



Gathered Session 2: Called to Serve (90 minutes)

Overview

This session focuses on our call to mercy, inviting the young people to dream big in planning (or choosing) their service project. The young people will review some of the themes from the program that connect with our call to mercy; identify the “people in the shadows,” both those in need globally and in their own community; and imagine a service project that addresses the needs of those people. A scavenger hunt activity will help the young people consider some of the facts of poverty and hunger both around the globe and close to home. A brainstorming activity will help them imagine service possibilities. Before the closing prayer, the young people will vote on the service project or projects the group will carry out.

Two options are offered for choosing the service project or projects. Option 1 requires that the young people brainstorm, select, and plan original service opportunities. Option 2 includes brainstorming but then moves the young people into a choice of predetermined options for service.

Option 1 can be exciting and engaging as the young people dream big—even in revolutionary ways! Try not to be afraid of the challenges their ideas may seem to present. Young people will often imagine big, bold efforts, and their project plans may stretch the resources available. If you use this option, begin this session early in the Confirmation process to ensure you have time to plan and execute the idea—ideally after the young people have completed module 3. Giving them the opportunity to make a real difference on something they care about can be transformative!

Option 2 will give you a chance to contact, ahead of time, the agencies you might be working with for the service day. This option should still include consultation with the young people. Consider having a few young people get together to help with planning, and check their interest level on different projects. Preselect a few service opportunities the young people can choose from for the service day.

Principles for planning service (no matter what option you choose):

- Take time to dispel myths about why people are in need. Avoid stereotypes that blame or judge people for their challenges.
- Connect with services that are already in place. Educate yourself about local issues and agencies. Look around at what is already happening in your community. Don't compete with or duplicate current efforts. Collaborate, cooperate, or meet a need that is going unmet.
- Be in relationship—with people in need, with your parish social ministry committee, with area agencies and services. You will have a better sense of what the needs really are and how the young people might best serve.

Planning meaningful service opportunities will take time, but keep in mind that serving others is often the most memorable experience of Confirmation preparation for young people.

Suggested Structure

| Time Frame | Activity |
|------------|---|
| 5 minutes | Gathering |
| 10 minutes | Welcome and Opening Prayer |
| 15 minutes | Icebreaker Game |
| 25 minutes | "People in the Shadows" Scavenger Hunt |
| 15 minutes | "What If We . . . ?" Brainstorming Activity |
| 10 minutes | Sticky-Note Survey |
| 10 minutes | Closing Prayer |

Practical Considerations

Choose Your Option

There are two options for planning and choosing a service day in this session (see "What If We . . . ?" activity). If you, as the coordinator, are planning the service project(s) yourself (option 2), this session is best held after the young people complete module 7 but before the service day. If you would like to have the young people plan the projects (option 1), it is best to hold this session earlier in the process but after module 4, to allow sufficient time for planning and scheduling with any agencies you might be working with.

Preparation

- **Space:** This gathering requires space for the group to meet together as a whole, a large open space for the icebreaker game, and a space for the small groups to meet.
- **"People in the Shadows" Scavenger Hunt:** Gather local statistics on poverty and related issues of hunger, homelessness, health care, educational opportunity, and any other issues you would like to point your young people toward for their service projects. Your local Catholic Charities office may have these statistics or should be able to point you toward them. Record the facts on the "Local Poverty Facts" template on the handout "People in the Shadows: Local, National, and Global Poverty Facts" (Document #: TX005804). Then print the handout and follow the directions for cutting the boxes apart, color-coding them, and hiding them around the room. The young people will find the facts during the activity and post them on corresponding sheets of newsprint titled "Global," "National," and "Local."
- **Prayer:** For the opening and closing prayers, set up a prayer table with a tablecloth; two Bibles, one bookmarked at Luke 10:25–28 and the other at Luke 10:29–37; a candle; and matches.

Materials Needed

- **Gathering and Opening Prayer**
 - the song or music video “Start a Fire,” by Ike Ndolo, from the *Scandal of Mercy* album, and an audio or video system
 - a sheet of newsprint taped to the wall
 - several markers
 - the Bishop Frank Caggiano video “It’s a Beautiful Thing” (from module 2) and a video system
- **Icebreaker Game**
 - Internet access and a video system (*optional*)
- **“People in the Shadows” Scavenger Hunt**
 - three sheets of newsprint taped to the wall, one labeled “Local,” one “National,” and one “Global”
 - three rolls of tape
 - prepared fact slips from the handout “People in the Shadows: Local, National, and Global Poverty Facts” (Document #: TX005804), hidden around the room
 - small prizes for the members of the winning team
 - three copies of the handout “Fact Finding: Small-Group Leader Directions” (Document #: TX005805)
 - three sheets of newsprint and three different colored markers
- **“What If We . . . ?” Brainstorming Activity**
 - three sheets of newsprint and three markers
- **Sticky-Note Survey**
 - sheets of newsprint, one for each service project idea the young people will be choosing from
 - a roll of tape
 - three different colored sticky notes for each young person
 - pens, one for each young person
- **Closing Prayer**
 - slips of paper, one for each young person
 - pens or pencils, one for each young person
 - a small basket
 - the song or music video “Scandal of Mercy,” by Thomas Muglia, from the *Scandal of Mercy* album, and an audio or video system

The Session

Gathering (5 minutes)

As the young people begin to arrive, play Ike Ndolo's song or music video "Start a Fire" in the background.

When greeting the young people, recruit a reader for the opening prayer (Luke 10:25–28) and a reader for the closing prayer (Luke 10:29–37). Hand them each a Bible with the passages bookmarked.

Invite the young people to write on the newsprint at least one way they have already been involved in serving people in need. This can be service they have done through the Church, through another organization, or on their own.

Welcome and Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

Welcome the young people and introduce the session with these or similar words:

- Welcome, everyone. The team is excited to be gathered with you. Today (*tonight*) we'll make a plan for our service project. We'll consider some of the needs in our community and around the world. We'll look at what our Catholic faith asks of us. And then we'll make a plan for action. Let's begin our time together with prayer.

Light the candle and invite the first reader forward.

Gospel Reading: Luke 10:25–28, the Greatest Commandment

Play the Bishop Frank Caggiano video "It's a Beautiful Thing" from module 2.

Using these or similar words, ask:

- I have two questions to ask that you don't need to answer out loud. I just want you to think about them in silence for a few moments.
 - If I say I love God, that I am a follower of Jesus, but then do nothing to help people in need, what message might that send others about my belief?
 - If I say I follow Jesus and then lift up the lowliest of people and put them at the center of my concern, what does that teach the world about who Jesus is?

Allow 15–30 seconds of silence before continuing:

- God calls us to love. We show our love by loving one another, by loving our neighbor. As we take time today to look at our hurting world and the suffering in our own community, let's seek the courage to take action. Let's accept the call to light a fire in our hearts that burns with love for people living in the shadows so that our belief is witnessed. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Icebreaker Game (15 minutes)

If time allows, feel free to set the tone for this game by playing one of the many ridiculous "goats yelling like humans" videos available on YouTube. To begin, summarize the Gospel story Matthew 25:31–46 in these or similar words:

- Toward the end of Matthew's Gospel, in chapter 25, Jesus describes what things will be like at the end of the world. He explains how the Son of Man will sort the good people from the bad people the way a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The sheep are the ones who

have taken care of those in need—feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting those who are sick or in prison. The goats are those who have not done these things. It's a pretty serious story that talks about heaven and hell and who is going where. We're going to play a game now that is the opposite of serious, and really, the only similarity to the story is that it has sheep, goats, and shepherds in it.

The game is played by arranging the young people into two equal teams. There is a "field" (or a room or gym) divided by a center line, and each team has a home-base line at the opposite end. The teams will huddle, each on their own side. As quietly as possible, the team members will decide whether they will all be shepherds, sheep, or goats for this round. Everyone on the team will be the same character, and each character requires a different pose: Shepherds stand up and hold one arm straight out in front as if they are holding a staff, goats bend at the waist and hold their fingers up by their ears like horns, and sheep squat and mimic being on all fours.

Once the teams have decided on their character (remind them it's a secret), the two teams will face off by standing at the center line facing the players on the opposite team. Everyone should have a foot on the center line. At your command, the two teams shout "Shepherds! Sheep! Goats!" assuming each pose as they do. Then each team immediately shouts its chosen character and assumes that pose.

At this point, the real fun begins. Each of the characters figuratively "beats" one of the others (as in the game "Rock, Paper, Scissors"). The shepherds beat the goats, the goats beat the sheep, and the sheep beat the shepherds. After a moment of confusion, as the young people try to remember which character beats the other, the team with the dominant character will chase the members of the other team back to their home-base line. Anyone who is tagged before reaching the home base must join the other team. For example, if one team chooses goats and the other team chooses sheep, the goats try to tag the sheep. If a sheep gets tagged, she or he joins the goat team. This process repeats until there is only one person left on one side or until you run out of time, in which case the larger of the two teams wins.

It can save time if each team chooses a back-up character during the huddle. Then if both teams happen to choose the same character, one or both can quickly switch to their back-up character.

Tip: This game often takes longer to explain than it does to play, so consider taking a minute to demonstrate with just a few volunteers who are prepared ahead of time. It will move things along!

"People in the Shadows" Scavenger Hunt (25 minutes)

Hang the three sheets of newsprint labeled "Global," "National," and "Local" at the front of the room with a roll of tape by each one. Arrange the young people into three small groups, and assign each group a color. Explain that there are color-coded facts specific for each group hidden around the building (or room) that fall into the three categories on the sheets of newsprint. Each small group is racing against the others to find all of its facts and post them on the correct sheets. If any young people find another group's facts, they should leave them where they found them.

After about 10 minutes, or once all the facts have been found and posted (whichever comes first), find and post any facts that were not discovered, and invite the groups to read through them.

Award the prizes to the first group that finds and posts all of its facts, and then transition into the next part of the activity using these or similar words:

- In the video we watched during opening prayer, Bishop Frank Caggiano talked about the “people in the shadows.” Similarly, Pope Francis says, “The way of the Church is precisely to leave her four walls behind and to go out in search of those who are distant, those on the ‘outskirts’ of life” (homily, February 15, 2015).
- As we prepare to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, we are invited more deeply into the service of others. Jesus is the one we follow, and we seek to love others the way he did. Our conversation today (*tonight*) will lead us to a decision about how we can serve people in the ways that our faith calls us to.

Distribute a copy of the handout “Fact Finding: Small-Group Leader Directions” (Document #: TX005805) to each group. Each group should appoint a small-group leader to help with this part of the activity. Then take a few minutes to discuss the questions on the handout:

1. Which of the facts do you find most surprising or upsetting?
2. Are there any issues (the ones that we’ve named or others) that you are motivated to act on now or that you have been involved with already?
3. What questions do you have about these issues?
4. What other issues or problems do you wonder about? Is there something you care about that hasn’t come up yet?

When the groups are done discussing, each small-group leader should read the following passage to his or her group:

- Showing love and care for those whom the world has rejected sometimes startles or “scandalizes” others. People can be surprised, and even upset, when we show mercy to those who are considered outsiders. When Jesus healed lepers or spent time with people who were seen as sinners, people were shocked. They were scandalized. The Parable of the Good Samaritan was scandalous, because it points out that even the person seen as an enemy can be the neighbor you are called to love. Jesus crossed social boundaries to get to the people on the outskirts, the “people in the shadows.” Our willingness to help people who have been rejected by others is what Pope Francis calls the “scandal of mercy.” Pope Francis is following Jesus’ example. Even before he was the Pope, Francis surprised people by riding the public bus with poor people instead of being driven in a private car like most bishops. As Pope he has upset and even scandalized people by handing out sleeping bags to the homeless, having showers installed for them at the Vatican, and welcoming them to sleep in Saint Peter’s Square. He keeps reminding us that we must care for those who are poor.

Now the small-group leaders will lead their group in a brainstorming discussion using the following questions. Give each group a sheet of newsprint and a marker to record their answers.

1. Who are the people in our community who are “living in the shadows,” and what would it look like to show them scandalous mercy? As a group, make a list of the people in need in your community. (*Hint:* Think about the statistics from your fact-finding mission, and consider the following groups: immigrants, refugees, the elderly, people in hospitals, people in nursing homes, those who are poor, the unemployed, those who are homeless, and the people “that society would prefer would just go away,” as Bishop Frank said.)

2. If you were to take action and help one or two of these groups through service, who would you want to help? In what way would you like to serve?
3. Do you know what is already being done to help these groups and who (what groups or agencies) is doing it? In what ways could you participate in these efforts, or how might you help in ways that the groups or agencies don't have the time or people power to do themselves?

“What If We . . . ?” Brainstorming Activity (15 minutes)

Now it's time to take brainstorming to the next level. Direct the young people to remain in their small groups. Ask each group to look over its brainstorming sheets so far. Give each group a new sheet of newsprint, and ask them to title it “What if we . . . ?” Explain that you want them to finish this sentence in a way that addresses one of the problems we've been discussing but as if there were no limits on time, money, or space. For example, “What if we . . . turned the church building into a homeless shelter?” (There actually is a church in San Francisco, St. Boniface, that invites homeless people to sleep in the pews at night.) Or “What if we . . . opened a restaurant to feed hungry people?”

As the young people think of each issue or group of people in need, encourage them to consider one of the questions from the previous activity: What would scandalous mercy toward that group of people look like?

Give the groups 10 minutes to come up with as many possibilities as they can. Make a show of timing them, and call “Go!” After 10 minutes, call “Time!” and ask the small groups to choose two of their ideas to share with the large group and to circle those ideas on their newsprint.

Sticky-Note Survey (10 minutes)

Option 1: Project Ideas Generated in This Session

Write the project ideas the small groups generated on separate sheets of newsprint and post them on a wall. You will need space around each project name for the young people to post their sticky notes.

Option 2: Project Ideas Organized by Parish Leader

Write your preselected project options on separate sheets of newsprint and post them on a wall. You will need space around each project name for the young people to post their sticky notes. Explain to the young people that although there is a predetermined set of service-day opportunities for them to choose from, the ideas they have generated are inspiring and beautiful. Ask if anyone would want to pursue any of the ideas above and beyond the service-day opportunities they will be choosing from. If anyone would like to pursue any of the ideas, arrange a time to meet with them outside of this session to develop a plan and to help them find the support they will need to carry it out.

For Both Options

Distribute three sticky notes in three different colors to each young person. Direct the young people to print their first and last name on each note. Designate a color for choice 1, a color for choice 2, and a color for choice 3, and direct the young people to write “1,” “2,” and “3” on those colored notes.

Give the young people 5 minutes to look over the project options. Then invite them to post sticky note 1 next to the option that would be their first choice, sticky note 2 next to the project that would be their second choice, and sticky note 3 next to the project that would be their last choice.

Let the young people know that projects will be chosen and groups formed taking these preferences into account, and announce when you will be informing the young people of their assignments. You might also ask for volunteers who would be willing to meet again to start planning and organizing each project.

Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

Introduce the closing prayer in these or similar words:

- We will close today (*tonight*) with the story Jesus told when someone asked him, "Who is my neighbor?" The answer Jesus gave surprised everyone.

Light the candle and invite the second reader forward.

Gospel Reading: Luke 10:29–37

Distribute the slips of paper and pens or pencils, and then share the following:

- By naming the Samaritan as neighbor, Jesus lets us know that if we want to follow him, even those we might have considered enemies are people we are called to love. There is no one who is outside the duty of our call to love. I'd like you take a moment now and think about a group of people or just one person in need of love this day. You might be thinking about one of the groups you talked about with your small group, or maybe you are thinking about someone you know personally who is in need. Call to mind this group of people or this particular person and write the name of that group or person on your slip of paper, followed by a prayer intention. When you are finished, fold the paper and bring it forward to place in the basket. Return to your seat and pray for your intention as we listen to the words of the song "Scandal of Mercy," by Thomas Muglia, who wrote this song at the age of 17.

Play the song or music video "Scandal of Mercy."

Conclude with these or similar words:

- God, we ask your blessing on all these intentions, for the people we know personally and those in our community, nation, and around the world who are in need. Help us to live out the call to mercy, to be neighbor as the Good Samaritan was neighbor. Help us to remember always, each day, with each person we encounter, our call to mercy and to give witness to God's loving mercy to all we meet. Especially give us the courage to go to the outskirts of society, to bring mercy to those living in the shadows, those whose hearts or lives are deeply broken. For this we pray. Amen.

(The quotation by Pope Francis in this session is from his homily at Mass with new cardinals, February 15, 2015, at https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150215_omelia-nuovi-cardinali.html. Copyright [LEV].)