

Prayer Resource



Corporal Works of Mercy



How to use the Mercy Partners Prayer Resource



About the Prayer Resource

The Prayer Resource contains nine prayers focused on the Corporal Works of Mercy.

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|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Corporal Works of Mercy | 6. Visit the imprisoned |
| 2. Feed the hungry | 7. Visit the sick |
| 3. Give drink to the thirsty | 8. Bury the dead |
| 4. Clothe the naked | 9. Care for our common home |
| 5. Welcome the stranger | |

For ease of use, the prayer resource is presented in a folder which contains 10 copies of each of the prayers, an Acknowledgement of Country and a Living the Corporal Works of Mercy card.

The prayer cards contain an overview of the work of mercy, a reading/reflection on the theme, a follow up reflection/discussion question and a prayer (references are included for all sources).

Prayer is essential at the commencement of meetings in a Catholic ministry for focus, to reinforce Catholic identity and to call God's blessings on the proceedings. Prayer time is also formative as it allows those present to examine aspects of life, faith and experience.

Using the Prayer Resource

The structure of each prayer is the same:

1. The front of the card should be read by the prayer leader. The leader may also wish to light a candle or use another centering device for the gathering of the group into a prayerful space.
2. The reading/reflection (back of card) develops or elaborates on the work of mercy. The leader could ask a member of the group to read this reflection.
3. A reflection question is provided for group discussion, or if the group is larger, one-to-one sharing might be more effective. The time used for this discussion is dependent on the group, but a minimum of 5 minutes is recommended.
4. The final prayer should be said as a group. At this time, those gathered could be asked for any specific prayer intentions or remembrances (personal or specific to the ministry).

We have included a scripture quote which reinforces the understanding of God as present in and through all people: a God of justice, compassion and mercy who invites us all to join in this way of living.

Prayer and reflection are a catalyst for change:

- They let in the Spirit of wisdom, presence, thanksgiving and communion.
- They invite participants to open their hearts to new ways of seeing and understanding.
- They bring God to the forefront of the meeting: its business, concerns, challenges and interactions.
- They provide a template for prayer in all parts of an organisation and model how such prayer can be facilitated.

For further information on this resource email
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CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY

The Corporal Works of Mercy invite us to share in God's mission in our world; a mission of compassion, love, protection and honouring of the dignity of the human person. The Corporal Works are derived from the Gospels, especially Matthew 25:40, where Jesus reminds us that whatever we do for people who are in most need, we do it to him. Indeed, Jesus' life and teachings clearly guide us in living the mercy of God: reaching out to the poor, walking with the lonely and suffering, being present to the marginalised and vulnerable.

The Corporal Works of Mercy are: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, visit the imprisoned, visit the sick, bury the dead, show mercy to our common home.



Jesus said: “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” (John 13:15)

In scripture, the concept of mercy connotes feelings and actions which are deeply personal, one-to-one, unique, special, tender, and warm. The tender love shown when Jesus washed the disciples' feet was an expression of humility and hospitality and set a standard for how we visibly express love to our neighbours.

Classically, in trying to teach this to us, the church compiled various lists which tried to summarise what is implied in imitating God's mercy. The corporal works of mercy are one such list, though there are others. In essence, these lists try to challenge us to be more holy, God-like, through practising a justness which is more personal, one to one, warm, and gracious beyond strict need. The works of mercy ask us to make everyone, especially the poor and needy, our family (Rolheiser, R. Accessed at bit.ly/36wW9Xz).

How
does the call
to mercy through
the Corporal Works
inspire the life of
your ministry?

God of Justness and Love,
Open our eyes to the needs
of the people around us.
Open our ears to the call
for justice and equality.
Open our minds to the reality
of exclusion and disadvantage.
Open our hearts to love and mercy.
Amen

FEED THE HUNGRY



Feeding the hungry seems a straightforward process: if people are hungry, we provide food. However, if we move beyond the literal consideration of hunger, we see that there are many types of hunger in the human experience. People are hungry for meaning, for kindness, for justice, for companionship, for peace and an end to suffering in its many forms. The Gospel call to feed the hungry is a call to attentiveness to the needs within our own communities; a call to respond with kindness and compassion.

If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? (James 2:15-16)

*Sometimes when we look out, the world seems so dark. War, violence, hunger, and misery seem to abound. This makes us anxious and helpless. What can I do in my private little corner of life that could have any effect on the march of world events? The usual answer is: nothing... (but) when we yield to helplessness, we strengthen the hand of those who would destroy. When we choose indifference, we betray our world... even in our own hidden life, we can become powerful agents of transformation... We have no idea of the effect we can have on one another. This is where blessing can achieve so much. Blessing as powerful and positive intention can transform situations and people (O'Donohue, J. *The Sacred Space Between Us*. 2008. p.216-217).*

**Who
are the
hungry in your
community? What
can your ministry
do to bless and
transform the
world?**

God of Abundance,
May we be ever attentive to the hunger which surrounds us:
Hunger for food and nutrition among those living in poverty,
famine or social upheaval
Hunger for attention in those living with loneliness and heartbreak
Hunger for justice in the marginalised, victimised and downtrodden
Hunger for meaning, for hope, for forgiveness, for love...
May we find ways to help those who hunger
and become solution builders for a fairer world.
Amen

GIVE DRINK TO THE THIRSTY



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Water is something we take for granted. Turn on a tap and it is there. But this is not the case for everyone on our planet. As Pope Francis notes, “Access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights... But water continues to be wasted, not only in the developed world but also in developing countries which possess it in abundance. This shows that the problem of water is partly an educational and cultural issue, since there is little awareness of the seriousness of such behavior within a context of great inequality” (Laudato Si’ n.30).

Jesus said to his disciples: “whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones... truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.” (Matthew 10:42)

The call to give drink to the thirsty touches on the fundamentals of human life. It calls on us to look beyond our own boundaries and advocate for a just distribution of resources across the world. It calls on us to be aware of the plight of our fellow human beings and the structures which reinforce resource injustice. As Sobrino notes, ‘When Jesus wishes to show us what it is to be an ideal human... he narrates the parable of the Good Samaritan... The ideal, total human being is represented as one who has seen someone else lying wounded in a ditch along the road, has reacted, and helped in every way possible... For Jesus, to be a human being is to react with mercy (Sobrino, J. *The Principle of Mercy*. 1994. p.17).

How
does
your ministry
protect and
preserve
water?

Living Water, Source of Life,
Flow through us into the world.
Wash away our selfishness and blindness
so that we truly care for our Earth.
Help us to look for ways to preserve and protect water
to ensure that all people have access.
Create in us hearts which respond to the cry
of those made poor.
May we have the courage to create a more just
and equitable distribution of the essentials of life.
Amen

CLOTHE THE NAKED



Clothing has many functions in our world – yes it keeps us warm, but it also denotes status, identifies us as a member of a group or profession, allows us to express joy and celebration and marks religious occasions and positions. This work of mercy challenges us to consider the impact of vulnerability in life: physical, social, emotional and spiritual, and to question how our society protects the dignity of all. It also reminds us that we should be grateful for those people in our families and communities who surround us with warmth and comfort.

As many vulnerable people rely on charitable organisations for their clothing, one direct way to carry out this work of mercy is to make regular donations of clothing, blankets and other necessities. But mercy compels us to look more broadly at our clothing industries: the treatment of poorly paid workers in manufacturing sweatshops; the environmental problems caused by rampant fashion consumerism including pollution, waste disposal and dumping of clothing in offshore landfills.

Clothing is not only necessary for bodily protection; we also need it to maintain our human dignity. In the Gospel when the prodigal son returns home, the father gives him his best robe, shoes on his feet, and a ring. These items symbolize the young man's dignity as the father's son and show that his position has been restored to him (Accessed at bit.ly/3JKAaL2).

**How
can your
ministry assist
those in need of
warmth and
protection?**

God of Comfort,
May we always give thanks for those
who wrap us in warmth and comfort.
Clothe us in humility and compassion
so we might understand the vulnerability
of those with whom we live and work.
Help us to enfold others in caring concern,
forgiveness, encouragement and respect.

Remind us of the importance
of protecting the dignity of all those
with whom we live and work.

Amen



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Yeats is reputed to have said: *"There are no strangers here; only friends you haven't met yet."* This perspective underpins Jesus' call to shelter the homeless and welcome strangers. To be a stranger is to not fit in or be recognised, but this state is only temporary – once words are exchanged, the stranger becomes an acquaintance and eventually maybe a friend. The challenge then is to connect, build relationships, say hello, smile and include. We can address this corporal work of mercy by reaching out to the unloved, the lonely and the unpopular and by practising radical hospitality.

Ruth said: “Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.” (Ruth 1:16)

Our interdependence, our interconnectedness, is far more significant than (our) differences – whether based on gender, ethnicity, politics, religion or any other source of identity... That's who we are. We exist in a shimmering, vibrating web of interconnectedness... Just look at the everyday acts of kindness, compassion, goodwill – cooperation – that go unremarked precisely because they are unremarkable for members of a species like ours (Mackay, H. The Kindness Revolution. 2021. p44-45).

This connectedness is illustrated in the biblical story of Ruth, who was a young woman who found herself a stranger in Israel, a country that differed in culture, religion and background from the one in which she was raised. It is a story about crossing boundaries, of an immigrant who came from a country that was deemed suspicious, and about overcoming prejudices by showing compassion and generosity.

How
can you
build inclusive
structures of
welcome and
hospitality?

May we be shepherds in our world seeking out the lost and isolated, including with a word and smile those who are marginalised, challenging prejudice and division based on race or religion. Like Ruth may we put relationships at the centre of all that we do.

Amen

VISIT THE IMPRISONED



There are many prisons in the human experience and many opportunities to practise this corporal work of mercy. The lonely, the excluded, the shut-in, those who are caught up in cycles of dependency and violence, those in long term care, or those crippled by fear and self-doubt: these are people for whom visiting is a lifeline, a connection to others which reinforces that we are all one. The reality of a global pandemic has dramatically illustrated our need for human connection and kindness, of the importance of checking in with those who live alone, and of the social, spiritual and psychological consequences of lockdowns and isolation.

Remember those who are in prison, as if in prison with them. (Hebrews 13:3)

The reality is that many of those in our prisons are there not because they are serious criminals but because they are poor. The inability to pay fines, the escalating cost of legal representation, the growth in people living in insecure housing and the inadequacy of social support payments all contribute to the high percentages of poor, under-educated, mentally unwell and drug dependent people in our prisons. Recent research shows that almost all of the national prison population lived below the poverty line and the same percentage had not completed secondary education (Accessed at bit.ly/3iEvCKi).

In a country as wealthy as Australia, imprisonment for the poor and disadvantaged is a national challenge and a moral disgrace.

**Who
are the
isolated and
imprisoned
in your
world?**

God of connection and friendship,
You have created us to live in community.
We pray for all the imprisoned,
those on the inside,
whose confinement is obvious
and those on the outside,
whose imprisonment is subtler.
Like Elijah, may we find comfort in your promise
to be with us when we feel lost or abandoned.
May we seek ways to address
the poverty and lack of opportunity
that lead to imprisonment.
Amen

VISIT THE SICK



The sick are vulnerable. They are often unable to help themselves, are locked in fear about their capacity to get well and yearn for company in the long hours of confinement. There are many examples of people who have ministered to the sick and infirm, comforting them through their presence and their care. Catherine McAuley, founder of the Sisters of Mercy, Nano Nagle, founder of the Presentation Sisters and St Teresa of Calcutta all addressed the health needs of the poorest people of their day through practical support, visitation and prayer. We too are called to care for those in our families and communities who are sick and also to support the work of medical staff, pastoral care workers and administrators who ensure quality care in our hospitals.

Do not hesitate to visit the sick, because for such deeds you will be loved. (Sirach 7:35)

Mother Teresa and her sisters picked people off filthy pavements to allow them to die in dignity. To my knowledge, there's still no one else doing that. Seeing Mother Teresa through the eyes of the man on the Kolkata street makes me pause. What would happen to these people if it weren't for the Teresas of this world reaching out to them in ways I certainly couldn't (Accessed at bit.ly/35hiw2x).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church identifies *illness and suffering* as being among the... *gravest problems confronted in human life...* (n.1500) because sickness can render us powerless, fearful and conscious of the fragility of life itself. For this reason being present with those who are sick and infirm is a great act of love and a reminder to the sick person that they do matter, that there is hope and that their fears can be shared.

**How does
your ministry
respond to
those who are
sick?**

God of Love,
Remind us of the vulnerability of the sick,
the frail and those with chronic diseases.
May we be willing, as Jesus was, to reach out
to those who struggle with their health.
Inspire us to follow the example of
Catherine McAuley, Nano Nagle
and St Teresa of Calcutta
who courageously ministered to the sick
and vulnerable of their day.
We remember those in our community who are sick
(pause for names)
Amen

BURY THE DEAD



This corporal work seems obvious, and our society has rituals and processes for laying to rest those who have died. But this has not always been the case. Care for the human body is a relatively recent practice and there are still circumstances where respect is not always accorded to the dead, particularly in times of war or social upheaval. We can address this corporal work of mercy, not just through funeral attendance, but also in caring for those who grieve and remembering deceased friends and family members with gratitude ensuring that their love and kindness live on.

Give graciously to all the living; do not withhold kindness even from the dead. (Sirach 7:33)

A funeral ritual or burial is a public, traditional, and symbolic means of expressing our beliefs, thoughts, and feelings about death. Rituals allow us to grieve, to remember and to support one another in sharing memories of a loved one through story and symbol. In burying the dead, we not only give testimony to the life of the deceased, but also reaffirm our core beliefs about life, death and the afterlife. Rituals unite us as a community.

Burial rituals give us the opportunity to bless those we love and to envelop them in our love. O'Donohue reminds us of the power of blessing: *"Whenever one person takes another into the care of their heart, they have the power to bless... To bless someone is to offer a beautiful gift"* (*To Bless the Space Between Us*. 2008. p207).

**What
rituals does
your ministry
practise to
remember those
who have
died?**

God of Love and Compassion,
May we embrace those who are dying,
support those who grieve and remember those
we have loved and whose love lives on in us.
May we continue to bless those who have died
in our remembrance and prayer.

Let's pause to call to mind
those in our community who have died
(pause for names)

Amen



CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME



Pope Francis added care of creation to the traditional sets of both the corporal and spiritual works of mercy in 2016. As a corporal work of mercy, showing mercy to our common home requires deliberate daily gestures and actions which end exploitation and violence against the Earth. Pope Francis reinforced the need for all people to show mercy to the Earth, our common home, *“Pollution and global warming, due partly to human activity, has turned the beauty of God’s creation into a polluted wasteland that impacts the world’s poor, who have suffered the brunt of our irresponsible and selfish behaviour”* (Accessed at bit.ly/388fyyv).

I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. (Jeremiah 2:7)

Once we start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations, we look at things differently; we realize that the world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others. Since the world has been given to us, we can no longer view reality in a purely utilitarian way, in which efficiency and productivity are entirely geared to our individual benefit. Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us (Francis. *Laudato Si'*. 2015. n.59).

**St Francis
and Pope
Francis – how do
these faith leaders
challenge us to care
for the environment
and respect God's
creation?**

Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures, especially Brother Sun,
who is the day through whom you give us light...

Through Sister Moon and the stars,
in the heavens you have made them bright, precious and fair...

Through Brothers Wind and Air, fair and stormy,
all weather's moods, by which you cherish all that you have made...

Through Sister Water, so useful, humble, precious and pure...

Through Brother Fire, through whom you light the night
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be you, my Lord, through our Sister,
Mother Earth who sustains and governs us.

Amen

Extract from the Canticle of Creation (St Francis of Assisi)