



CATHOLIC MOBILIZING NETWORK
TO END THE USE OF THE DEATH PENALTY
PROMOTE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE



*Where Justice
&
Mercy Meet*

*A Retreat Experience
for Teens*



PROMOTE
RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Catholic Mobilizing Network ~ High School Retreat

“Where Justice and Mercy Meet”

RETREAT OVERVIEW

This retreat has been produced to introduce high school-age youth to basic concepts and ideas of Catholic Church teaching as it relates to the death penalty, restorative justice, mercy and forgiveness. It is detailed to help facilitators with minimal previous knowledge of the material become comfortable leading discussions and sharing information. The design is such that the individual catechetical sessions may be used as standalone pieces integrated into a classroom or youth ministry night experience.

Six themes are addressed:

- Catholic Social Teaching
- Mercy and Forgiveness
- Criminal Justice & Recidivism
- The Death Penalty
- Restorative Justice
- Mission

WARMERS/ICEBREAKERS

Warmers/Icebreakers are designed to help participants become more comfortable with one another as well as support concepts of the retreat (e.g. storytelling).

SCRIPTURE CONNECTIONS

Each catechetical session includes several passages from scripture that are relevant to the topic. These can be incorporated in several ways: they may be worked into the discussion; used for background reference; as a focal point for journaling, prayer or reflection; or shared with participants for future reflection.

JOURNALING

Journaling is a great way for participants to “go deeper” with themes and concepts. Encourage participants to take notes during the retreat. Although they won’t be given any kind of test on the material, each session will reference what has been previously discussed. This will also aid in reflection and forming prayers.

MUSIC

Each session includes a listing of several songs which would be appropriate to play before or after the session to aid in reflection. Music used is entirely at the discretion of the facilitator; different groups respond to songs in different ways. These are only suggestions.

PRAYER

Each prayer experience may be adapted, modified or replaced with something the facilitator may feel better suits the group or discussion.

RETREAT DAY ONE

7:00p - Participants arrive at Retreat Location

8:00p - Welcome

- Settle in & Fellowship

8:30p - Opening

- House rules
- Emphasis on staying on task
 - Participate - don't anticipate!
 - RESPECT
- It's important that the group:
 - has a sense of openness, trust and willingness to risk
 - wants to dig deeper
 - be focused
- Review of the retreat schedule/plan
 - Questions, concerns?
- Purpose of the retreat
 - Why are we here?
 - Why have a retreat?
 - *A chance to "escape"*
 - *We retreat to advance*
 - Retreat Scriptural models/objectives
 - *Greater intimacy with God - Christ after Baptism (Mt 4:1-11, Mk 1:12-13, Lk 4:1-13)*
 - *Humility, Calling - Jesus avoids being made king (Jn 6:15)*
 - *Peace, Solitude - Jesus retreats to country (Mk 1:45)*
 - *Rest & Renewal - Jesus takes disciples to "Come apart and rest" (Mk 6:31)*
 - *Consultation - The Transfiguration (Mk 9:2-9)*

Important point: Jesus and disciples could have stayed away and continued to have their wonderful experience on the mountain, or left what they had experienced behind. Instead, they returned to the others and brought renewed energy and commitment back with them

 - *Surrender, Seeking Strength - Jesus accepts God's plan (Mt 26:36-46, Mk 14:32-42, Lk 22:39-46)*
 - *Conversation with God - "Go into your room and shut the door" (Mt 6:5-6)*
- What are the group's expectations for the weekend?
 - What do I need to open my heart to this weekend?
 - How can I invite the Holy Spirit into my life?

9:00p - Warmer: Sharing Our Story

- The Gab Bag (15-45 minutes, depending on size of the group)

The Gab Bag warmer is a fun way to encourage relationship-building skills. It works well with groups of people that know each other well or groups that are mostly strangers to one another.

A bag full of small items - toys, everyday items, etc. - is passed around the group one person at a time. As each person pulls an item out they must tell the group a personal experience or story that relates to that item, or what that item may symbolize to them. They may take "artistic license" with their story. For example, someone that pulls a tennis ball out of the bag may talk about tennis, a sport, something shaped like a ball, something that bounces, something fuzzy, or something yellow.

Examples of items in our "Gab Bag"...

Toys: Car, apple, hamburger, teething ring, dog, train, superhero, horse, baby doll

Everyday Items: Pen, CD, cell phone, spoon, seashell, cross, soap, keys, coins, cup

9:45p - Catechetical Session 1 - Catholic Social Teaching

- Overview - "Seven Themes - Seven Pillars "

The purpose of this session is to connect participants with concepts that may already be familiar to them. The session will review the seven themes of Catholic Social Teaching (CST). In doing this, participants will be challenged to consider their own views on life issues in context with Catholic Church teaching.

- Scripture Connections

- You have been told, O mortal, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: only to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God. - Micah 6:8
- Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? - 1 Corinthians 3:16
- Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image...God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good. - Genesis 1:26-31

- Music Suggestions

- Sarah Haze - Every Heart
- Keith and Kristyn Getty - Compassion Hymn
- Casting Crowns - Does Anybody Hear Her?

- Opening prayer - adapted from Pope John Paul II's Prayer to the Holy Spirit, CMN (5 minutes)

Holy Spirit, come with me, stay with me, enter my heart, teach me your way and help me to follow. Help me make good choices so I may please you in all things.

Be my counselor and guide. You, who love justice, don't let my words or actions bring harm to others. May my lack of knowledge never lead me away from you; may my accomplishments never cause me to trust myself above you; may my wants and needs never cause me to fail. Hold me close to your heart in grace, so that in you I may never be far from the truth. May justice, guided by love, lead me in all things so that I may do nothing against your will.

Come, Holy Spirit. Come. Enter deep into the hearts of your people. May each of us be filled with your presence for the good of all, so that God may be all in all.

Holy Spirit, you who are our joy and peace, open our hearts and minds to God's call to be people of goodness, truth, compassion and love.

Open our hearts and minds so we may show your love to others and all may come to know Christ, the True Light who has come into the world to offer every human being the sure hope of eternal life. Amen.

- The Setup

- Say to the group:

- Now that we know each other a little better, and have learned the importance of storytelling and perspectives, we're going to focus on something on a similar but also different topic. Just like we all have different perspectives that led to our different stories from the Gab Bag, we have different perspectives that influence our core beliefs. We're going to explore this and use these different perspectives to talk about Catholic Church teaching on social justice issues.

- Activity - Axis (15 minutes)

- Adaptable to groups of any size
 - Materials needed: masking tape
 - Procedure

- Work in an area with a lot of free space; participants will need room to move. Clear the room of furniture, or push the furniture against the wall if you are working indoors. In the center of the room, place a straight line of masking tape. Instruct the participants to stand on this line; try to have them spaced evenly. Ask them to close their eyes, or blind-fold them if you think it's necessary; this will allow them to participate without feeling self-conscious about what everyone else is doing.*

- Say to the group:

- It's really easy for us to think that, because we think or believe in something, other reasonable people must believe it too. But that's not always the case; reasonable people disagree about a lot of things, even about topics that we think everyone in a group should agree about. Today we're going to see if this applies to you all. We're going to read a list of topics to you. If you agree with the practice, or you generally think it's an ok-thing, as long as the conditions are right, step forward. If you disagree with it and think it's bad in all cases, step backwards. If you don't know anything about it or aren't sure, don't move. Take time to think about your decision, and move based on what YOU believe - not what your parents believe, or on what you think everyone else is doing.

- Now name the following topics, pausing in between each so participants have time to make up their minds if they need to:

- *Abortion*
 - *Euthanasia*
 - *The Death Penalty*
 - *Birth control*
 - *Embryonic stem cell research*
 - *Suicide*

- Once you are done reading the list, ask the participants to open their eyes. After they've had a chance to see where they are standing in relation to everyone else in the room, allow them to sit again and begin the debriefing.*

- Group Process (5-10 minutes)

In most circumstances participants will be scattered throughout the room after the Axis activity. This will segue into the discussion of Catholic social teaching and a consistent ethic of life. Even if the Axis shows a lot of disagreement among the participants, this is preferable to having everyone stay in the position where they started; this way, at least, will show that the participants are engaged in the topics.

- Discussion questions/reflection

- *Why do you think people are scattered about the room?*
- *What would it take for all of you to be standing in a straight line? Would standing in a straight line reflect catholic Church teaching?*
- *Are you surprised by the results? Why or why not?*

- Catechetical Session (20-30 minutes)

- Say to the group:

We just saw how much variety there is within this room. You would think that, because we're all Catholics, we pretty much agree on everything - at least on the important things. That's not always the case. When it comes to the "big issues" - literally, matters of life and death, it's important to know what the Catholic Church actually teaches. Hopefully, a lot of this will be review for you all; if it's new, that's okay too.

- What is Catholic Social Teaching?

- *This is the body of doctrine developed by the church on matters of social justice, which is central to our faith and calls of to practice love and justice. It has been articulated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents.*

- Share with the group the Seven Themes

- *Encourage participants to write down each theme in their journals. Start each by asking participants what they think the theme refers to before you share with them details.*

- Theme #1 - Life and dignity of the human person

- *The dignity of each and every person is the foundation of a moral society, and of all our other principles as Catholics.*
- *This dignity cannot be earned by good behavior or lost by bad behavior; it is inherent in us.*
- *The value of human life is being attacked by practices like abortion, euthanasia, cloning, embryonic stem cell research, the intentional targeting of civilians in war, terrorist attacks, and the death penalty.*
- *Consistent ethic of life: this is the belief that, as Catholics, we should support life in all matters. If one protests abortion but supports a practice that the Church does not absolutely condemn (such as the death penalty), their ethic of life is not consistent. By supporting anything that leads to unnatural death, one is supporting a culture of death, which tears down the dignity of human life.*

- Theme #2 - Call to family, community, and participation

- *We do not exist in a vacuum, but in a community.*
- *We have a right and duty to participate in society, seeking the common good, especially of the poor and vulnerable.*
- *Marriage and the family are central; they must be strengthened.*

- Theme #3 - Rights and responsibilities

- *Because of our dignities as humans, we have both rights and responsibilities.*

- *We have a right to life, and a responsibility to provide this to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.*
- Theme #4 - Option for the poor and vulnerable
 - *Societies are measured by how the lowest members are treated.*
 - *The needs of the weak should be put first..*
- Theme #5 - The dignity of work and the rights of workers
 - *Work is more than a way to earn money; it is a way to contribute to God's creation.*
 - *In order to protect the dignity of work, the rights of workers must be respected*
- Theme #6 - Solidarity
 - *We are one human family; we are all a part of the body of Christ.*
 - *As a part of this, we are called to be peacemakers and work to end conflict all over the world.*
- Theme #7 - Care for God's creation
 - *We are stewards of the world; we are required to protect God's people and planet - all of His creation.*
 - *Our faith should be lived in a relationship with God's creation.*
 - *All of our talks on this retreat will take into account the seven themes of Catholic Social Teaching. Keep them in mind throughout the weekend, and don't be afraid to challenge yourself - or others - if you feel you are not living up to the standards that the Church calls us all to live by.*
- Discussion questions/reflection

Use your own discretion to decide if you want to ask participants these questions and get their answers "live", or just offer them as a starting point for journal reflection. If participants answer in the group it offers an opportunity to learn from other perspectives, while journaling allows for deeper thinking.

 - How much of this were you already aware of?
 - Did you disagree with anything, or is there anything you're confused about?
 - Which of the seven themes do you think you most exemplify, and which do you think you need to work on the most?
 - Were you surprised by the differences (or the consistency) during our axis game?
 - Why do you think it turned out like it did? Do you think these differences are good or bad?
- Closing prayer - Adapted from A Prayer to End the Use of the Death Penalty, CMN (5 minutes)

Merciful Father, we thank you for the gifts that you continue to give us and ask your blessing on all we do to build a culture of life. Help us to remember that all people are made in Your image and likeness. We pray for all people, that their lives and dignity as children of a loving God may be respected and protected in all stages and circumstances.

We pray for the victims of violence and crime and their families, that they may experience our love and support and find comfort in your compassion and in the promise of eternal life.

Give us wisdom and hearts filled with your love. Guide us as we work to a society that truly chooses life in all situations; help us to protect the unborn, abused, neglected, disabled, elderly, and poor especially. We ask this Father through your

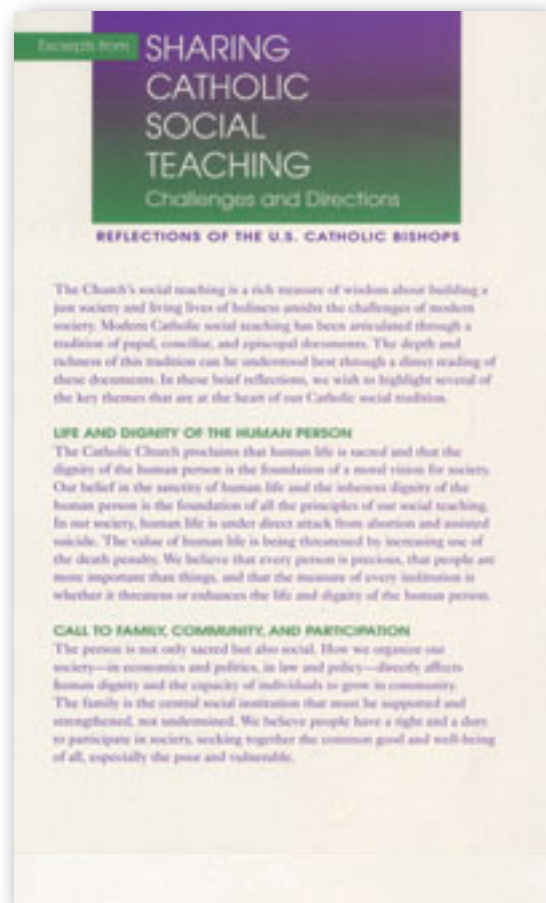
Son Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

- Notes, references
 - <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching.cfm>
 - Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC): 1397, 1929-1933, 2270-2283

10:30pm - Fellowship

11:30pm - Bed

Resource available from USCCB Publishing
<http://www.usccbpublishing.org/productdetails.cfm?PC=1235>



RETREAT DAY TWO

8:30am - Breakfast

9:30am - Morning Prayer

10:00am - Catechetical Session 2 - Mercy & Forgiveness



- Overview - “Become a New Creation”

Now that we have gone over the basic concepts of Catholic Social Teaching, we’re going to move on to another important Catholic concept: forgiveness. This is something that is absolutely central to Catholics, but can easily be forgotten. The purpose of this talk is to bring forgiveness and mercy to the forefront of participants’ minds.

- Scripture Connections

- “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and unjust.” - Matthew 5:43-45
- Then Peter approaching asked him, “Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus answered, “I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times.” - Matthew 18:21-22
- Be merciful, just as also your Father is merciful. Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. - Luke 6:36-37
- Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. - Colossians 3:12-13
- And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. - 2 Corinthians 5:17-20

- Music Suggestions

As always, it is entirely up to the facilitator’s discretion how they wish to incorporate music, if they choose to do so at all.

- Matt Redman - Mercy
- Matthew West - Forgiveness
- Jon Foreman - A Mirror is Harder to Hold
- Brenton Brown - All Who are Thirsty

- Opening prayer (5 minutes)

God, I ask You to help me remember the sacred dignity that every human possesses, and to understand that it is present even when I find it difficult to see. With this in mind, help me to value forgiveness and mercy, reflect on what it

means in my life, and to learn to bestow it just as I would want it to be bestowed upon me. I pray to You to every day for largeness of heart and mercy, in the words of our Lord... Our Father, who art in heaven...

- Warmer - Human Knot (5-10 minutes)

- Procedure

- *Have the participants stand in a circle of not more than eight people or fewer than six (even numbered groups work best). Once this is done, have everyone reach their right hand into the center and take the hand of someone across from them. Once everyone has taken a hand, without letting go they should then extend their left hand into the center, taking the left hand of someone DIFFERENT across the circle.*
 - *Without letting go of each other's hands, the group should try to untangle themselves. If they work together and are patient, they should be able to accomplish this within a few minutes. However, if the knot proves to be impossible or results in separate groups, allow the participants to start over and figure out a way for them to grab each other's hands in a manner they feel will allow them to successfully untangle the group. Try to have them do this without guidance.*
 - *To create additional energy with this warmer encourage the groups to race against one another to see who unknots first.*

- The Setup

- Say to the group:

- We just had an experience of the potential difficulties of working together to solve a problem. When people or communities are in conflict or relationships are broken working together is extremely difficult. When we have been hurt by someone - whether physically, mentally or spiritually - or a trust abused returning to a place of healthy relationship may seem impossible. The first step to healing is through mercy and forgiveness.

- Catechetical Session (15 - 30 minutes)

- Before we really get into the "nitty-gitty" of this session, ask the participants a few questions to warm them up. They can answer aloud or just note their answers in their journals and reflect on them during the session and after.*

- We began our session reciting Lord's Prayer, which calls us to forgive. But what is forgiveness? Can you define it? Why is it a good thing?
 - Do you know what the Church says about forgiveness?
 - Do you think there are any requirements that must be met before you forgive someone? How is forgiveness related to the dignity of human life?

- Tell the participants that you're going to read them the parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-35), which they have probably heard before. This is a short, modified Lectio Divina experience. Ask them to be quiet and pay attention as you read:*

- The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. Then Peter approaching asked him, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus answered, "I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times. That is why the kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the accounting, a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount. Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property, in payment of the debt. At that, the servant fell down, did him homage,

and said, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.' Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan. When that servant had left, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount. He seized him and started to choke him, demanding, 'Pay back what you owe.' Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he refused. Instead, he had him put in prison until he paid back the debt. Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master and reported the whole affair. His master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to. Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?' Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt. So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart."

- After a moment, say:

I'm going to read the passage again. This time, I want you to listen for a specific word or phrase that stands out to you. After I finish reading I want you to share with a couple neighbors your word or phrase and explain why that stood out to you.

- After reading the passage second time, give participants an opportunity to share the phrases that stood out to them. Invite them to share these with the larger group as well. Explain:

As you can see, scripture will say different things to different people. It will even say different things to you each time you listen to it or read it. This is because we are in a different place emotionally or spiritually each time we approach scripture. It allows us to understand God's Word in new ways and help us grow in faith.

- Explain that you will read the passage one final time. This time, tell the participants that they are to listen to the story as a whole. After reading, debrief by asking the following questions:

- *Now that we've read the story three times - is there anything about it that surprised you or that was different from what you remember?*
- *What do you think the story says about forgiveness? Put yourself in the shoes of the servant and of the master.*

- Discussion (15-30 minutes)

- Say to the group:

We've looked at the Biblical concept of forgiveness and mercy, and that has informed our thinking a lot. There's still much to talk about, though; we know that we're called to forgive, but do we really know how to go about doing that? Let's spend a little more time to take this deeper. It's important to discuss because at times it can be really overwhelming. As Pope Francis said, "Mercy is the Lord's most powerful message. It is not easy to trust oneself to the mercy of God, because his mercy is an unfathomable abyss. But we must do it!"

There are five principles of forgiveness that can be understood from Catholic teaching:

- *God is the author of forgiveness, mercy, reconciliation, etc.; we participate in this.*
 - How? Through prayer. We can't do it on our own - we can only do it through His grace.
 - Two kinds of forgiveness: vertical and horizontal. Vertical is us and God, horizontal is us and other people. We can't have one without the other.

- *When dealing with forgiveness, God begins with the victim.*
 - Reversal of fortunes as expressed in The Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-12).
 - This is how we should deal with justice: victims first. They are the priority.
- *Forgiveness and reconciliation make a “new creation” out of the victim and wrongdoer*
 - Full erasure of wrong won’t be achieved until heaven; we can’t literally erase the past.
 - Forgiveness allows us to get as close as possible to that; by reconciling, we begin again or start over. Forgiveness is the hope and trust that God will put everything to rights when we are in Heaven.
- *Suffering and wrong can be lodged in the Passion of Christ*
 - Provides a greater meaning; unite with Christ and offer our pain up to God.
 - Forgive as He forgave (Luke 23:34).
- *Reconciliation cannot be complete until God is “all in all”*
 - Eschatological; as already stated, forgives is the trust that true justice will be served and judgment will be made by God at the end of time.
 - Perfect reconciliation is impractical and sometimes impossible in our messy human lives; that doesn’t mean we aren’t called to strive toward it.

As the Lord’s Prayer states, we should forgive just as we want to be forgiven. It’s like the golden rule.

- *If you don’t forgive, how can you expect to be forgiven?*

Forgiveness does not mean condoning a wrong; it means the opposite. If condonation was involved there would be nothing to forgive. Instead, forgiveness affirms the wrong and says that the victim will not be held down by hatred or anger any longer.

Don’t diminish people to their worst actions; this ties back to dignity of human beings, which can’t be taken away for bad behavior.

- Discussion questions/reflection
 - How would you feel if your entire life was defined by one stupid mistake, one thing you had done to hurt someone else? Is it fair to “label” someone by that one mistake?
 - Is there anyone in your life that you’re having trouble forgiving? How do you think these concepts can be applied to the criminal justice system without forgetting justice for the victims? What do you think is the proper balance between justice and mercy?
- Application (20 minutes)
 - Provide participants with sheet(s) of paper and a pen or pencil. Instruct them to write a letter to someone they’re having trouble forgiving. Encourage them to write whatever is on their heart; they won’t be asked to share this, and won’t have to send the letter unless they want to. If they’re having trouble thinking of someone to write to, they can also write to someone who may be having trouble forgiving them. Allow them to start this assignment after the closing prayer so that once they’re done they will have some free time.
- Closing prayer - adapted from Reflecting on Forgiveness and Human Dignity: A Prayer Service, CMN (5 minutes)

God of mercy, you gave your son Jesus Christ as a gift of salvation for all people. Through his life and witness we understand that all life is sacred, the human dignity of all people is to be respected, and all are deserving of mercy and compassion. Help us to grow in love and see the face of Jesus in all we encounter, the guilty as well as the innocent. In the words of Pope Francis, we pray: “Let us be renewed by God’s mercy, let us be loved by Jesus, let us enable the power of His love to transform our lives too; and let us become agents of His mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation and make justice and peace flourish.” We ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen.

- Notes, references
 - <http://thevalueofsparrows.com/2014/09/15/peacemaking-five-principles-of-a-practical-theology-of-reconciliation-by-robert-j-schreiter/>
 - Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC): 2302-2306, 2838
 - Alternative Lectio Divina experiences could be based around Luke 36:50 and Luke 15:11-32

11:30am - Break/Free Time

12:00pm - Lunch

1:00pm - Catechetical Session 3 - Criminal Justice & Recidivism

- Overview - “The Criminal INJustice System”

Up to this point we’ve discussed Catholic topics and concepts that could really be a part of any retreat. Now, we’re going to take what we’ve learned and start tying it into information about the Criminal Justice System. It is the facilitator’s job to share the facts; it will be the task of the participants to connect these separate sessions.
- Scripture Connections
 - ...I am a thing of scorn, and especially to my neighbors a horror to my friends...I am forgotten, out of mind like the dead; I am like a worn-out tool. I hear the whispers of the crowd; terrors are all around me. They conspire together against me; they plot to take my life. But I trust in you, Lord... - Psalms 31:12-15
 - When justice is done it is a joy for the just, downfall for evildoers. - Proverbs 21:15
 - I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance. - Luke 15:7
 - Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me...Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me. - Matthew 25:34-40
- Music

- Mandisa - You Wouldn't Cry for Me (Andrew's Song)
- Tim Hughes - God of Justice
- Daniel Bashta - In the Ruins
- Audrey Assad - Show Me
- Opening prayer (5 minutes)

Merciful Father, we call on you to help us remember the dignity of all humans, which you teach to us through the Church. Imprint this on our hearts; never let us forget it. Help us to be forgiving and merciful, just as you are forgiving and merciful to us. Help us exemplify justice, and administer it to both the victims and the wrongdoers; in our desire to help one, don't let us forget the other.

Guide us in our attempt to help all those who are affected by crime, both those who perpetuate it and those who are victimized by it - and help us to remember that these people can be one and the same. May those who experience violence find comfort in You, and come to rely on You rather than on their own understanding.

Fill our hearts with Your love, and help us to be your instruments on earth. We ask this through Your son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.
- The Setup

This warmer will have students decide whether or not they "love" others in the group based on silly factors. It will be a fun game, but will also lead into more serious discussion about how convicts and ex-convicts are often rejected by society. This activity is the sort that is best to jump into and explain afterwards, so for now only instruct the participants to arrange themselves in a circle.
- Warmer - Do You Love Your Neighbor? (15 minutes)

Adaptable to groups of any size.

No materials needed. It may be convenient to use chairs, or have participants mark their seats with their shoes or some other object.

Because the session itself is heavy on facts and figures, considering using a white board or poster board to write down important facts and statistics.
- Procedure
 - *With everyone sitting in a circle, have a volunteer stand in the middle (or stand in the middle yourself). The person who is "it" in the middle will walk up to a person of their choosing and ask, "Do you love your neighbor? The person then responds with either "Yes, except..." or "no".*
 - *If the person says no, the two people to either said of him or her have to switch seats while the person in the middle tries to steal their seat*
 - *If the person says yes, they must continue the statement; "Yes, except for people who have brown eyes" or "Yes, except for people who are wearing sneakers" or so on. Everyone in the circle who matches the criteria needs to then get up and find a new seat (it should not be a seat that was adjacent to their previous one), while the person in the middle tries to steal someone's seat. The final person left in the middle because "it" and the game continues.*
 - *Play for as long as time allows, or until everyone has been in the middle at least once. After the game winds down, have everyone find a seat and begin debrief.*
- Group Process (5-10 minutes)

In the warmer, participants likely came up with all sorts of ridiculous criteria for loving their neighbor; they also probably targeted specific people in the group so they could guarantee finding a seat for themselves. This was funny, but will also allow us to move into more serious discussion.

- Say to the group:

For the sake of the game, we gave ourselves all of these criteria for whether or not we loved our neighbor. But can you imagine if we carried that game into real life? Can you imagine if we decided it was okay to stop loving our neighbors based on their hair color or skin color, or because they had hurt us in our past and we didn't want to forgive them? That would go against what the Church teaches about the human dignity of every person; as Catholics, we're called to see God in every individual.

- Ask participants if they have any reflections they'd be willing to share based on the warmer. How do they see the game being played out in real life? When they have finished sharing, move into the session.

- Catechetical Session (20-30 minutes)

- Say to the group:

As ridiculous as our game was, the sad truth is that this is often how our society really works. Sure, we try to love our neighbors - until they mess up. Our society often has criteria for "loving our neighbors" that seems logical until you really think about it; once we look at it, we'll see that this criteria is just as absurd as the game we played.

What do you know about how our criminal justice system works? Is it always fair? Why or why not?

- After participants have had a few moments to share, continue:

We know the basics of how the system works, and we would like to assume that the job is done fairly. Most people leave it at that; they don't feel the need to educate themselves beyond a basic level. Often, we tend to simply go along with whatever the popular sentiment is at the time; for example, many Americans are more afraid of crime than ever, but in reality crime rates have been falling since the 1980s. Even though the facts don't match up with our ideas, these misconceptions still hold weight; that's why our government officials campaign with promises of being "tough on crime", and that's why our prison system is larger than ever.

The sad reality is our prison system is pretty dysfunctional. For example, how we as a society determine who should be imprisoned is centered around race much more than it should be; African Americans make up 12% of the US population but represent 49% of prisoners. Hispanics make up 9% of the population but are 19% of the prison population. What do you think is the reason for the disparity? Is it reasonable to simply write it off on the simple fact that minority populations commit crime more than Caucasians?

- *Studies show that minorities are treated more harshly by the police and the courts; minorities are more likely to be convicted for the same crime that a white person gets acquitted for.*
- *In addition to this, minorities are more likely to be the victims of crime; in 1990, for example, the murder rate for young black men was 140 victims for every 100,000 - seven times the murder rate for young white men.*
- *Much of this is connected to economic factors; minorities typically live in poorer*

communities, which means that when they go to court they can't afford good lawyers. They often get assigned public defenders, who are typically inexperienced and overwhelmed with a heavy caseload. This can make all the difference in determining the outcome of a case.

- Ask the group:

Can you think of a concrete example of the difference an experienced and/or expensive lawyer may make in a criminal case as opposed to a lawyer with minimal or no experience?

- Continue:

When you really think about it, there are a lot of people in prison who probably shouldn't be. Besides the racial disparity, often ignore or disregard alternatives like fines, probation, boot camp, or other community sanctions. Our incarceration rate is six to twelve times higher than other Western countries because we tend to turn to incarceration as THE answer to our problems.

- *Prison inmates have a high rate of illiteracy, drug dependency, and mental illness. 70% of inmates did not complete high school, and half of the prison population is convicted on charges related to drugs; blacks are 10 times more likely to enter prison on drugs charges even though whites and blacks use drugs about equally. For the most part, treatment would be more effective than prison time; however, funding and community support for treatment is low.*
- *We have recently tripled the amount of illegal immigrants that we throw in jail or prison while we wait to deport them; they must wait weeks or months before having an asylum hearing. Meanwhile, they are sitting there - essentially just taking up space*
- *70% of women in prison are non-violent offenders.*
- *The reason our prison population is so large is because of our "tough" policies, like three strikes, where non-violent offenders could potentially get life in prison for committing the same crime or a similar crime three separate times. Mandatory minimums take all decisions away from the judge and jury, and impose a bare minimum sentence for certain crimes - even if mitigating circumstances make that sentence inappropriate.*

There's another factor that leads to our high prison population: private prisons. Within the past few decades, the government has turned to private prisons in order to save money. These are, essentially, businesses; they are prisons that are run by private individuals rather than the government, and their job is to make a profit.

- *Because they want to make a profit, these prisons try to cut corners wherever possible. This makes conditions bad - really bad. It's not as though the inmates in these prisons are just uncomfortable or something, which many people don't feel a need to worry about; prisons are intended to be uncomfortable, in a way. These prisoners have terrible food and medical care, are not offered religious services - which is a constitutional right - and are offered little to no rehabilitative programs. Private prisons are not a place where individuals learn from their mistakes; they are warehouses for people.*
- *Private prisons WANT a lot of inmates; they want people to commit crimes after their release and end up back in prison (this is called recidivism). That's what keeps them in prison. Ideally, the goal of prisons should be to become unneeded.*
- *Many of these prisons are of the "Supermax" variety, and restrict inmates to individual cells for 23 hours every day.*

The end result of all of this is a whole lot of broken families. 70% of those who go to prison leave a child behind, usually in foster care. One and a half million children under the age of eighteen have a parent in state or federal prison; most

of these are minority families. African American children are nine times more likely to have a parent incarcerated than white children are. This all adds up to a vicious cycle; individuals who come from broken homes and have parents in prison are more likely to end up in prison themselves.

Because we focus on housing convicts instead of rehabilitating them, recidivism is a serious concern in our corrections system. Our system has been called a system of “revolving doors” because 32.7% of ex-convicts are rearrested within six months of their release from prison; this number rises to over 70% within three years. There are several reasons for this.

- *Many issues that cause people to commit crimes that land them in prison are not addressed during their sentencing; examples include drug abuse and anger management. Remember, prisons tend to be warehouses, not places to learn.*
- *In addition to this, non-violent offenders tend to become violent during their stay in prison due to their association with violent offenders. Many offenders are actually worse, morally, when they leave prison instead of better. Related is the concept of prisonization; many individuals who have been in and out of the correctional system their whole lives often don't have the tools to function with the relatively unstructured life outside of prison. They come to depend on prison time in order to function.*
- *Finally, ex-cons often find that their punishment doesn't really end with their release from prison. They often pay for their crimes for their rest of their lives. This makes sense to a certain extent; people should pay for the very real consequences of their crimes. However, that's exactly what prison time is for. They serve their sentence, and that is their punishment. Once they return to society, they should be able to start a new, better life for themselves. Unfortunately, many ex-cons face repercussions long after they return to society; besides being social outcasts, they are unable to receive student loans or food stamps, and many are rejected from jobs precisely because of their ex-con status. The result is that many individuals feel that they have no option other than to return to crime.*

Here's the thing: America, as a whole, tends to be unreflective about its criminal justice system. We forget that criminals are still people and have an inherent dignity gifted them by God. Of course they should make some sort of payment for the crimes that they commit, but we take it too far; we don't care if, in prison, they are sexually abused, assaulted, given foods with maggots, or if they die from lack of medical treatment. As a society we seem to think that because they have committed a crime, they deserve whatever punishment or indignity that is thrust upon them. We are absolved of our need to defend their human dignity.

- *“It is necessary to distinguish between error, which always merits repudiation, and the person in error, who never loses the dignity of being a person.” - Pope Paul VI, *Guadium et Spes*, 28; December 1965*
- *“Our society seems to prefer punishment to rehabilitation and retribution to restoration thereby indicating a failure to recognize prisoners as human beings.” - USCCB*
- *Studies have shown that rehabilitative treatment does reduce recidivism, but there is no single treatment that works*
- *Substance abuse is a huge factor in recidivism, as we now know; community-based programs are especially effective and save a lot of money.*

- Discussion questions/reflection

- What do you think? Did any of this information surprise you?
- Let's think about everything we've learned in the context of our warm-up activity. Is there any point in which it is okay for us to stop “loving our neighbors”? Even if

they've committed terrible crimes?

- If we're meant to continue loving our neighbors, even those who are in prison, how do we act that out?
- Closing prayer - Adapted from Life Teen (5 minutes)
 - Prayer for the Imprisoned: Heavenly Father, we ask that you would hear our prayer for those men and women who are in prison. Lord, we place them in your loving arms and ask that you would help them repent of their faults and turn to you for love and forgiveness. We pray for those whose families have abandoned them because of their imprisonment. We ask that you would fill their loneliness with your constant comfort and care. Watch over and protect them from harm. Amen.
 - Prayer for the Victim of Crimes: Heavenly Father, we ask you to hear our prayers for all those who have been a victim of a crime or attack. We pray for a complete physical, emotional, and mental healing for the victims. We pray that you would take away any anger or hurt and replace it with forgiveness. We pray for those victims who have died. May they have eternal rest with you. Amen.
 - Heavenly Father, we ask that you guide the decisions of all government officials who has power over the Criminal Justice System of the United States. We pray that you watch over them so that they truly work for justice, and do not treat anyone unfairly. Let them remember the dignity of all people, and have the courage to stand up for what is right. We pray that you teach them to seek justice and love mercy. Amen.
- Notes, references
 - http://www.jubed.com/youth_ministry/view/Do-you-love-your-neighbor/
 - <http://www.bjs.gov/>
 - <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/criminal-justice-restorative-justice/crime-and-criminal-justice.cfm>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NaPBcUUqbew> a brief overview of the prison complex published by Vlogbrothers; does not discuss race, but could serve as a nice visual supplement.
 - Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) 2266

2:30pm - Free time

5:00pm - Catechetical Session 4 - The Death Penalty

- Overview - "Death, Where Is Thy Sting?"
 - This will not so much focus on the process of capital punishment in America itself because they will be able to infer a lot of that from the *Dead Man Walking* viewing. Instead, we will spend most of our discussion on Catholic social teaching in regards to the death penalty, and tie the discussion into our previous sessions on Catholic social teaching and human dignity and consistent ethic of life, forgiveness, and criminal justice session.
- Scripture Connections

- Anyone who sheds the blood of a human being, by a human being shall that one's blood be shed; for in the image of God have human beings been made. - Gen 9:6
- "You have heard that it was said, 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on (your) right cheek, turn the other one to him as well." - Matthew 5:39
- There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save or to destroy. Who then are you to judge your neighbor? - James 4:12
- The Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard "Delay," but he is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. - 2 Peter 3:9
- Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? - 1 Corinthians 15:55
- Music
 - Needtobreathe - Garden
 - Johnny Cash - The Mercy Seat
 - Lifehouse - Storm
 - Jon Foreman - House of God, Forever
- Opening prayer - adapted from Pope John Paul II, Prayer to the Holy Spirit (5 minutes)

Holy Spirit, come with me, stay with me, enter my heart, teach me your way and help me to follow. Help me make good choices so I may please you in all things.

Be my counselor and guide. You, who love justice, don't let my words or actions bring harm to others. May my lack of knowledge never lead me away from you; may my accomplishments never cause me to trust myself above you; may my wants and needs never cause me to fail.

Hold me close to your heart in grace, so that in you I may never be far from the truth. May justice, guided by love, lead me in all things so that I may do nothing against your will.

Come, Holy Spirit. Come. Enter deep into the hearts of your people. May each of us be filled with your presence for the good of all, so that God may be all in all.

Holy Spirit, you who are our joy and peace, open our hearts and minds to God's call to be people of goodness, truth, compassion and love.

Open our hearts and minds so we may show your love to others and all may come to know Christ, the True Light who has come into the world to offer every human being the sure hope of eternal life. Amen.
- The Setup (20-30 minutes)
 - Say to the group:

We've covered a lot of material so far. We've talked about the dignity of life, about forgiveness, and about our criminal justice system. There's a lot to say about each of these things; we could have spent a whole weekend going over just one talk. Now we're going to talk about death. We're really getting into serious stuff, here. No one likes to talk about death; it's scary, sad, and makes us face things we rather wouldn't. Things like sin, judgment, and the unknown. But that's what we're going to talk about this afternoon, specifically in relation to the fifth commandment - thou shalt not kill. Pretty familiar, right? What makes things difficult is when we talk about killing in reference to the death penalty. This is

where the waters get hard to navigate. Talking about the death penalty is serious, and requires prayer and discernment. For this discussion, I'm going to ask you all to be serious and attentive, and be aware of the gravity of this situation. Many people face the very real repercussions of the death penalty, although it can seem like a foreign and distant concept to us.

- Catechetical Session

God is the ruler of all living things. He is the one who has authority over death, not us. So the fifth commandment really means what it says: don't kill people. Beyond this, we are also called to respect life - including our own - and defend the lives of others. A lot of Catholic social teaching comes from this.

- *Because we're allowed to protect our own lives, "turning the other cheek" does not mean we are called to let ourselves get mugged, raped, or murdered. In fact, sometimes the protection of life involves taking a life; self-defense allows this. This is tragic, but necessary. The thing is, our media often highlights the necessity over the tragedy. We are quick to talk about how important it is for us to defend ourselves, but often forget that when anyone dies by human hands it is a serious removal from God's plans for us.*
- *This is where the death penalty comes in. Those who take the lives of others have committed a serious sin. They absolutely deserve to be punished. But does that mean we are allowed, in turn, to take their lives? This issue is not whether people deserve to die, but whether we deserve to administer that death. Reasonable people disagree about this.*

The church teaches a whole lot of things about the death penalty, and the bible does not provide a particularly clear message on this topic. Someone who only gives a cursory glance to church teaching can get confused; on one hand, the church says that punishment should be proportional to the crime, but it also says that we shouldn't put out an eye for an eye.

- *The church says that the death penalty is technically permissible; it's not something like abortion, where it is always bad in all circumstances. It is neither contrary to nor required by divine law. However, given the means at the State's disposal to effectively repress crime by rendering inoffensive the one who has committed it, without depriving him definitively of the possibility of redeeming himself, cases of absolute necessity for suppression of the offender 'today ... are very rare, if not practically non-existent.'" [John Paul II, Evangelium vitae 56].*
- *If there is no way to protect society from a dangerous criminal, a government has the authority to kill him or her humanely. However, these types of situations really haven't existed for a long, long time; remember, the church is over 2,000 years old. Our prisons are obviously much more secure than they were 2,000 years ago, and our cultures and sensibilities have changed quite a bit. So, there really isn't an appropriate situation in the modern world for our country to use the death penalty. The test is not whether the crime is really heinous; the test is whether or not society has an alternate way of defending itself.*

This can be really tough to grasp, especially for people who take an awesomely strong stance on life in other areas, like abortion. Heinous crimes against the innocent make us cry out for justice, and we often look to the death penalty as a way of dispensing that justice. But we have to ask ourselves: are we asking for justice, or are we asking for revenge? Are we asking for justice, or are we asking for more bloodshed?

- *When we get angry at a sin or a sinner, and feel this desire for vengeance - which is understandable but misguided - we have to remember that human dignity is not something that goes away because of bad behavior. The fact that someone is a murderer*

does not mean that they no longer have human dignity, and that their life is then worthless; people should not be reduced to their worst actions. In addition to this, it could be argued that there really is no way to kill someone that respects this dignity, even if an execution is technically justified.

- *As Catholics, we're all about the sanctity of life. But we can't have a consistent ethic of life if we disagree about this issue; it drags us all down. We're not just called to be pro-life; we're called to be unconditionally pro-life. Currently, 48% of Catholics support the death penalty.*
- *We must not forget that Christ forgives the greatest sinners, and forgave his own executioners as he was dying on the cross.*
- *The dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil. Modern society has the means of protecting itself, without definitively denying criminals the chance to reform. - Pope John Paul II, Gospel of life (Evangelium Vitae), 27; March 1995*
- *Our witness to respect for life shines most brightly when we demand respect for each and every human life, including the lives of those who fail to show that respect for others. The antidote to violence is love, not more violence. - USCCB, Living the Gospel of Life, no. 22*

Even if the church wholeheartedly supported the death penalty, the way it is used in the United States is cause for some concern. We'll learn more about this when we watch **Dead Man Walking** tonight.

- *Until fairly recently - just over ten years ago - the death penalty was legal for the mentally disabled and for juveniles. Can you imagine your peers being sentenced to death?*
- *Because there is so much room for error - evidence being withheld or bad legal counsel, or a jury that is biased, over 130 people have been exonerated from death row. There are almost certainly more individuals whose innocence wasn't discovered in time to save their lives. People think that modern technology makes room for error smaller, but it doesn't really*
- *As it exists today, the death penalty is heavily biased racially; it is much more common for minorities to get the death penalty than it is for white people who have committed the same crimes. It is also biased toward the poor; there has never been a rich person on death row. We'll see more of this in the movie.*
- *It is time for our nation to abandon the illusion that we can protect life by taking life. Ending the use of the death penalty would be one important step away from a culture of death and toward building a culture of life. - USCCB, A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death, 2005.*

- Discussion questions/reflection

- As Catholics, we do claim to value life from conception to natural death. What does this mean to you?
- Why do you think the Church would teach that in very rare and extreme circumstances the death penalty is allowed?
- Recently two men in Ohio were exonerated of their crimes after spending 39 years in prison, including death row. Had there been a limitation on appeals these innocent men would have been executed for a crime they did not commit. What do you think of the perspective that it's acceptable to continue on with executions, even though it potentially means innocent people may be wrongfully convicted and executed?

- Closing prayer - A Prayer to End the Use of the Death Penalty, CMN (5 minutes)

Merciful father, we ask your blessing on all we do to build a culture of life. Hear our prayers for the impacted by the death penalty.

We pray for all people, that their lives and dignity as children of a loving God may be respected and protected in all stages and circumstances.

We pray for the victims of violence and their families, that they may experience our love and support and find comfort in your compassion and in the promise of eternal life.

We pray for those on death row, that their lives may be spared, that the innocent may be freed and that the guilty may come to acknowledge their faults and seek reconciliation with you.

We pray for the families of those who are facing execution that they may be comforted by your love and compassion. We pray for civic leaders, that they may commit themselves to respecting every human life and ending the use of the death penalty in our land.

Compassionate Father, give us wisdom and hearts filled with your love. Guide us as we work to end the use of the death penalty and build a society that truly chooses life in all situations. We ask this Father through your Son Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

- Notes, references
 - <http://catholicyouthministry.com/life-night/legit-defense/>
 - <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/death-penalty-capital-punishment/index.cfm>
 - Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) 2266-2267

6:30pm - Dinner Break

8:00pm - Movie - “Dead Man Walking”

- Background

Sister Helen Prejean has been instrumental in sparking national dialogue on the death penalty and helping to shape the Catholic Church’s newly vigorous opposition to state executions. She travels around the world giving talks about her ministry. She considers herself a southern storyteller.

In 1982, Sr. Helen started visiting Patrick Sonnier in Louisiana’s Angola Prison. She became his spiritual adviser, worked to prevent his execution, and finally walked with him to the electric chair. She did the same thing with a second prisoner, Robert Willie. Concerned with the plight of murder victims’ families she founded “Survive,” which provides counseling and support for grieving families.



And then she sat down and wrote a book about the experience. The result was *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States*, published in 1993. The book became a best seller, was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, and spawned an Oscar-winning movie and an internationally acclaimed opera. Tim Robbins has developed it into a play that is being performed by high school and college students across the country.

Since 1984, Sister Helen has divided her time between campaigning against the death penalty and counseling individual death row prisoners. She has accompanied six more men to their deaths.



- The Film

Dead Man Walking tells the story of the transformational relationship between Sr. Helen Prejean and Matthew Poncelet, a prisoner on death row. It is directed by Tim Robbins and features Susan Sarandon and Sean Penn. The film, released in 1995, is based on the book of the same name by Sr. Helen. It was nominated for and won numerous international film awards, including best actress and actor Oscars for Sarandon and Penn. Sr. Helen appears briefly in the film standing to the left of Sarandon keeping vigil outside the prison where Penn's character will be executed.

The film is rated "R" for depiction of rape and murder. It is advised that parental permission forms be collected from participants (this may be included as part of the standard event permission form - film viewing sample included at end of this package).

10:00pm - Debrief

- In the beginning of the film Sr. Helen's discomfort with being "called" to ministry in the prison is depicted. When have you had difficulty answering a call? Have there been times when you had to step way outside your comfort zone in order to move forward? When?
- During the parole hearing the film includes a rather detailed explanation of the execution process, which we see near the end of the film. Is this process "humane"? What would be a humane process for executing someone? How did you feel about the way the person to be executed is "displayed" to the witnesses?
- Sr. Helen is confronted by the victims' families for her lack of outreach to them. She works to change their perception of her and her motivations. Can you recall a time when you have had a conversation with someone that changed how you perceived them? That changed how they perceived you? How important is it to listen to and try to understand another person's story?
- Many Christians struggle with teachings of Jesus and the Church. In the film Sr. Helen says to one of the victims' family "I'm just trying to follow the example of Jesus, who said every person is worth more than their worst act." Why do you think people have such difficulty with the teachings of Jesus? Would it be difficult for you to look past a person's worst act - especially if you were hurt directly - and accept their dignity as a child of God? Why or why not?
- In 1999 Pope John Paul stated in regards to the death penalty "... the dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil." What needs to happen to help people understand this teaching? How

did Sr. Helen see beyond the “great evil” Matthew was a part of to understand his dignity?

- In a conversation with one of the prison guards Sr. Helen says “The Bible asks for death as a penalty for adultery, prostitution, homosexuality, trespassing upon sacred ground, profaning the Sabbath and contempt of parents.” Did you know the Bible appears to support the death penalty for what some would consider minor or victimless crimes? Did you know there are areas of the world today where people are executed by the state for some of these very crimes?
- Over the course of the film we experience the transformation of both Sr. Helen and Matthew. At the conclusion of the film it appears Mr. Delacroix has not been transformed, nor has he found peace in Matthew’s execution. Do you think executing someone heals others? Does it create a sense of closure? Why or why not?
- What is your overall reaction to the film? Has it changed your mind, or helped you to understand human dignity differently? Why or why not?
- Closing Prayer - A Prayer to Abolish the Death Penalty by Sr. Helen Prejean, CSJ

God of Compassion,

You let your rain fall on the just and the unjust.

Expand and deepen our hearts
so that we may love as You love,
even those among us
who have caused the greatest pain by
taking life.

For there is in our land a great cry for vengeance
as we fill up death rows and kill the killers
in the name of justice, in the name of peace.

Jesus, our brother,
you suffered execution at the hands of the state
but you did not let hatred overcome you.

Help us to reach out to victims of violence
so that our enduring love may help them heal.

Holy Spirit of God,
You strengthen us in the struggle for justice.

Help us to work tirelessly
for the abolition of state-sanctioned death
and to renew our society in its very heart
so that violence will be no more. Amen.



11:00pm - Quiet Fellowship

12:00am - Bed & Lights Out

Retreat Day Three

8:30am - Breakfast

9:30am - Morning Prayer

Reflecting on Forgiveness & Human Dignity - A Prayer Service for Youth
(included at end of this retreat package)

10:00am - Catechetical Session 5 - Restorative Justice

- Overview - "Circle Up"

The goal of this session is to introduce teens to the concept of restorative justice, which can serve as a solution to all of the issues we've discussed thus far. Participants will learn a response to wrongdoing that is forward-looking and seeks to heal all involved; proponents of restorative justice believe that the goal of punishment is to be medicinal. This is a strong departure from the typical retributive view. This session will serve as the capstone for all the previous sessions.

- Scripture Connections

- "You have heard that it was said, 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on (your) right cheek, turn the other one to him as well." - Matthew 5:39
- "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and unjust." - Matthew 5:43-45
- Learn to do good. Make justice your aim; redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow. - Isaiah 1:17
- Thus says the Lord of hosts: Judge with true justice, and show kindness and compassion toward each other. - Zechariah 7:9

- Music

- Me in Motion - Seek Justice, Love Mercy
- Graham Kendrick - God of the Poor (Beauty for Brokenness)
- Jon Foreman - Revenge
- Tenth Avenue North - You Are More

- The Setup

- Say to the group:

Most of our discussions this weekend have centered around one central topic: conflict. Conflict as it exists in the Criminal Justice System and what we can do about it as Catholics. So, this morning, we're going to see if we have the tools we need to address conflict - we're going to apply what we've learned.

- Catechetical Session (15-20 minutes)

The trouble with our current justice system lies in communication. We're so concerned with our own perspectives and concerns that we are unable or unwilling to see the concerns of other people involved. Remember when we did the Gab Bag

activity on the first day? Don't forget the different experiences that everyone has, and how the effect the way they look at things.

What is Restorative Justice? It is a theory of justice that emphasizes the repairing of harm caused by unjust behavior. It offers an alternative to Retributive Justice (eye for an eye) by holding offenders accountable, while simultaneously trying to redeem their broken situation. It is an acknowledgment that true justice is difficult work, but that the value and dignity of all persons involved is worth the effort.

- *Retributive Justice*
 - "Eye for an eye" justice, punishment that is equal to the crime
 - May easily slip into something that looks more like revenge than justice
- *Restorative Justice*
 - Seeking healing for victims and communities, restoring dignity of offenders
- *Responsibility*
 - Offenders take responsibility for their actions, accept appropriate punishment
- *Rehabilitation*
 - Offenders are challenged, encouraged, and rewarded for efforts to change their behaviors and attitudes
- *Restoration*
 - Healing is promoted by making the needs of the victim and the community the primary focus
- *Restorative justice fosters dialogue between the offender and the victim. It has the perspective that crime is against an individual or community, not the state. Therefore, justice should focus on a dialogue between those who were mostly involved. Crime hurts so justice should repair the harm as much as possible.*

So, what does restorative justice look like in action?

It is a process to involve as much as possible the victim, the affected community, even the offender and collectively identify harms, needs, healing, and obligation to make things as right as possible.

In prison, a positive utilization of restorative justice is through victim-offender mediation with a skilled facilitator. This could only be on a voluntary process; sometimes mediation is impossible or too painful to consider. However, participants in prison restorative justice programs have a recidivism rate of less than 2%. Clearly, it is effective when it can be implemented.

- *"An increasingly widespread and positive development in many communities is often referred to as restorative justice. Restorative justice focuses first on the victim and the community harmed by the crime, rather than on the dominant state-against-the-perpetrator model. This shift in focus affirms the hurt and loss of the victim, as well as the harm and fear of the community, and insists that offenders come to grips with the consequences of their actions. These approaches are not "soft on crime" because they specifically call the offender to face victims and the communities. This experience offers victims a much greater sense of peace and accountability. Offenders who are willing to face the human consequences of their actions are more ready to accept responsibility, make reparations, and rebuild their lives." - Catholic Bishops, RRR*

Restorative Justice isn't just something for prison, though. It can be used in your lives in very real ways. Recently, high schools have begun using restorative justice tactics to mediate conflicts among peers. Again, the goal is to make the wrongdoer aware of their action, understand their need to take accountability, and work to make things right.

- Discussion
 - Does this sound like restorative justice is “soft on crime”? Why or why not?
 - Restorative justice is designed to be just the opposite. What do you think may be the difficulties of bringing injured parties together with offenders? Have you been present or know of such situations? Did it work?
 - Do you think this technique requires more active participation than traditional punishment? Why or why not?
 - *I draw the attention of society’s leaders to the need to make every effort to eliminate the death penalty and to reform the penal system in a way that ensures respect for the prisoners’ human dignity...pastoral workers have the task of studying and recommending restorative justice as a means and a process for promoting reconciliation, justice and peace, and the return of victims and offenders to the community. - Pope Benedict XVI, Benin, November 2011*
 - *In the end, it is more effective towards bringing about redemption. In reference to the woman caught in adultery, “but only words of love, of mercy, which invite her to conversion.” - Pope Francis, March 17 2013, his first Angelus as pope*
- Activity - Accountability Circle (20-30 minutes)
 - Adaptable to groups of any size; generally, smaller groups (around 5 people, but no less than 3) will work best.
 - Materials needed: slips of paper with scenarios and container. Chairs should be arranged in a circle.
- Procedure
 - Say to the group:

Let’s pretend we’ve all been shipwrecked on a desert island. We’re pretty much on our own, and since it seems like we might be here a while, we’ve set up our own little village of sorts. At first this is really great, because we’re all pretty awesome people and we like each other - right? Everyone has a role to play. Unfortunately, conflict is bound to come up eventually; that’s pretty much a part of the human condition. It’s really hard to avoid. But, with that in mind, we also know what works and what doesn’t work in our justice system back home; we want to see if we can do a better job at dealing with conflict. So when conflict arises on our little island, what will you all do about it?
 - Ask for two volunteers from the group: one will play a wrongdoer and the other will be a victim. You may want to ask for a third participant to play the judge or facilitator; how this activity goes largely depends on the inclination of the participants. The rest of the participants will be bystanders, witnesses, secondary victims, or just generally members of the community depending on the scenario. Have the two volunteers sit in the middle of whatever area you’re in, with everyone else sitting around them. Although the two volunteers will be the focus of the activity, everyone else is welcome to join in the conversation - at a certain point, this will even be necessary.
 - Have one of the volunteers draw from the following scenarios out of a container. Alternatively, you may want to choose the scenarios for them, starting with relatively easy situations and moving onto more difficult ones. This is your choice.

Scenario 1: Person A has an idea or how to get off of the island, which he or she shares with Person B. Person B then shares this idea with the rest of the island,

passing it off as his or her own. As a result, Person B is enjoying increasing popularity, and Person A is perceived as grumpy and unhelpful.

Scenario 2: Person A has been spreading lies about Person B to the community. Although Person B's close friends attempt to defend him or her, these lies have a damaging effect on Person B's reputation.

Scenario 3: Everyone in the community has worked hard to build their own shelter. Some have worked harder than others; Person B has constructed a particularly elaborate shanty that took many hours to build. One night, in an act of carelessness, Person B destroys person A's new home.

Scenario 4: Since we arrived on the island, Person A and Person B just have not been getting along. As time passes, the tension between them grows. This often results in verbal arguments. One night, Person A physically attacks Person B, and community members have to tear them apart. Person B is rather significantly hurt, and is unable to work for several days.

- *Note that these situations are intentionally low on detail. It is up to the participants to fill in details such as motivation, background history, who else was involved, and so on. Encourage them to really get into their roles; the wrongdoer in each situation should feel that he or she had a very good reason for acting as they did. It is also up to them to determine what should be done to solve this conflict, but remind them to keep in mind the restorative justice concepts that have been discussed. How this situation plays out will vary depending the participants themselves. Let them work out the conflict on their own with as little guidance as possible. The important point is that a reach a conclusion where they feel like the conflict has been solved and justice is served.*

- Group Debrief Process (5-10 minutes)

After three or four scenarios - depending on the time - have the group come together.

- As you went through the scenarios what worked and what didn't?
- Did everyone feel like they said what needed to be said?
- Did everyone involved feel like they had made the correct choices, and that they had successfully dealt with the scenario?
- Do you think these scenarios would be likely to happen again, or were they resolved for good?

- Going deeper - discussion questions/reflection

- What is your reaction when someone wrongs you? When you do something wrong, how do you wish others would react?
- Can you think of situations where restorative justice would not work? Why? (e.g. limits on monetary restitution, one side isn't willing to participate, or victim requires offender to plead guilty.)
- Can you think of any ways that you can apply this to your own life in the future?

- Advocacy/real world applications

- How can you apply these concepts to your life after this weekend ends? Howard Zehr suggests:
 - 1. *Take relationships seriously, envisioning yourself in an interconnected web of people, institutions and the environment.*
 - 2. *Try to be aware of the impact - potential as well as actual - of your actions on others and the environment.*

- 3. *When your actions negatively impact others, take responsibility by acknowledging and seeking to repair the harm - even when you could probably get away with avoiding or denying it.*
- 4. *Treat everyone respectfully, even those you don't expect to encounter again, even those you feel don't deserve it, even those who have harmed or offended you or others.*
- 5. *Involve those affected by a decision, as much as possible, in the decision-making process.*
- "I challenge you to:" seek out situations to be a peacemaker...
- Closing prayer - A Prayer for Restorative Justice, CMN (5 minutes)

Let us silence our minds and open our hearts to praise God for this time we have been given to better understand how promoting restorative justice in our community - seeking resolution and healing through relationship - is a path that closely follows the way of Christ.

We pray with Pope John Paul, that "The dignity of human life [may] never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil."

We pray with Pope Benedict, that "Society's leaders will make every effort to eliminate the death penalty and to reform the criminal justice system in a way that ensures respect for the prisoners' human dignity."

We pray with Pope Francis, that we embrace "...the Lord's most powerful message: mercy" and "ask for the grace of never tiring of asking for forgiveness because [God] never tires of forgiving."

We pray for all those who promote restorative justice as a means of compassion and healing for victims and their loved ones, and restoration of the dignity of offenders and their families.

God, your love is unconditional - patient, kind, forgiving, and unchanging, even when we are undeserving. Help us respond to our higher calling by serving one another despite conflicts or bad behavior and remain open to the hope of peaceful co-existence.

We ask all this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.
- Notes, references
 - USCCB
 - CMN
 - <http://emu.edu/now/restorative-justice/2009/11/27/10-ways-to-live-restoratively/>
 - Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) 2266

11:30am - Free Time

12:00pm - Lunch Break

1:00pm - Catechetical Session 6 - Closing & Commissioning - Mission

- Overview - “Shake the Dust Off Your Feet”

This would be the advocacy/activism piece, what do you do with what you've learned. This will be the last session, will include commissioning and closing prayer. I'd like to tie it in scripturally to the sending of the disciples where Christ talks about if your message is not received shake the dust and move on. This is good for any social justice work and especially for a difficult topic like this. We can bookend the session with other other scripture.

- Scripture Connections

- You have been told, O mortal, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: only to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God. - Micah 6:8
- Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. - Colossians 3:12-13
- Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh. - Luke 6:21

- Music

- Chris Rice - Go Light Your World
- Sidewalk Prophets - Change This Heart
- Audrey Assad - Come Thou Fount
- Addison Road - What Do I Know of Holy

- Opening prayer - Mary Undoer of Knots (adapted for group use)

Virgin Mary, Mother of fair love, Mother who never refuses to come to the aid of a child in need, Mother whose hands never cease to serve your beloved children because they are moved by the divine love and immense mercy that exists in your heart, cast your compassionate eyes upon us and see the snarl of knots that exist in our lives.

You know very well how desperate we are, our pain, and how we are bound by these knots.

Mary, Mother to whom God entrusted the undoing of the knots in the lives of his children, we entrust into your hands the ribbon of our lives. No one, not even the Evil One himself, can take it away from your precious care. In your hands there is no knot that cannot be undone.

Powerful Mother, by your grace and intercessory power with Your Son and our Liberator, Jesus, take into your hands today these knots.

We beg you to undo them for the glory of God, once for all. You are our hope. Our Lady, you are the only consolation God gives us, the fortification of our feeble strength, the enrichment of our destitution, and, with Christ, the freedom from our chains.

Hear our plea.

Keep us, guide us, protect us, o safe refuge!

Mary, Undoer of Knots, pray for us.

Amen.

(Original here: <http://www.praymorenovenas.com/mary-undoer-knots-novena/>)

- Warmer - Taking a Stand (10-15 minutes)

- Procedure

Participants are instructed facilitator will name something. After the item has been named, participants will physically move to the side of the room designated “Love” or the opposite “Hate” side. Random participants will be asked to “defend” their choices. Eventually some participants will gravitate to or ask permission to stand in the middle. They are also encouraged to defend their choice.

- Taking a Stand (Love/Hate)

- *School*
 - *Roller Coasters*
 - *Pizza*
 - *Country Music*
 - *Chocolate*
 - *Television*
 - *Reading*
 - *Sports*
 - *Internet*

Now that the format has been established, participants are instructed we will go deeper. Now they must choose between “Agree” and “Disagree” and the choices are more difficult. Again, participants will be randomly asked to defend their choices. Some participants may ask if they can move (or will naturally gravitate) to the opposite side as they hear explanations.

- Taking a Stronger Stand (Agree/Disagree)

- *Parents should be held responsible for the actions of their children*
 - *There is too much sex and violence on television*
 - *Government officials should not be trusted*
 - *It is acceptable to protest what we believe to be unjust, even if it means breaking the law*
 - *People are responsible for their situation in life*
 - *Everyone should pay the same percentage of their income in taxes*
 - *Racism is no longer an issue in today’s society*

- Debrief

- Did you find it difficult to make your choices? Why or why not?
 - Did you change sides after you heard others defend their positions? Why or why not?
 - How difficult is it for people to stand up for what they believe in? What are the things that discourage us from taking a stand?

- Catechetical Session (30-40 minutes)

- Say to the group:

We’ve covered a lot of topics over the past few days. We talked about Catholic social teaching and the dignity of all people, we talked about the power of forgiveness, we talked about all the discouraging facts surrounding the criminal justice system and what the Church teaches about the death penalty, we watched a movie, based on a real story, about an executed man, and we’ve learned about restorative justice as a potentially solution to the problems that have been raised this weekend. You all have also been learning, on your own, a little bit about real life people who have been involved in capital cases. Put all together, the criminal justice system, knowing what is right and wrong and how to fix it - it just seems like one big mess. A tangle! Restorative justice may be a solution, but it needs

people to support it; what we need is people who will spread God's love...You all have seen what we can accomplish when we're willing to work together. I'm sure at some points to just give up and let go of each other's hands, but you all saw for yourselves just what you can accomplish with persistence, patience, and teamwork.

- Ask the participants to be quiet and attentive as you read...

Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: the first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him.

These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give. Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, or a bag for your journey, or even two coats, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support. And whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it, and stay at his house until you leave that city. As you enter the house, give it your greeting. If the house is worthy, give it your blessing of peace. But if it is not worthy, take back your blessing of peace.

Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet. Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable to the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for that city. - Matthew 10:1-15

- Pause, allowing time for the passage to really sink in. Then repeat it one more time, telling the participants to listen for anything that stands out to them.

- After a moment, say:

I'm going to read the passage again. This time, I want you to listen for a specific word or phrase that stands out to you. After I finish reading I want you to share with a couple neighbors your word or phrase and explain why that stood out to you.

- After reading the passage second time, give participants an opportunity to share the phrases that stood out to them. Invite them to share these with the larger group as well. Explain:

As you can see, scripture will say different things to different people. It will even say different things to you each time you listen to it or read it. This is because we are in a different place emotionally or mentally each time we approach scripture. It allows us to understand God's Word in new ways and help us grow spiritually.

- Explain that you will read the passage one final time. This time, tell the participants that they are to listen to the story as a whole.

- Debrief

- What do you think you're meant to get out of this passage?
- What do you think the story says about activism?
- What did stand out differently to you each of the three times we read the passage?

- *I have a dogmatic certainty: God is in every person's life. God is in everyone's life. Even if the life of a person has been a disaster, even if it is destroyed by vices, drugs, or anything else - God is in this person's life. You can, you must try to seek God in every human life. Although the life of a person is a land full of thorns and weeds, there is always space in which the good seed can grow. You have to trust God.* - Pope Francis, *Interview with America Magazine, September 2013*

- Discussion/reflection (10 minutes)

As Catholics, we aren't just called to believe. We're called to be active about those beliefs and do something about them; we need to spread good to the world. Sometimes that's going to be very hard; knots seem impossible to undo, some people seem impossible to love as Christ demands, sometimes it is hard for us to take a public stand. But we need to be like the apostles. We need to trust that we can use our gifts for good, that God will give us the grace we need to go on.

Whenever you feel doubt, don't be afraid to look to Mary. The idea is that Mary can help us to untie those really tough knots in our lives, the ones that seem impossible. With Mary's help, we can fix these knots in our lives and come closer to Christ...

- Instruct participants to take a few moments to write in their journals about what they'll take away from this retreat. What they've learned. What has made them uncomfortable. What has transformed them.

- Advocacy/real world applications

- How can you all get involved, and take what you've learned this weekend out into the world?
- How can you work to undo the difficult knots in life?
- How can you "shake the dust off your feet"?

- *Don't stop learning. Educate yourself about the death penalty and criminal justice system, particularly as it exists in your state. Then pass on this knowledge to others.*
- *Become an advocate with politicians -regarding issues of torture/solitary confinement/ sentencing/cruel and unusual punishment*
- *Visit organizations/websites to learn more - CMN, USCCB, EJUSA, DPIC, Restorative Justice Online*
- *Pray, pray, pray, then pray some more*

Challenge participants to think of ways to be active themselves; although there are many opportunities for advocacy, they vary state-by-state and with accessibility to high schoolers. Suggest that participants start an advocacy group within their parish to continuously meet, learn, and challenge each other.

- *Prison penpals, prayer groups, and book drives are all accessible options*
- *One option that can help them educate themselves and others is the **Dead Man Walking Theater Project**, which can be found at <http://catholicismobilizing.org/programs/dead-man-walking-school-theatre-project/>*

- Commissioning

- *(adapted from USCCB Commissioning Service <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/catechetical-sunday/commissioning-service.cfm>)*

- Leader:

Lord God, source of all wisdom and knowledge, you sent your Son, Jesus Christ, to live among us and to proclaim his message of faith, hope, and love to all nations.

In your goodness bless our brothers and sisters who have offered themselves as advocates for justice and instruments of mercy for your Church.

Strengthen them with your gifts, that they may teach by word and by example the truth that comes from you.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

- Closing prayer

Heavenly Father, You've revealed to us everything we need to know and do in order to love You best and grow close to You. Help us remember Your commandments, and, above all, Your mercy and love. Imprint them on our hearts even more than they already are, and guide us to spread that love to others. Let us spread the warmth of your love so that others can feel it, too. Don't let us forget the dignity of all life.

Father, the prayer that You taught the apostles called all Christians to forgive as You forgive us. Help us to joyfully rise to this challenge and emulate your gracious forgiveness. Remind us that sin, while always condemnable, should not be equated to the sinner.

Father, don't let us off the hook when it comes to the outcasts of society; after all, You said that the last shall be first at the end of time. You also said that what we do to the least of men we do to You. Let us not forget that this includes those who commit crime; although You are perfectly just, You are also perfectly merciful. In our desire to be just and to punish crime, don't let us overshoot our target and pervert this virtue; let us seek true justice, for all involved, a justice that heals. Let us remember the sources of crime and work to fix these causes. Guide our leaders; help them guide us to a better, holier society.

Heavenly Father, You sent Your son to be executed on the cross. Although this is the center of our faith, it is easy for us to take for granted what it really means. Although Christ were innocent and died to save us, there are men and women who are also facing death. In Your infinite wisdom, guide us to minister to them as best we can. If it is in your plan for them to face death, allow them to truly convert and enter into the kingdom of heaven, like the repentant thief on Good Friday. If at all possible, help us to preserve life until its natural end, and consistently choose life in all cases.

Amen.

- Farewell

- Closing Remarks

- Notes/references

- http://www.jubed.com/youth_ministry/view/Human-Knot/
- All scripture passages are from USCCB, New American Bible
- <http://www.theholyroary.org/maryundoerknots>
- Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) 1939-1942

2:00pm - Depart from Retreat Location

Material Needs

- Bible
- Journals for each participant
- Pens/pencils, enough for each participant
- “Dead Man Walking” DVD
- Poster Board
- Sheets of lined paper, enough for each participant
- Masking Tape
- Copies of “Reflecting on Forgiveness & Human Dignity” Prayer Service for each participant
- Four Scenarios on individual slips of paper for Session 5
- Container for paper

Participant Movie Pass

Dear Parent/Guardian:

During our retreat “Where Justice and Mercy Meet” we will view the film “Dead Man Walking.” The film tells the story of the transformational relationship between Sr. Helen Prejean and Matthew Poncelet, a prisoner on death row. It is directed by Tim Robbins and features Susan Sarandon and Sean Penn. The film, released in 1995, is based on the book of the same name by Sr. Helen. It was nominated for and won numerous international film awards, including best actress and actor Oscars for Sarandon and Penn.



The film is rated “R” for brief depictions of rape and murder. These scenes are not gratuitous and are essential to the complete understanding of the story. Following the film there will be a detailed discussion of the content of the film, including religious and moral themes.

Please fill out this page and return it to the retreat leader.

I, _____ parent/guardian of
_____ hereby give permission for
them to participate in the viewing of the film “Dead Man Walking”
as a part of their retreat experience.

Signed

Date

Reflecting on Forgiveness & Human Dignity

Welcome & Introduction

Leader: *We come together in prayer to consider what God says to us about mercy and forgiveness. Granting forgiveness to someone that has committed a crime, even done great evil is a struggle for many. However, when asked how many times we should forgive Christ said “seventy times seven.” That doesn’t mean 490 and we stop. It means we’re required to forgive again and again and again. This is not an easy thing to do. It also doesn’t mean that in forgiving we forget. But through forgiveness we create opportunities for healing and growth. May our prayers help us understand we are to be instruments of mercy, and advocates for the sacredness of all life in our world.*

Opening Song – Gather Us In

1. Here in this place new light is streaming,
Now is the darkness vanished away,
See in this space our fears and our dreamings,
Brought here to you in the light of this day.
Gather us in the lost and forsaken,
Gather us in the blind and the lame;
Call to us now, and we shall awaken,
We shall arise at the sound of our name.
2. We are the young – our lives are a myst’ry,
We are the old who yearn for your face,
We have been sung throughout all of hist’ry,
Called to be light to the whole human race.
Gather us in the rich and the haughty,
Gather us in the proud and the strong;
Give us a heart so meek and so lowly,
Give us the courage to enter the song.
3. Not in the dark of buildings confining,
Not in some heaven, light years away,
But here in this place the new light is shining,
Now is the Kingdom, now is the day.
Gather us in and hold us forever,
Gather us in and make us your own;
Gather us in all peoples together,
Fire of love in our flesh and our bone.

Ritual

- *A candle is lit*
- *A Bible is enshrined*
- *A crucifix is enshrined*

Leader:

God of mercy, you gave your son Jesus Christ as a gift of salvation for all people. Through his life and witness we understand that all life is sacred, the human dignity of all people is to be respected, and all are deserving of mercy and compassion. Help us to grow in love and see the face of Jesus in all we encounter, the guilty as well as the innocent. We ask this through Christ our Lord ~

All: *Amen*

Leader: *Let us now open our hearts and minds to God’s Word*

Reader: *A reading from the Gospel according to Matthew (Matthew 6:14-15):*

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

The Gospel of the Lord

All: *Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ*

Reflection

Leader: *Take a moment and think of a time when someone hurt you - a family member, a friend, anyone. As you take a few moments in silence, consider the following questions:*

- *What makes it difficult for you to forgive someone?*
- *Are there people we just can’t or won’t forgive?*

~ Allow a few moments for silent reflection ~

Now think of a time when you hurt someone and asked forgiveness:

- *How hard was it to ask for forgiveness?*
- *How did you feel when you were forgiven?*

~ Allow a few moments for silent reflection ~

It is difficult to forgive, and it is difficult to ask for forgiveness. However, these are moments when we must be open to God’s grace in our lives. God gives all of us the opportunity for redemption of our sins. When we support abortion, euthanasia, the death penalty or other means that seek to end life unnaturally we limit or interfere with the possibility for personal redemption and reconciliation with God.

A Litany of Forgiveness

Leader: *Let us pray... Gracious and loving God, Jesus told us we must forgive and forgive again, as you forgive us. We ask forgiveness for our failings, or for the times we have allowed the failings of others to harden our hearts and minds.*

All respond: Have mercy on us, Lord.

- *For the times we've been hurt and found it difficult to forgive...*
 - *For the times we have turned our back on someone rather than seek reconciliation...*
 - *For the times we've hurt others, intentionally or unintentionally...*
 - *For the times we have turned away from the poor, the sick, the imprisoned...*
 - *For the times we have made fun of someone, excluded someone, made someone feel they were unimportant...*
- All respond: Lord, hear our prayer.*
- *Help us to have hearts of compassion and love...*
 - *Help us to put the needs of others before our own...*
 - *Help us bring healing to all those lives touched by violence, crime or neglect...*
 - *Help us nourish a culture of life that respects the dignity of all...*
 - *Help us be models of conversion and transformation...*

Concluding Prayers

Leader: *Let us pray...*

Loving God, we ask you to hold in your special care all those that have their lives threatened by means of violence or punishment. Strengthen those that stand against the unnatural ending of human life. Open the hearts and minds of your people so they may come to better understand that all life is sacred, even the lives of those that have done great evil.

All: Amen

Leader: *And may God bless us and keep us in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit ~*

All: Amen

Leader: *Go now in peace to love and serve the Lord and one another:*

All: Thanks be to God.

Reflecting on Forgiveness & Human Dignity

A Prayer Service for Youth



www.catholicsmobilizing.org