



# Retreat

## Overview

This retreat is a full-day event, with an overnight option, designed to help the young people enter a more contemplative and reflective period, free of day-to-day distractions and busyness. The retreat focuses on the theme of mercy and allows the young people to explore their own stories of encounters of mercy in their lives—when they have experienced mercy and when they have not. The young people are led in a process of writing a story of desire for their own life, imagining how they desire to live a life rooted in, and giving witness to, mercy. As they consider how this might look for themselves, they are invited to reflect on the stories of Jesus, spiritual guides, and the saints, as well as the call of the Church.

## Preparation

### One Month Before

If the Confirmation community will be attending Mass as part of the retreat, set the Mass up for the final activity or before dinner (if you are extending the full-day option or doing the overnight option).

*Mercy moments* are staged stations for the young people to experience during the “Good Samaritan Stroll” in the closing prayer experience. Ideally, parishioners or parish or school staff who have not been involved in the retreat up to this point will serve as the actors, but retreat volunteers can step in if needed.

- **Station 1:** A person is unloading his or her car or moving items from one place to another. Essentially, the person may be taking five items inside and bringing the same five items back outside. The person must appear to be struggling with heavy items or too many items, perhaps even dropping some. The actor may not ask for help but may receive help graciously.
- **Station 2:** People (e.g., menu ministry team members) are setting up or cleaning and putting away tables and chairs in the dining area, rushing and maybe even a bit frantic, as though they are running behind, perhaps struggling with the heaviness of the chairs or tables.
- **Station 3:** An elderly parishioner is sitting on a bench outside of the building. The parishioner should wait until the young people initiate communication, and then he or she may respond.
- **Station 4:** An unrecognizable parishioner is bundled up or standing in the sun fanning herself or himself (depending on the weather outside of the building). The parishioner should wait until the young people initiate communication, and then he or she may respond.

Recruit adult volunteers to help throughout the day, including a volunteer to create the PowerPoint presentation during the retreat and chaperones if you are doing the overnight option.

Establish a menu ministry coordinator to prepare and serve food for the day. Provide a budget, guidelines, and a list of food allergies. The menu ministry coordinator will then organize a group of parents, the previous Confirmation group, or the leadership team to be on the menu ministry team. All of the food prepared for the day will be based on children’s books, to emphasize the theme of *story* that runs through the retreat. Examples are listed here, but feel free to brainstorm and create new options. Print color copies of the front covers of these books, or borrow the actual books (from parish families or your local library) and display them with their corresponding foods.

### Breakfast:

- *Green Eggs and Ham*: breakfast casserole
- *If You Give a Moose a Muffin*: muffins
- *If You Give a Dog a Donut*: donuts

### Lunch:

- *Dragons Love Tacos*: tacos
- *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*: spaghetti with meatballs or Swedish meatballs
- *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*: fruit kabobs
- *James and the Giant Peach*: peaches
- *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish*: Swedish fish or Goldfish crackers
- *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*: cookies
- *Goodnight Moon*: moon pies

Dinner is optional if you are doing the full-day retreat without the overnight option. Consider inviting parents, sponsors (if the young people have already identified them), members of the previous Confirmation group, and any other parishioners or staff members involved in the Confirmation process to a potluck dinner with the young people. Sharing a meal is a great way for the young people to feel that they are part of the faith community. Encourage them to take the opportunity to share moments of mercy they have experienced on the retreat, and ask the other guests to share their own stories of mercy.

### One Week Before

1. Assign the young people to groups of four or five. These will be their groups for the entire retreat.
2. Make copies of the handouts and gather other resources needed for the activities:
  - a large candle, altar, or statue to serve as the centerpiece for the retreat
  - pens or pencils and markers
  - an audio or video system
  - instrumental music (*optional*)
  - copies of *The Catholic Youth Bible: The Gospel of Luke*, one for each young person
  - pads of sticky notes in different colors, one color for each group
  - a puzzle with large pieces (at least two or three pieces for each young person)  
*Note:* Depending on the number of participants, the “Puzzle: We Are the Church” activity may work better as a small-group activity. In this case, provide one puzzle for each small group, preferably large enough that each participant can take five pieces for the second part of the activity.
  - a large mirror
  - sticky-back mirror sheets, trimmed to fit on the inside front cover of *The Catholic Youth Bible: The Gospel of Luke*, one for each young person
  - 11-x-17-inch sheets of art paper, one for each young person (*optional*)
  - the song “Amazing Grace,” sung by Sarah Kroger, on the *Scandal of Mercy* album
  - PowerPoint and projection equipment
  - small journals, one for each young person (*overnight option*)

- the song “Scandal of Mercy” (acoustic), by Thomas Muglia, on the *Scandal of Mercy* album (*overnight option*)
- people-shaped craft sticks, one for each young person (*overnight option*)
- flameless candles, one for each group (*overnight option*)

## Full-Day Retreat: Morning (4 hours)

### Suggested Structure

Time Frame	Activity
15 minutes	Breakfast
30 minutes	Icebreaker
15 minutes	Opening Prayer
45 minutes	“Letters Form Words” Activity
15 minutes	Break
30 minutes	“Puzzle: We Are the Church” Activity
30 minutes	“Reflecting Christ: Morning Wrap-Up” Activity
60 minutes	Lunch

### Breakfast (15 minutes)

Set the breakfast foods and books or book covers out ahead of time so that the young people can begin eating as they arrive. If they ask the reason for the books, encourage them to think about the connection between the stories and the food, and to keep thinking about the importance of stories in general as the retreat unfolds.

### Icebreaker (30 minutes)

Welcome the young people and explain that this icebreaker will serve as an introduction to the theme of the retreat. Offer the following directions:

- Letters are the building blocks of our language. Each has its own identity, but we need to know how to use and arrange them in order to communicate with one another. If a letter stands alone (with the exception of *A* and *I*), it lacks meaning.
- Individual letters suggest something different to each of us. For example, when one person sees an *S*, he or she might think of a favorite sport, soccer, while another person might think of his or her best friend, Sam.
- The goal of this alphabet icebreaker is to get through the whole alphabet with only one person speaking at a time.
- For example, one person says “*A*,” and another person follows with “*B*”; however, if two people jump in at the same time, the group must start over.

This prompts the young people to listen, wait, and try to establish a group rhythm. Encourage the young people to be spontaneous for the first few tries—just jump in and start. If they repeatedly struggle to complete the round, ask if they want to pause and problem-solve among themselves. After they make it through the entire alphabet, invite them to try it again, this time with their eyes closed.

Finish the icebreaker with a word round, similar to the first, but proceeding clockwise around the circle saying words in alphabetical order. Offer the following directions:

- Now we will go around the circle saying words in alphabetical order. You will say the first word that pops into your head that begins with your letter. If you hesitate, the group must start again, with the person who hesitated now starting with A.

## **Opening Prayer (15 minutes)**

The icebreaker serves as a good transition into a new way to pray.

Distribute a pen or pencil and a copy of the handout “ABC Prayer” (Document #: TX005826) to each young person. Offer the following directions:

- As you ask God to guide your pen, write an ABC prayer by writing down one intention for each letter (that starts with that letter), including things you are thankful for, things that you need guidance with, people in your life, issues that are important to you, people you want to pray for, whatever you feel called to write.

Consider playing soft, instrumental music to create a prayerful atmosphere.

When everyone is finished writing, invite the young people to go around the circle alphabetically again, saying the word, phrase, or name they wrote as their intention for that letter. If a young person's prayer is personal or confidential, she or he can pass, and there is no need to start over if someone hesitates.

Share the following reflection:

- There once was a little girl with terminal cancer. As her family gathered around her bedside in her last few hours, they were filling their time with words and realized that they had not asked the little girl what she would like to say. In her gentle, sweet voice she began to say her ABCs and her family wondered where this was going. When they asked her why she recited the ABCs, she replied, “I just didn't know what to say, so I figured I would say the letters and God would put together the words.”

Pose this question to the group:

- How often do we let God put together our words?

Allow quiet time before inviting the young people to share as they feel comfortable.

Close by saying the following prayer as a group, found on the handout:

- “Indeed, the word of God is living and active” (Hebrews 4:12). Let your words live in me, Lord, and let me act according to your word. Amen.

## Letters Form Words (45 minutes)

Arrange the young people into their assigned groups and let them know that these will be their groups for the rest of the retreat. Ask each group to choose a scribe for a brainstorming activity.

The groups will have 3 minutes to brainstorm words found in Scripture or heard during the Mass. Explain that this activity will serve as the introduction to the theme of the retreat, which they will find out after the first part of the activity. Encourage the young people to try to stick to words that are related to Scripture or Mass (for example, *praise* and *Lord* instead of *home* and *walk*). The scribes should write down as many words as they can. At the end of 3 minutes, gather a word count from each group.

Introduce *mercy* as the retreat theme in these or similar words:

- Two powerful ways God makes his mercy present to us are through Scripture and the Mass.
- Mercy, as you will explore and experience throughout this retreat, is God's compassion and forgiveness poured out on us. We see God's mercy in action in the way he protected and guided the Israelites in the Old Testament, and in the way Jesus forgave sinners, healed the sick, and taught the crowds in the Gospels.
- We see God's mercy in the Mass too. For example, right at the beginning of the Mass, we acknowledge our sins and ask Jesus to forgive us. In the Eucharistic Prayer and in receiving Jesus' Body and Blood, we enter into Jesus' ultimate act of mercy: his suffering and death on the cross to save us from sin and death and bring us to eternal life.
- When we receive God's mercy, we are filled with new life. The life we receive through God's mercy enables us to forgive others and to show them compassion. The Holy Spirit leads us to show mercy to our family, friends, classmates, neighbors, and everyone we meet. The Spirit also inspires us to share with others the message of God and his mercy—how we experienced God's mercy in the first place.

Now direct each group to narrow its list down to 10 words that would describe for people everything they need to know about mercy.

Give each group a pad of sticky notes (in their assigned color) and have them write each of their 10 words on a separate sticky note. As each group presents by sticking its notes on a bulletin board, blank wall, or other open space, invite all the young people to work together to sort the words to help identify any repeats, differing words, or other patterns that emerge once all the words are posted.

Ask for volunteers to explain why their group picked their words and why they didn't include others.

Direct the groups to gather together again and narrow down their lists to five of the most important words about what mercy is. They may use words that other groups presented after the first round. Have the groups present their new lists, and encourage them to share how they arrived at those five words (for example, why they chose to add a certain word from another group, or how they decided which words to eliminate).

Distribute a copy of *The Catholic Youth Bible: The Gospel of Luke* to each young person. Direct the young people to write their group's five words near Luke 6:35: "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked." As an alternative to writing directly in the Gospel, you

could suggest that the young people each write their group's words on a sticky note and then stick the note to the page near this verse.

## **Break (15 minutes)**

### **Puzzle: We Are the Church (30 minutes)**

Transition to this activity with these or similar words:

- In the last activity, we created lists of words to tell people about mercy.
- Mercy is both a gift we have received from God and a gift we are called to give away. It changes our lives and the lives of those we offer it to.
- In this activity, we will explore how that receiving and giving happens in community.

Spread out the puzzle pieces in a large, flat area where all the young people will be able to reach and rearrange them. If you are conducting this activity in small groups, ensure there is enough space between groups so that their puzzle pieces do not get mixed together. Guide the young people in assembling the puzzle three times, following these directions for each round:

- Round 1: Assemble the puzzle as a group.
- Round 2: Divide the pieces equally and touch only your pieces to assemble the puzzle.
- Round 3: Divide the pieces again and assemble the puzzle without talking.

Gather the larger group and discuss how this activity relates to faith. Have the young people share their ideas. Affirm their contributions and close the first part of this activity with these or similar words:

- Our receiving and giving mercy are best understood in the context of the Church community. We are connected to one another in the Church, and we receive strength and grace from the sacraments and people in the community who enable us to show mercy to one another and to people outside the Church.
- In the Church, we each bring different gifts to help one another follow God and show mercy, just as you helped one another assemble the puzzle in the different rounds.
- In the next part of this activity, we will learn that mercy must be concrete. Mercy is not just a nice feeling; it is love and forgiveness and compassion put into action with the people we encounter.

Now direct the young people to each choose a puzzle piece and then gather with their group members. Give each group some markers and instruct the young people to write the following on the back of their puzzle pieces. (If you are conducting this activity in small groups, have each young person choose five puzzle pieces from her or his group's puzzle and write one of the following on each piece.)

- their name
- the name of a person who has been important in their faith
- the name of a person in their parish, school, or family who is a good example of mercy
- one of the five words their group picked to describe mercy
- the name or description of someone who is in need of their mercy

Gather the larger group once more, and have the young people assemble the puzzle again, this time with the backs of the pieces faceup. (If you are conducting this activity in small groups, have the small groups stay together for this part.) Invite the young people to observe how all of these words together

make a big picture, a story of those gathered here. Transition to the next activity, the last of the morning, with these or similar words, addressed to the larger group:

- Picture your life as a continuation of Christ's story. What is this story about? In what ways are you helping to write it?
- Now picture your life as a story of its own. What is it about? Who decides what happens in it?

## **Reflecting Christ: Morning Wrap-Up (30 minutes)**

Often we must take a step back and look in the mirror to see if our lives are reflecting Christ.

Direct the young people to come up and get a copy of the handout "Mirror of Mercy" (Document #: TX005827). Before each young person sits back down, she or he should hold the handout up to the large mirror for a moment to see that it reads, "I reflect Christ's mercy." When everyone has done this, explain that they will now spend 15 to 20 minutes in silent reflection time as they answer the questions on the handout.

As the young people rejoin the larger group, distribute the sticky-back mirrors and direct them to stick the mirrors onto the inside front covers of their copy of *The Catholic Youth Bible: The Gospel of Luke*.

Conclude with this prayer as the young people gaze into their mirrors, literally seeing themselves on the pages of Scripture:

- May we always reflect God's mercy in our words.  
May we have the strength to reflect God's mercy in our actions.  
May our life be a reflection of God's story, rooted in mercy and love.  
We ask all of this, in the name of the true example of mercy, the Holy Trinity.  
Amen.

## **Lunch (60 minutes)**

Gather the young people in the dining space. Have a member of the menu ministry team or another adult volunteer offer a short blessing before lunch.

Stories feed our souls and leave us hungering for a lead role.

Encourage the young people to eat their lunch with people they haven't talked to yet today. Ask each table to discuss this question as they eat:

- What book would you want a part in?

Distribute sticky notes or small pads of paper and a few pens to each table. During the meal, hold three 1-minute speed rounds every 15 minutes:

- Round 1: Name as many books as you can.
- Round 2: Name as many TV shows as you can.
- Round 3: Name as many movies as you can.

The tables will compete as groups, and their answers must be written down to count. Consider offering a reward for each round, such as allowing the winning table of the first round to be first in line for food.

These games will tie into the idea that books, TV shows, and movies tell a story, and so should our lives. After lunch, the young people will begin a session on Scripture stories.

## Full-Day Retreat: Afternoon (5 or 6 hours)

### Suggested Structure

Time Frame	Activity
30 minutes	Free Time
30 minutes	"Scripture Stories about Mercy" Activity
20 minutes	"Images of Mercy" Activity
100 minutes	"Exploring Mission Statements" Activity
15 minutes	Break/Snack
45 minutes	"What Is Our Motto of Mercy?" Activity
60 minutes	Closing Prayer Experience
60 minutes	Celebration of the Mass ( <i>optional</i> )

### Free Time (30 minutes)

Guide the young people in using this free time to mingle with one another, play games, call their parents, or simply rest and relax.

### Scripture Stories about Mercy (30 minutes)

Introduce guidance and encouragement to live lives of mercy as the topic of the afternoon.

Direct the young people to gather in their groups. Assign one or two passages from the Reading Guide in *The Catholic Youth Bible: The Gospel of Luke* to each group. As an alternative, use the following Scripture passages (which appear in the *Called to Mercy* modules).

- Matthew 5:14–16
- Luke 3:10–11
- James 2:14–17
- Matthew 5:43–48
- Matthew 25:35–40
- 1 John 3:17–18
- John 15:11–14, 16–17
- Matthew 6:9–15
- Luke 10:25–37

Ask the young people to consider the following questions as they read and then to discuss the questions in their groups:

- What do these stories tell us about mercy?
- What do these stories call us to do or be?



Explain to the young people that Pope Francis calls us to be missionaries of mercy. In his document *The Face of Mercy (Misericordiae Vultus)*, he uses many images to help us better understand the “face of mercy.” Let’s explore these images to find out what mercy looks like!

### **Images of Mercy (20 minutes)**

Divide the “Images of Mercy” handout (Document #: TX005828) so that each group gets three images used by Pope Francis. Have the groups discuss what each image says about mercy.

The following images are listed on the handout:

- medicine of mercy
- balm of mercy
- the path of merciful love
- a force that reawakens us to new life
- an oasis of mercy
- instruments of mercy
- the oil of consolation
- fruits of divine mercy
- sanctuary of divine mercy

Other images from *The Face of Mercy* that might help the young people contemplate mercy include the following:

- God’s justice
- Jesus as the face of the Father’s mercy
- the beating heart of the Gospel
- the great river of mercy

### **Exploring Mission Statements (100 minutes)**

Remind the young people that a mission statement is a summary of the goals, purpose, and values of a person, institution, or business. Explain that the next two activities introduce the young people to the process of creating a mission statement to guide their lives, based on the goals, purpose, and values that are important to them.

Have each group look up the mission statements for three popular businesses or brands and write these on a sheet of paper. Then direct the groups to trade papers and try to guess the businesses or brands based on the mission statements.

### **Mission Statements in Scripture (30 minutes of the total)**

For this part of the “Exploring Mission Statements” activity, direct the young people to open their Bibles or *The Catholic Youth Bible: The Gospel of Luke* to the Scripture passage their group read in the “Scripture Stories about Mercy” activity. If they were assigned more than one passage, have the groups choose one passage to study for this activity.

Invite the groups to do the following:

- Write a mission statement based on your group’s Scripture passage.

Give the groups some time to write their missions statements and then invite them to share these statements with the larger group. They should read the Scripture passage their statement is based on as part of their presentation.

### **Our Stories (35 minutes of the total)**

Introduce this part of the “Exploring Mission Statements” activity, in which the young people will craft their own mission statements for a life of mercy, with these or similar words:

- We have gone from letters, to words, to stories.
- Look at your group’s five words to describe mercy and at the Scripture passage you read, along with the mission statement your group crafted. If you were to craft a *personal* mission statement, one to guide your life personally, what would it be?

Invite the young people to take the next 20 to 30 minutes for quiet reflection to formulate their personal mission statements. Encourage them to incorporate ideas from the rest of the retreat.

### **Create Stories (35 minutes of the total)**

For this part of the “Exploring Mission Statements” activity, explain to the young people that they will create a photo story or video that reflects their personal mission statement. They will record the photos or video with their phones and e-mail them to the volunteer who is putting together the PowerPoint presentation. (You might consider setting up a gmail account specifically for this purpose, such as *ConfirmationYourParishName@gmail.com*). Alternatively, the young people could use an app like Snapchat to record and share their mission statements.

***If you have fewer than 20 young people, have them choose one of the following options:***

**Option 1:** Act out the words of your personal mission statement in three to five photos.

For example, with the mission statement “To love and serve God,” a young person might take these photos:

- a heart made with their hands
- hands outstretched in service
- a hand pointing up or hands praying
- a sheet of paper that says “To Love and Serve God”

**Option 2:** Take multiple photos of the words of your personal mission statement.

***If you have more than 20 young people, have them choose one of the following options:***

**Option 1:** On an 11-x-17-inch sheet of paper, write your personal mission statement. Decorate your mission statement and take a photo with it.

**Option 2:** Take a video of yourself proudly stating your personal mission statement.

Direct the young people to gather with their group members while they work on their mission statement stories, as they may need help taking photos or shooting videos.

Gather all of the stories into one e-mail account and download them to use during the closing prayer. Have one of the volunteers put the personal mission statement stories together in a PowerPoint presentation with the song “Amazing Grace,” sung by Sarah Kroger on the *Scandal of Mercy* album, as the background music. Save the PowerPoint presentation to be played during the closing prayer of the retreat or after the Confirmation Mass as part of a montage of the young people’s mission of mercy.

## **Break/Snack (15 minutes)**

### **What Is Our Motto of Mercy? (45 minutes)**

In this activity, the groups will brainstorm a motto of mercy for their whole Confirmation class. Once each group has come up with two or three ideas, they will present and “sell” their mottoes to the larger group. After all the groups have presented, lead the larger group in voting to choose one motto for the whole Confirmation class.

Invite the young people to record the class motto, along with their personal mission statements, on the back of their puzzle pieces from the morning activity, if they so choose.

*Note:* Consider incorporating this class motto into the PowerPoint presentation for the closing prayer. You might also have it printed on bookmarks, candles, or T-shirts for a wonderful Confirmation gift. Personalize the Confirmation gifts by adding each young person’s personal mission statement to his or her gift.

*If you are using the overnight retreat option, skip to the Mass or dinner following this activity. If you are not using the overnight option, transition to the “Closing Prayer Experience” at this time.*

### **Closing Prayer Experience (60 minutes)**

Distribute a copy of the handout “Good Samaritan Stroll” (Document #: TX005829) to each young person. Begin the experience by asking one of the young people to summarize the Parable of the Good Samaritan from the Gospel of Luke. If no one is familiar with it, ask for two or three volunteers to read it aloud from *The Catholic Youth Bible: The Gospel of Luke* (10:25–37). Describe the concept of mercy as presented in the parable in these or similar words:

- We often think of a “Good Samaritan” as someone who does something nice for another person. But the Samaritan in Jesus’ parable did so much more than a random act of kindness.

First, he went out of his way to show mercy to the man who had been attacked. His act of mercy set back his own travel time, in addition to his money, significantly. And he didn’t expect anything in return; he actually offered to give even *more* if it was required!

Second, the Samaritan typically would have considered the victim, a Jewish man, to be an enemy. And vice versa—maybe the Jewish man would have refused the Samaritan’s help, if he were able! But the Samaritan recognized that the Jewish man was in need and decided to show him compassion, regardless of who he was.

- In the next part of this prayer experience, you will have opportunities to show mercy to others and to reflect on other times when you have shown mercy to another person or when mercy has been shown to you.

Explain to the young people that they will now experience a “Good Samaritan Stroll,” consisting of four *mercy moments* (stations described in the Preparation section at the beginning of the retreat plan) that they will rotate through in their groups. For each mercy moment, the groups should observe what is happening, briefly discuss what the merciful course of action would be, and then put it into action.

Each group must go to each mercy moment together but not at the same time as another group. Be sure that each group begins at a different mercy moment, discusses the applicable questions on the handout after experiencing a mercy moment, and waits patiently before moving to the next one if another group is still there. It is best to have adults at each mercy moment to facilitate and help with the flow of the groups.

If you have more than four groups, a feasible option is to divide the class in half. Half of the young people can participate in the “Good Samaritan Stroll” while the other half has time for quiet personal reflection, and then the groups can switch.

When all groups have completed the four mercy moments, gather the larger group in a circle around a large candle, an altar, statue, or whatever has served as the centerpiece of the environment throughout the retreat.

Share these or similar words:

- Today we have gathered to see how letters become words, words become sentences, and sentences become stories. These stories shape our lives and tell us more of who God is, and who God calls us to be.
- Bishop Frank tells us, “Love helps the person realize the dignity that they already have.” Mercy is offering the love of Christ, which we first received and then are called to give to others just as freely as it was given to us.
- In the journey of faith, there are those who have shown us mercy. We now take a moment to think of those people.

Allow the young people some quiet reflection time and then invite them to identify these people by name.

- These people have been a model of mercy to us. They are a part of our story and an inspiration as we look forward to the mission God has planned for each of us.

Share the PowerPoint presentation of the young people’s personal mission statements and stories.

- As we conclude our time here today, let us ask for the courage to start a revolution of mercy. Let our mission become our vision of how we will show God’s mercy to others. Just as you “put on” Christ in your Baptism, we now ask God to ignite the Gifts of the Holy Spirit within each of you as you “put on” mercy.

Close with the prayer “Circle of Mercy,” by Jeannette Goglia, RSM, following the directions on the handout to pray it as a group.

## **Celebration of the Mass (60 minutes, *optional*)**

Transition to the Mass with these or similar words:

- The Mass tells us a story, a story we are a part of. As we have learned today, it is a story of mercy. How does the Mass tell the story of mercy? How does the Mass tell our story?

Talk beforehand to the priest who will be celebrating the Mass to see if he is comfortable with brief interruptions (similar to a teaching Mass). The young people will benefit from hearing explanations of some of the many moments of mercy throughout the Mass, such as the Penitential Rite, the Gloria, any mercy references in the day's readings, and the Eucharistic Prayer and Communion Rite.

Distribute a copy of the handout "Celebration of the Mass" (Document #: TX005830) to each young person. Direct the young people to cut out the heart on the handout and bring it with them to the Mass. Give each young person a pen before the Mass so they can note moments of mercy during the Mass (either a moment they experience mercy personally, or a moment they recognize that mercy has been offered) on their paper hearts.

## Overnight Option: Evening (4 hours)

### Suggested Structure

Time Frame	Activity
60 minutes	Dinner
20 minutes	"Mercy and the Mass" Activity
70 minutes	"Works of Mercy" Activity
70 minutes	"Write My Story" Activity
20 minutes	Evening Prayer

### Dinner (60 minutes)

The dinner hour can also be a good time to have the young people take their belongings to their rooms for the night, play a game outside, etc.

If you are having a potluck dinner, encourage the young people to sit with their families, previous Confirmation class members, or other parishioners, and to share what they have experienced throughout the day. Ask the priest or another parishioner ahead of time to say grace before the meal.

### Mercy and the Mass (20 minutes)

Begin the evening with a brief discussion of the young people's experience at the Mass, using the following questions to get the discussion going:

- How does the Mass tell the story of mercy?
- How does the Mass tell our story?

Discussion can begin in the larger group and then break into smaller discussion groups or vice versa.

After they have had time to process the first set of questions, direct the young people to gather in their groups and to individually consider the following questions, which are also listed on the "Celebration of the Mass" handout (Document #: TX005830). Give the young people time to reflect on the questions and record their answers (or just write notes so they remember), and then invite them to share their answers, as much as they feel comfortable doing so, with their group members.

- What did God want you to hear today?
- How does the Eucharist provide mercy in a way that nothing else can?
- How can you start a revolution of mercy?
- Who is in need of mercy in your community?
- How do you define *mercy*?

## Works of Mercy (70 minutes)

Briefly introduce and define the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy.

### Spiritual Works of Mercy

**Counsel the doubtful.** To encourage someone who is struggling with doubts about faith or God, to keep him or her company on the journey. To live your own life so that others can see your faith in action.

**Instruct the ignorant.** To share your faith with others through religious education, the Bible, or by inviting them to Mass.

**Admonish the sinner.** To gently correct someone who is hurting themselves or others by his or her actions.

**Comfort the sorrowful.** To listen and be present with someone who is mourning the death of a loved one, the loss of a friendship, and so on.

**Forgive injuries.** To forgive without holding a grudge when someone hurts you.

**Bear wrongs patiently.** To react calmly and kindly when someone treats you unfairly.

**Pray for the living and the dead.** To bring the worries and struggles of family, friends, and classmates to God, as well as your own worries and struggles.

### Corporal Works of Mercy

**Feed the hungry.** To donate food or share extra servings with someone who needs it.

**Give drink to the thirsty.** To conserve water and support efforts to provide clean water around the world.

**Clothe the naked.** To donate clothing or money to organizations dedicated to helping people in need.

**Shelter the homeless.** To volunteer at, or donate items to, a homeless shelter. To respond with compassion when you encounter a homeless person.

**Visit the sick.** To volunteer at a nursing home and support those who take care of the elderly and ill.

**Visit the imprisoned.** To donate items to a prison ministry or organization that ministers to the families of those in prison.

**Bury the dead.** To send a card to someone whose loved one has died or to respectfully visit a cemetery.

Distribute the handout “Works of Mercy” (Document #: TX005831). Divide the list among the groups so that each group will be working on at least two Spiritual and two Corporal Works of Mercy. Overlap is acceptable if you have three or more groups.

Invite the groups to write a realistic scenario for each of the Works of Mercy they have been assigned. Each scenario should include an encounter with someone in need of this work of mercy and a merciful response to their need. Encourage the young people to base their scenarios on real events they have experienced, if possible. Note that more than one person can be involved in a given scenario; we are called to show mercy together, as a community of faith.

Give the groups plenty of time to work on their own, and then gather the larger group again. Ask for volunteers from each group to share one or two of the group’s scenarios until all of the Works of Mercy have been presented. The volunteers can either simply read the scenario or the group members can act it out.

## Write My Story (70 minutes)

Distribute the small journals and explain this activity in these or similar words:

- Our lives are the continuation of the stories in Scripture, the continuation of the story of Christ, who is present today through us. Our lives are a reflection of Christ's love and mercy. When we receive love and mercy, we are then able to give love and mercy. God tells a story of faith through each of our lives. You are the main character in *his* story.
- Each of us has different gifts and talents. Some of us draw, some of us write poetry, some of us journal, but we are all storytellers.
- Using your ABC prayer, the words your group used to describe mercy, and your personal mission statement, you are going to write the story of your life.

Share the following "story" options with the young people:

- a picture book
- a children's book with one or two sentences on each page
- a five-page reflection
- a poem, placing one to two stanzas on each page
- a song
- a play with two to four scenes

Let the young people know they will have a little over an hour to work on their story of faith now, as well as time to finish it in the morning. Share the following prompts if anyone is having trouble getting started:

- Be sure the focus is on faith and mercy intermingled with life events. I invite you to go beyond, "I was born, I moved here, I went to school here." This is the story of your faith life.
- Who are you? Whom has God created you to be? How did you get here—whom or what has God put in your life to help you reach this point? Where are you going? Where is God leading you? How will you live out your mission of mercy?
- If you are feeling overwhelmed, focus on a few key points in your story instead of trying to describe everything you've ever experienced. For example, how did God reach out to you at a specific good or bad time in your life? What were the concrete changes you noticed—or decided to make—after this encounter?

## Evening Prayer (20 minutes)

Share with the young people that music tells us a story, sometimes with no words.

Distribute the handout "Music Journaling" (Document #: TX005832). Play some instrumental music and have the young people journal the story they hear. Give them a couple minutes to finish writing after the music ends, and then have them gather and share in their groups.

Together say the following, which is included on handout:

- Mercy is God's powerful Word spoken in Jesus—  
His life, passion and resurrection.  
It bends and changes, forms and re-forms our lives,  
so that we may receive Mercy  
and, in turn, be merciful.



## Retreat

Close by listening to “Scandal of Mercy” (acoustic), by Thomas Muglia, on the *Scandal of Mercy* album.

Dismiss the young people for the night in silence, as a time of reflection, prayer, and Scripture reading. This allows the young people to push themselves beyond their comfort zone and enter a time of extended silence, keeping them calm and prayerful as they go to bed.

Announce that lights-out will be in 30 minutes. Direct the chaperones to prayerfully sit vigil in the hallways with the lights low to maintain the atmosphere of prayer as the night ends.

## Overnight Option: Morning (4 hours)

### Suggested Structure

Time Frame	Activity
60 minutes	Breakfast and Cleanup
30 minutes	Opening Prayer
45 minutes	Reflection Time
45 minutes	"Sharing Our Stories" Activity
60 minutes	Closing Prayer Experience

### Breakfast and Cleanup (60 minutes)

### Opening Prayer (30 minutes)

#### **"God: Delights in Who I Am"**

by Annette Embrich, ASC

No matter where I may find myself—  
Among the thickest of thistles and thorns in the desert  
Or, in the midst of heat or in darkness,  
I can only open myself to be  
Who I am called to be.

What difference is there if I sparkle in the light  
Or lay silent in the silence of the night?  
Whether I'm perfectly formed or stained lightly,  
I am created very beautifully  
And becoming who I'm meant to be.

No shadow can ever cloud my goodness.  
No one's light can dispel my spark.  
I am beauty, I am hope, I am light  
And that's who I'm called to be.

As I unfold with grace and integrity to the light  
Of the full moon reflecting upon me,  
I discover there's a piece of light in all of us.  
It may be hidden or sheltered for a short while,  
But I have with me the power to illumine the dark.  
That's when I know I am who I'm called to be.

Whom has God created you to be? Distribute the people-shaped wooden craft sticks and markers and invite the young people to decorate their sticks with images and words that describe themselves. They can include gifts, talents, characteristics, quirks, likes, dislikes, and more.

When the young people are finished, they will share their people sticks in their groups.

### **Reflection Time (45 minutes)**

The young people may take this time to finish or refine their story of faith they began the night before. Consider having a quiet activity available, such as a reflection walk the young people can take individually or in pairs, for anyone who finishes early.

### **Sharing Our Stories (45 minutes)**

Call the young people back to the prayer space and ask them to sit in small circles with their group members. Give each group a flameless candle to place in the middle of their circle while they share their stories with one another. (If you have a group of 20 or fewer, feel free to invite each young person to share her or his story with the larger group.)

Encourage the young people to share as much of their stories as they feel comfortable doing. Remind them that sharing our stories, especially stories of faith, can bring us closer together as a community and can help encourage others on their journeys.

### **Closing Prayer Experience (60 minutes)**

See “Full-Day Retreat: Afternoon” section for details.

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