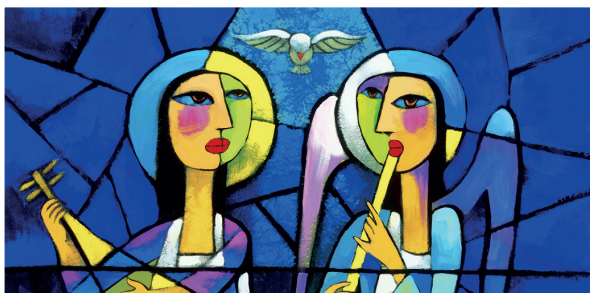
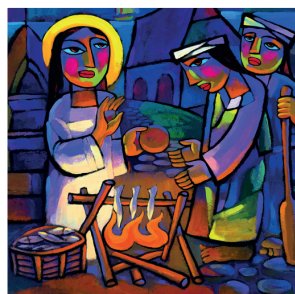


Prayer Resource



Spiritual Works of Mercy



How to use the Mercy Partners Prayer Resource



About the Prayer Resource

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

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Spiritual Works of Mercy | 6. Bear wrongs patiently |
| 2. Comfort the sorrowful | 7. Forgive offences willingly |
| 3. Counsel the doubtful | 8. Pray for the living & the dead |
| 4. Instruct the uninformed | 9. Care for creation |
| 5. Admonish the sinner | |

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 Spiritual 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
formation@mercypartners.org.au

SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY



While corporal works of mercy concern the material and physical needs of others, the spiritual works address the needs of their hearts and spirit. God's call to mercy is everywhere, calling us to action, knocking loudly on the barriers we erect, challenging us in our quieter moments. As Rupp reminds us: *"listening is to be cultivated and renewed each day... we cannot run through life and expect that we will hear what stirs deep within us or notice what begs our attention without regularly adjusting our listening antennae"* (*Open the Door*. 2008. p.47). What a different world we would have if we cultivated attentiveness to the needs of others and made the works of mercy our mission and cultural touchstones.

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking... (Revelation 3:20)

The works of mercy affect a person's entire life. For this reason, we can set in motion a real cultural revolution, beginning with simple gestures capable of reaching body and spirit... This is a commitment that the Christian community should take up, in the knowledge that God's word constantly calls us to leave behind the temptation to hide behind indifference and individualism in order to lead a comfortable life free of problems. Jesus tells his disciples: "The poor you always have with you" (John 12:8). There is no alibi to justify not engaging with the poor when Jesus has identified himself with each of them (Pope Francis. Misericordia et Misera. n.20).

**How
does Pope
Francis' call for a
cultural revolution
of mercy challenge
your ministry?**

God of mercy and compassion
Be with us as we journey together.
Help us to listen to your call to be
hearts of mercy in our place and time.
Bless our decisions, our directions,
our challenges.
Help us to carry the banner
for a different view of life,
one which honours the
God presence in all people
and promotes love,
compassion and hope.
Amen

COMFORT THE SORROWFUL



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Who are the sorrowful in our society?

Sorrow has many faces and many sources. Our society has an epidemic of depression and other mental health issues suggesting we have lost connection with what brings personal happiness. As some of the people we meet each day might be carrying enormous sorrow, we are challenged to practise kindness and to be open to helping when needed; to always remember the power of a word, a smile, or a gesture. There are transformative blessings in mercy and compassion, as O'Donohue reminds us: *"wherever one person takes another into the care of their heart, they have the power to bless"* (To Bless the Space Between Us. 2008. p.207).

They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32)

Everyone is in need of kindness, because everyone walks with shadows – all of those living with the pain of disappointment, frustration, humiliation, rejection, or loss. Kindness is the universal balm for troubled souls, the gift that says, ‘I understand the need for kindness, because I share it’ (Mackay, H. *The Kindness Revolution*. 2021. p.40).

The scriptural account of the journey to Emmaus shows the deep sorrow of Jesus’ followers after the crucifixion. Hopes were dashed, his teachings seemed empty and the future looked bleak. A cloud of despair had settled over them. But Jesus appeared to them on their walk, as a reminder that our God truly walks with us in good times and bad; that we sometimes need to see things with new eyes and that change of heart comes when we take time to share and listen with others. As Chittister notes, “mercy is learned first in the human heart” (*God’s Tender Mercy*. 2010. p.13).

Where
are the sorrows
in your ministry?
How can your
ministry be a model
of comfort for
others?

God of love
May we be Emmaus people,
conscious of your love
and presence among us.
Give us hearts of mercy to reach out,
support and comfort others.
Remind us of the transformational impact
of acts of kindness and compassion.
Amen

COUNSEL THE DOUBTFUL



Everyone has moments of doubt. Life experiences often rock our confidence, and the everyday pressures of an ever-changing world can sap energy. The word doubt comes from the Latin *dubitare*, to question or hesitate, suggesting decisions between alternatives or fear of moving forward. If we are called to counsel the doubtful, we must practise open-mindedness; we must seek wisdom and most importantly we must always avoid imposing solutions on those who are struggling.

Jesus said: “Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.”

Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:27-28)

The call to counsel the doubtful reinforces the importance of cultivating hope and affirming others whenever possible. The ‘how’ of this work of mercy is varied, but the doubtful who seek counsel are seeking a compassionate heart, a listening ear and an approach which is honest, respectful, gentle and wise.

The scriptural account of the doubt of the disciple Thomas reinforces the need for patience and compassion with those who are sceptical. Thomas refuses to believe the other disciples’ story of Jesus’ bodily appearance to them. Jesus’ response is gentle and encouraging, allowing Thomas time to come to terms intellectually, emotionally and spiritually with the reality of the resurrection. Thus, Jesus gave us a template for this spiritual work of mercy. As Pope Francis notes: “Jesus’ attitude is striking: we do not hear words of scorn, we do not hear words of condemnation, but only words of love, of mercy, which are an invitation to conversion” (Accessed at bit.ly/3ILL5nd).

What
types of
doubt are
evident in the
work of your
ministry?

God of mercy
Strengthen us in our work.
May we have patient hearts
with the doubts of others,
compassionate hearts
for mission in our world and
open hearts to our own need
for information and support.
Give us the courage to live
with paradox and the strength
to address those challenges
which unsettle us and
threaten to steer us off course.
Amen

INSTRUCT THE UNINFORMED



What does it mean to be uninformed? There are social, personal, cultural and spiritual aspects of being uninformed: conventions and ways of behaving which are not understood; lack of insight; deliberate misinformation or deception; lack of opportunity for education or inculturation; blindness and rigid certainty. This spiritual work of mercy invites us to value all forms of education as agents of transformation, and to respect learning as a lifelong endeavour. It is a reminder of the power of role-modelling and example in reinforcing values and ways of kindness and mercy.

Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. (John 21:13)

Like the disciples who recognised Jesus in the sharing of bread and fish on the shore, we can find wisdom and understanding through the actions of others, in stories and rituals. As Chittister notes, "... our lives are full of guides, formal and informal, authoritative or not... committed to the will of God. They lead us to choose the best rather than the better, the great rather than the good, the just over the unjust" (Radical Spirit. 2017. p.63).

As long as we engage with life's setbacks and hardships, deal with them and remain open to the lessons they can teach us, the experience of adversity will deepen our well of empathy, increase our sensitivity to others' needs and enlarge the resources we can draw on to offer our support (Mackay, H. *The Kindness Revolution*. 2021. p.35).

How
is your ministry
reinforcing, through
deed and word,
ways of mercy
and kindness?

Merciful God

Keep our hearts and minds grounded in the Gospel call to love of neighbour. Open our ears to the wisdom of our founding traditions, our community and models in faith and justice.

May we be always mindful of the need for leadership, role modelling and advocacy for those who are vulnerable and marginalised.

Help us to be
leaders of mercy in our world.

Amen

ADMONISH THE SINNER



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It is regarded as culturally inappropriate to criticise others for faults and sinfulness. This type of activity is often seen as hypocrisy or moral righteousness. Our behaviour, on the other hand, always speaks so much louder than words and there are many instances where others take behavioural cues from us. This is how cultures – both positive and negative – are built. We can all call others to inclusive and just behaviour through our actions large and small. This spiritual work of mercy invites us to become models of opposition to injustice, cruelty, greed and intolerance.

Jesus asked, "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell among thieves?" He replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:36-37)

Jesus used parables to highlight action for the most vulnerable as a sign of a merciful heart. One of the foremost parables of mercy is that of the Good Samaritan. As Pope Francis asserts in *Fratelli Tutti*: "The story of the Good Samaritan is constantly being repeated. We can see this clearly as social and political inertia is turning many parts of our world into a desolate byway... leaving great numbers of the marginalised stranded on the roadside... Jesus trusts in the best of the human spirit; with this parable, he encourages us to persevere in love, to restore dignity to the suffering and to build a society worthy of the name" (*Fratelli Tutti*. 2020. n.71).

When
and how can
our ministries
confront injustice,
misinformation or
unkindness?

God of the story remind us:
that our actions
mirror our beliefs and values;
that our deeds are always
more important than our words;
that cultural change begins with us;
and that how we treat others
has a ripple effect across ministries
and society more broadly.
Give us the courage
to address wrongs
when they confront us.
Amen

BEAR WRONGS PATIENTLY



To be wronged—hurt, undermined, betrayed, ignored, unfairly criticised or slandered—is not an easy thing to accept with patience. This spiritual work of mercy reminds us that most situations in life are unfinished, incomplete or flawed. Gentleness with others, especially those who hurt us, can transform relationships and change lives. As Pope Francis explains, *“The language of the Spirit, the language of the Gospel, is the language of communion that invites us to get the better of closedness and indifference, division and antagonism”* (Accessed at bit.ly/3qGlnH8).

This work (of mercy) is aimed at those situations that are part of life: misunderstood motives, slights, insults, backbiting and gossip... the wisdom required is to know when to speak and when to keep silent. As we read through the Gospels we find that there were occasions when Jesus responded to criticism of his disciples or himself. But there were times when he remained silent (Accessed at bit.ly/36SdoSY).

Focusing on the positive is always the better path. To respond in ways that promote peace, acceptance and collaboration opens a situation to new life. Like the angels at the tomb of Jesus on Easter morning – the question we should ask is: why are you looking for the living among the dead (Luke 24:1)? Opting for life-giving solutions through acceptance and forgiveness is preferable to choosing those things which kill opportunities for reconciliation.

How
can we build
cultures of care
and respect
in our
ministries?

God of patience and mercy
Enable us to rise above
resentment, anger and grudges.
Nurture in us positive relationships
and a spirit of forgiveness
Bless us in our striving for peace.
Amen

FORGIVE OFFENCES WILLINGLY



The core word in this spiritual work of mercy is 'willingly'. We all know Jesus' teaching to forgive not just once but many times, but sometimes our forgiveness is conditional or grudging. True forgiveness takes courage. As Chittister notes: *"Forgiveness frees us from the burden of anger. What we refuse to forgive continues to harm us... forgiveness is the gift that says two things: First, we are just as weak as everyone else in the human race and we know it. And, second, our inner life is too rich to be destroyed by anything"* (God's Tender Mercy. 2010. p.46).

... for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. (Luke 15:24)

The story of the Prodigal Son is now more commonly referred to as 'The Loving Father'. It is the quintessential parable of forgiveness and mercy. Despite his son's actions which break many moral, social and spiritual codes, the father welcomes him home with joy and gratitude. The older son does not share his father's forgiving spirit and thus, Jesus underscores the challenge of this work of mercy; it is sometimes very hard to forgive.

Rolheiser notes: *"In our more honest, in our more humble moments, I think that all of us admit that we don't really love others in the way that Jesus asked. We don't turn the other cheek... We don't wish good to those who wish us harm. We don't bless those who curse us... We can be fair, we can be just, but we don't yet love the way Jesus asked us to"* (Accessed at bit.ly/3iHWYiK).

How
do forgiveness
and reconciliation
manifest
themselves in
your work?

Merciful God help us to be:
Willing to set aside bitterness
and hurt feelings
Willing to embrace difference
Willing to forgive
Willing to acknowledge our own faults
Willing to be compassionate hearts
for mercy in our world.
Amen

PRAY FOR THE LIVING & THE DEAD



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Prayer can be seen as an act of solidarity, care, gratitude and compassion, asking God's love to embrace those we are concerned about and those we love. Prayer can also be a response to difficult times, a spiritual lifeline to a God who walks with us in the everyday. Prayer for the dead is a special act of heart-remembering and love. To pray a blessing on those who have died is to offer not just a soul gift, but also the certainty of Divine kindness and mercy across time and space. Some have described this spiritual work of mercy as the foundation of all the others – the bedrock of a merciful life.

"... if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request." (Esther: 7:3)

*It is such a privilege to have people who continue each day to bless us with their love and prayer. These inner friends of the heart confer on us inestimable gifts. In these times of greed and externality, there is such an unusual beauty in having friends who practise profound faithfulness to us, praying for us each day without our ever knowing or remembering it. There are often lonesome frontiers we could never endure or cross without the inner sheltering of these friends (O'Donohue, J. *To Bless the Space Between Us*. 2008. p.210).*

The biblical story of Esther reminds us of the importance of prayer. She interceded for her people (despite danger to herself) when the King's advisors set out to destroy them (Esther 4:8). Esther provides us with an example of an intercessor who shows both clarity of purpose and faith in God. Esther also understood the need to allow time and space for God's action in the heart of the other.

How
is prayer
honoured in
the life of your
ministry?

Let's call to mind those people,
living and dead,
who are close to our hearts.
Wrap your love,
Compassionate God,
around our friends and family.
Be with our colleagues and those
we meet in our daily life.
Comfort those we know
who are grieving.
Bless those we find difficult.
May we, like Esther, never give up
in our petitions for our people.
Amen

CARE FOR CREATION




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In 2016 Pope Francis declared two new works of mercy – one corporal and one spiritual. Both concern care for the environment. Pope Francis explains that the spiritual work of mercy, care for creation, calls for “*a grateful contemplation of God’s world*” (*Laudato Si’*: n.214) which allows us to discover in each thing “*a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us*” (*Laudato Si’*: n.85). To be grateful for places of beauty, sunsets, spring mornings or ocean views, creates the heart space for action and advocacy.

*On each side of the river stood the tree of life...
And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:2)*

The scripture story of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden can be seen metaphorically as the rupture between human beings and the natural world. Today this rupture is real and urgent. Human greed and insensitivity to the natural world has brought destruction of eco-systems, pollution and climate change affecting every country in the world.

If someone has not learned to stop and admire something beautiful, we should not be surprised if he or she treats everything as an object to be used and abused without scruple. If we want to bring about deep change, we need to realize that certain mindsets really do influence our behaviour... If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs (Pope Francis. Laudato Si'. n.11).

**Where
is respect
for the Earth
and the natural
environment
evident in your
ministry?**

All-powerful God,
You are present
in the whole universe and
in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness,
all that exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.
Fill us with peace, that we may
live as brothers and sisters,
harming no one.
Amen

(extract from Laudato Si'. p.189)