what is the sound of the crowd?.... what does Jesus do?....

In a split second, Jesus bends down and begins to write in the dirt with his finger....what do you think he is writing?.....what is Jesus’ facial expression?....

As the Pharisees continue to badger Jesus, Jesus quickly stands up and addresses them....what is your reaction when Jesus stands?...Jesus then confronts the Pharisees with these words: “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her”....what is the sound of the crowd, or is there any sound?...what is the facial expression or body language of the woman....can you feel Jesus’ MERCY for this woman?...

Jesus bends down once again and writes on the ground...you try with all your strength to see what Jesus is writing....what do you see?...and what does Jesus seem to be thinking?...

Then, one by one, the people begin to leave the temple area...what did the woman do?....

How was Jesus looking at the woman as the entire crowd disseminated?...

How do you feel as you watch Jesus' mercy embrace the woman?.....

How do you feel each day when Jesus extends the same mercy to you?...now imagine

Jesus embracing you just when you need his forgiveness and mercy saying, "I don't condemn you! Now go and try not to sin anymore." (Pause for several seconds.)

Then quietly and gently say, "Now, open your eyes when you are ready..."

### Discussion Questions in Large Group

- 1) What did you experience during the meditation?
- 2) Did you feel the power of the mercy of Jesus at any time?
- 3) What were your feelings about the woman?
- 4) Has there been a time in your life when you know Jesus embraced you and extended mercy and forgiveness?

### 1:15-2:00pm Closing Ritual, Comments, Prayer

(Play instrumental music in the background, then say):

"In proclaiming this year as the ***Year of Mercy***, Pope Francis has powerfully called on the entire Catholic Church to amend itself as a place not of judgment or condemnation but of pardon and merciful love. The Holy Father states that 'perhaps we have long forgotten how to show and live the way of mercy...the time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more....'" (Misericordiae Vultus)

*(If you have a **small cross for each participant**, invite them to hold it in the palm of their hand...if you only have **one cross**, invite the group to hold it in their hand for a few seconds and then pass it to the person on their right)....Now say:* "As we reflected and shared this day on the mercy of our Lord, let us now turn to one another and offer a small prayer for each other. Please hold your left hand over the small cross in the palm of your right hand while praying together the following from Pope Francis):

**"The Lord asks us not judge and not to condemn.  
So may MERCY be the force that reawakens us  
to new life, and instills in us the courage to look to the  
future with hope. Amen."**

### Closing Comments

Thank the group for their presence and faith sharing during the retreat....offer any words of encouragement regarding living daily their call to be merciful and just....

### Closing Prayer

All: Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting.

Leader: Lord, we know that only through your mercy are we truly happy. Help us to extend mercy, compassion, pity, forgiveness, kindness, sympathy and understanding to all we meet and greet each day. And when we fail, give us the wisdom to trust you and ask for forgiveness.

All: Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting. Amen.