A parish based retreat
to provide people with a deep encounter with the mercy of Christ

Scheduling Format:
Thursday and Friday evening; Saturday until noon

Overview
This retreat is designed to be used at the local parish or cluster level for people who are eighteen years or older. It is organized by leaders in the parish community and carried out entirely by them. Outlines are provided here for all the talks, prayer services, and handouts. The maximum number of new retreatants is about forty. This retreat is meant to be offered once per month, allowing as many in the parish to participate as want to.

It runs on Thursday and Friday evening and finishes on Saturday morning, on three consecutive days. Keeping these three times as close together as possible is best for the flow of the retreat. You may devise other retreat schedule formats as you need them. The most common alternative schedule formats are
- Friday evening and all day Saturday, ending with the parish vigil Mass
- All day Saturday and Sunday morning

As you make adjustments, take into account the placement of various morning and evening prayers, meals, and key elements. You may wish to “cut and paste” within this document to make your adjustments. Be sure to save a copy of the original to have on file.

You might consider providing child care for the period of the retreats to allow young couples with kids to be present.

We are in debt to various other retreat movements on which Christ Have Mercy retreats are modeled, in particular TEC – Teens Encounter Christ, and Cursillo.
Who should attend?

- **All parish leaders** should be the first to be invited. Whether serving on leadership groups or in various volunteer ministries (such as liturgical roles, catechesis, or pastoral care) each active member of the parish will benefit from making an annual retreat. It helps them deepen their communion with Christ and the Church.
- **Parents of children** who are in faith formation (religious education or day school), especially those preparing for first reconciliation or Holy Communion. It will greatly assist them to be ready as their child’s “primary teacher” to deepen their own communion with Christ and experience again the sacraments as this retreat celebrates them.
- **Couples as a Household.** We recommend that you invite couples to attend this retreat together, even if one of them is not Catholic. We are seeking to build “households of faith” which is very difficult when one member deepens his or her communion with Christ but the other does not. We suggest that you invite both, whether or not they are in a valid marriage or not married at all.
- **Those preparing a child for baptism.** What better avenue of faith growth is there for young couples than to deepen their communion with Christ through a retreat. It will make the baptism of their child more intentional and meaningful. Simply make this retreat part of their preparation process.
- **Young adults** from age 18 and higher. This retreat will not be the first for many young people because youth ministers have long used retreats as a way of helping young Catholics deepen their communion with Christ.
- **Those preparing for matrimony.** This is a very strong and powerful way to introduce faith into the marriage preparation process. By sharing their faith together, you greatly increase each couple’s chances for a long marriage. Simply make this retreat part of their preparation process.
- **Those who are making their way into the church**, either for the first time as they seek full communion coming from another Christian tradition, or the fully initiated Catholic who has simply not darkened our doorway for a while. The retreat process is very powerful in shaking off the myths and fears of being an active Catholic.
- **Any interested member of the parish.**
A note about sharing Reconciliation and Eucharist with other Christians

There are two points in this retreat when non-Catholic participants may need a special treatment. The first is during the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation. During this time, it is important to help those from other Christian traditions to feel especially welcome. Even though they will not confess to a priest, they will experience the power of the Spirit working in them and moving them to reconciliation. Non-Catholics could be invited to talk with a priest (they will not receive absolution) or you may wish to have non-priest “listeners” available with whom they could talk. If you use form two of the rite (private confession, shared absolution) they will naturally feel much more a part of the overall rite.

The second moment is at the closing Eucharist. Here it is necessary to follow church teaching, but church teaching does allow us to share the Eucharist with other Christians provided they (1) are spiritually ready, (2) ask for it freely, (3) believe with the church regarding the real presence of Christ, and (4) do not have access to it in their own church at that time. The guidelines for sharing the Eucharist with others who believe as we do are found in the General Directory for Ecumenism #131. They are repeated by Pope John Paul II in Ut Unum Sint #46 where he wrote, It is a source of joy “that Catholic ministers may administer the Eucharist to Christians who are not in full communion…but who greatly desire to receive…freely request them, and manifest the faith.”

You can find the latest United States Catholic Conference (USCCB) information on “Non-Catholics and Holy Communion” at http://www.usccb.org/liturgy/q&a/mass/communion.shtml.
Room set up

- A private conference room is needed with round tables, seating for 6 retreatants plus one leader per table. There will also be a podium, and a small table on which the Sacred Scriptures will be placed, along with a candle. If the lights in the room are bright overhead lights that cannot be dimmed, then bring in lamps to light the room with a more intimate lighting scheme.
- A private dining room, separated from the conference room. The tables here need not be round.
- The use of the church, or another space prepared for worship.
- The scheduling nightmare: rather than making these retreats fit into the existing parish schedule of weddings and other events, put these into the calendar first and schedule everything else around them. What could be more important than helping folks turn their hearts to Christ? And even if all the other events were done, if this is not done, we may fail in our core mission.

Staff

- A Retreats & Encounters Coordinator. This could be a staff person, or a willing volunteer. It might be best to call on someone for this role who has previously made a retreat him or herself.
- Retreat Staff:
  - A Retreat Leader for each weekend who will provide some of the reflections (20 minutes each) and lead the sharing. It is good to rotate the leadership role, to prevent any one person from making this his or her personal ministry.
  - Four or five other Speakers or teachers to give the reflections which the leader does not give. These speakers also double as table leaders.
  - Table Leaders who will lead all activities at the table level; one leader is needed for each small group.
  - A Host Team of five to six people, which will provide for hospitality, meals, and general set up and clean up.
    - After the first Christ Have Mercy retreat in the parish, call on retreat alumni to staff this team. Or invite those who have made the Living Christ retreat to be part of this team.
    - Note: The host team itself may wish to plan prayer, reflections, and especially sacrifice on behalf of those making the retreat.
• A Retreat Prayer Coordinator: who will coordinate inviting prayers and good works from the community to support the work of the retreat.
• The Pastor or other Priests and Liturgical Musicians, who assist in the planning and celebration of the liturgical parts of the retreat.

Materials needed

• A Bible for each participant
• Plus a common Bible to place centrally in the room
• A Christ candle to place next to the Scriptures
• A bowl of water to place centrally in the room, near the candle and Scriptures
• Pads for note taking
• Pens
• Decorations for the meeting and dining rooms to make them welcoming and appealing
• Tent style name plates for each table
• Name tags for all, including all the leaders
• “Seasons of Mercy” inventory sheets - reproducible handout included in this resource
• Prayer service to accompany Reconciliation Form 2 - reproducible samples included in this handbook
• Food for meals - the meals are an integral part of the retreat experience
Schedule

Thursday evening
6:00 PM  Supper (served and cleaned up by host team)  Dining room
         prayer before eating
6:45 PM  First session - “Introductions”  Meeting room
7:45 PM  Break (refreshments served by host team)  Meeting room
8:00 PM  Second session - “Seasons of Mercy”  Meeting room
         large group sharing
10:00 PM End for the night - everyone sleeps at their own homes

Friday evening
6:00 PM  Supper (served and cleaned up by host team)  Dining room
         prayer before eating
         at the tables after eating: brief mystagogia
6:45 PM  Third session - “The Mercy of Christ”  Meeting room
7:45 PM  Break (refreshments served by hosts)  Meeting room
8:00 PM  Fourth session - “Mercy in the Community”  Church
         The Sacrament of Reconciliation, form 2
10:00 PM End for the night - everyone sleeps at their own homes

Saturday morning
8:00 AM  Breakfast  Dining room
         prayer before eating
         at the tables after eating: brief mystagogia
8:45 AM  Fifth session - “Christ Have Mercy”  Meeting room
10:15 AM  Break with substantial snack  Dining room
10:45 AM  Sixth session - “A Plan for Daily Life”  Meeting room
         The closing message from the Retreat Leader
11:30 AM Closing Eucharistic liturgy  Church
         This is a special liturgy for the retreat
         and may not take the place of the Sunday obligation.
Preparation

Six weeks before the retreat:
- Announce the retreat in the parish. Scheduling will have to be done far in advance to have the needed spaces and people available.
- In many parishes, these retreats will be needed in a variety of languages. Even though immigrants eventually do speak English, most of the time they pray and live their daily faith in their native tongue. You have permission to translate any part of these notes for use in another language.
- Invite people who want to participate to sign up formally and pay a small fee, about $20, to defray the cost. Have a small fund available for those who cannot afford to pay.
- Give personal invitations to all parish staff, elected leaders, and other leaders in the community. Encourage married couples to attend together. The expectation should be that anyone involved in parish life prepares for leadership by making a Christ Have Mercy or Living Christ retreat.
- Limit the number to about 40, in eight groups of five, plus the table leaders.

One month before the retreat
- Recruit the host team to help with set up, clean up, and meals - probably about 5 people. This team can be given all responsibility for this work.
- Recruit a Retreat Leader - someone with experience in leading group process and who has already experienced conversion to Christ.
- Recruit Table Leaders to lead table discussions. If necessary, these can be people making their first Christ Have Mercy retreat or people who have already made a Living Christ retreat.
- Schedule a two room space, one to serve as a dining room, near the kitchen, and the other to serve as the meeting room. Snacks will be set out during most of the retreat as well. These can either be on a table in the meeting room or in the dining room. It’s necessary for both of these rooms to be private from other parish events. And it’s necessary for the meeting room to be available for the entire three day period because people will be leaving things on the tables, hanging papers in the room, and so forth.
- Also schedule the Church if possible for Reconciliation on Friday evening and again for the closing Eucharist on Saturday at 11:45 AM. If there are conflicts with weddings or funerals, other rooms can be used for the retreat because of the smaller number of people.
• Schedule the pastor and possibly other priests (depending on which form you use) for the Sacrament of Reconciliation on Friday evening at 8:30 PM.
• Schedule the pastor or another priest, plus liturgical musicians for the closing Liturgy on Saturday at 11:30 AM to 1:00 PM.
• Plan for a way to invite the whole community to be in prayer and vigil during the entire retreat period. The Retreat Prayer Coordinator will be responsible to bring the community together in vigil with the retreatants.
  • One way: distribute vigil candles and prayer cards. Ask people to use them at their table during meals throughout the retreat period.
  • Another way: invite members of the community to offer up works of justice, mercy, and holiness - and communicate that to the retreatants by way of a simple note which will be read during the retreat.
• The meals are a key part of the retreat experience. They can be simple but elegant. Encourage the host team to develop menus that are easy to prepare and serve.

One week before the retreat
• Confirm with all parish staff members who will be involved to make sure they know the precise time and place they will be needed.
• Meet with the Host Team to double check all details and supply lists.
• Shop for the needed supplies.
• Review your list of participants and break them into appropriate groups.
• Take a deep breath and relax - the Holy Spirit will be in charge of what happens.
Guide to the First Session: Thursday at 6:45 PM

“Introductions”

Folks arrive and are greeted by the team. They get a name tag. The first event is supper. Many of these folks won’t know each other very well - and this meal is the way for them to begin to enter into the retreat. Just as the eating is finished but before anyone leaves the table, take a moment to go around the tables to each person one by one and invite them each to just take a deep breath and share their name and one significant thing that happened to them that day. Keep this light and quick, if possible. It has to move fast to keep us on time.

After supper, adjourn to the meeting room where they go to their tables. It’s probably best to pre-assign table seating so that there is a good mix of gender, age, and backgrounds on each table. If the pastor or other parish staff are making this retreat, they simply take their place at a table like anyone else. Once everyone is settled, we are ready to begin.

The Retreat Leader welcomes all.

- Tells a little about him or herself, background in the parish, desire to grow in the mercy of Christ, love for the church, family details, hopes for this retreat. Not too pious at this point or some people might be put off.
- Explains the schedule a little, but only sketchily. Do not give the details or announce beforehand about sacraments, meals, or the topics of the reflections. Let the retreat unfold for the participants a little at a time to keep them focused on the present moment.
- Gives the “community guidelines” for this retreat
  - Be kind to each other at all times.
  - Be honest - everything we hear here is confidential.
  - Work hard at this process of growing closer to Christ.
  - Listen closely to each other.
  - Speak clearly, charitably and briefly when it’s your turn.
  - Be open to the Spirit in our midst.
  - Don’t keep the group waiting - be on time.
  - Keep confidential everything you hear in this retreat.
- Asks each group to quickly (in three minutes, timed by the Retreat Leader) choose a group name and write it on a name plate for the table.
• Then, invites each participant to introduce him or herself: name, family
details, life in the parish, hopes for the retreat. This expands what we just did
at supper.
  • Note: the process for this sharing will be the same one used throughout
the retreat.
    1. Each group begins by sharing at the table, following the directions
of the Retreat Leader.
    2. Then, when all are finished, the Retreat Leader calls the whole
group to order and invites each group to come to the front together,
standing (or sitting if they are not able to stand) in a line, across the
room in front of the podium.
    3. Then, one at a time they do their sharing. When all are finished, the
large group applauds and the small group goes back to its table.
  • For this first sharing, the small group should first announce its table
name and why it was chosen. Then each person should make that
slightly longer introduction of him or herself. The leader must keep
this process moving along quickly.
• The Retreat Leader asks if there are any questions at this point and when all
are satisfied, announces the break, asking people to be punctual at 15 minutes.
After the break:

The Retreat Leader now holds a brief ceremony during which we honor the Word of God. At the ready should be a small table, covered with a decorative cloth. On it, a Bible stand, a candle, matches, and a container of Holy Water.

1. Process with the Bible to the center of the room, holding the Bible reverently above your head and place it on the table.

2. Light the candle.

3. Proclaim a short reading of your choice.

4. Then say that the Bible is the light for our lives and the life of the whole Church. It will also be the center of what we do here in the next three days.

5. Give a very short explanation of why this is so. Then say that baptism is the beginning of our journeys of faith. At Baptism we receive Christ, we are empowered by grace to live in Christ. The water of baptism is a sign of this new life.

6. Then sprinkle all with this water as an opening blessing.

7. This entire opening ceremony should take 10 minutes or less.
Guide to the Second session: Thursday at 8:00 PM

Talk outline for
“Seasons of Mercy”

This talk is a fifteen minute reflection given by either the retreat leader or someone else chosen for this presentation. Do not be tempted to talk longer than the allotted time. As the group moves its attention to this moment, the Retreat Leader stands at the podium and calls everyone to attention, using humor and gentleness. He or she then introduces this speaker, giving a personal statement about his or her competency to share about the Seasons of Mercy. Keep the introduction short.

Purpose: to help the participants become aware of

- what mercy is
- how mercy is extended from God to us
- and from us to others and all the world
- our own personal history of mercy – both receiving and giving it

Here are your main points:

- Thank everyone for being at the retreat this week.
- Mercy is the ready willingness to help anyone in time of need, especially through pardon or reconciliation. It is a habitual inclination of the will.
- This means that mercy is an attitude on our part, a way of treating others and the world around us, which comes to us automatically in situations.
- Mercy is the compassionate care for others whereby one takes on the burden of another as one's own. It is an active quality of the virtue of charity, motivated by love. While mercy is often treated as a rather benign term, its power is conveyed more accurately by looking at it in a scriptural context.
- Jesus is the most eloquent witness to mercy in the New Testament. He is never vague in his proclamation of God's mercy, and rather than using parables or discourses, he reveals God's mercy in his everyday relations with people from all strata of society. Jesus is an active agent of God's mercy — confronting the crowd about to stone the woman taken in adultery, meeting the Samaritan woman at the well, weeping with the other mourners at the death of Lazarus, and ultimately taking up the cross laden with the sins of the world and being led to his death.

According to Mt 25:31-46, mercy will be the quality on which the Christian
will ultimately be judged. This understanding of the necessity of mercy was also developed in the early Church, particularly in the Didache, which went so far as to state that those who have no mercy will be condemned.

“Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that 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 to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?’ …And the king will answer them, ‘Truly, I tell you, as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’” (NRSV Mt 25:34-40)

• Mercy goes beyond the issues of who is responsible. Mercy is simply love’s response to suffering. So the Father of Mercy, to relieve our suffering, sent his Eternal Son to be made flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit. God the Son, by nature incapable of suffering, became vulnerable for us. He bound the strong man who had tyrannized the human race and paid the debt that the human race hadn’t been able to cover. His rescue mission succeeded at the cost of his life.

• Do you show mercy? Do you withhold mercy?

• Have people shown mercy to you? Have people withheld it from you?

• Here share a brief story from your own life about your own experience of mercy and how your understanding of it has unfolded. Don’t be afraid to share about the rough times, but do not engage in inappropriate self disclosure, the sort of thing which belongs in therapy or the sacrament of reconciliation.
  • An example might be: Your father has always treated you with indifference and inattention, but you show mercy toward him in his own hour of need, even though he has not deserved it.
  • Or: Your child grew up with antagonism toward you. Whatever the cause of that, you continue to offer him or her forgiveness, a hearty welcome, and an open heart.
  • Or: You have a heart for the poor, and believe that you are responsible for the improvement of their lives, even though you do not know them personally.

• After you finish:
• Distribute a Seasons of Mercy inventory (the handout is on the last pages of these notes) and ask people to take a few minutes to think through it. Then the Retreat Leader thanks the speaker and invites each small group to share, giving each person about 3 minutes (20 minutes overall).
• Then lead a large group discussion as above, each small group member is invited to share (briefly) with the whole group about one major turning point in his or her spiritual journey.

• When this is finished: go immediately to the closing prayer of the night, which is called “Compline.” (Compline is an ancient form of liturgical prayer in the Church. It is traditionally prayed to honor the end of the day.)
Guide to the brief ceremony

**Compline**
before people go home

The Retreat Leader presides at this prayer.

- Turn down the lights in the room.
- Have a charcoal lit for incense. Use the Scripture and candle table as your altar or point of reference for this prayer. (Check beforehand to see if anyone in the room will have difficulty breathing if incense is used and always use it in moderation in any case. Be sure the room is well ventilated. Check local fire codes.)
- Begin with a sacred gesture: the Sign of the Cross.
- Invite everyone to pause in gratitude for all that has happened this day.
  - Invite everyone to forgive those who have hurt them
  - And to be sorry for those whom they have hurt.
- Proclaim a short reading from the Word of God:
  Luke 2:29-32
- Invite anyone who wants to briefly share one thing from today for which he or she is grateful.
- Sprinkle a little incense on the charcoal and invite everyone to be in silence for a few minutes.
- After two minutes of silence, play a quiet spiritual song on a CD player.
- During the music, pray a simple prayer to end the day:
  Lord, you have given us the generous gift of this day.
  Now as we prepare to sleep, gently hold our hearts in your hands.
  Bring us safely through the night to tomorrow, when we will rise to serve you once again. Amen.
- Let the music stop. Blow out the candle. Depart quietly.
Guide to the Mystagogia at Meals
on Friday evening & Saturday morning at breakfast

This process is led by the Retreat Leader. After the meal is eaten but while still at table, get the attention of the group. Ask everyone to recall the work of the last evening. Slowly walk back through the evening, listing from beginning to end: the opening prayer at supper, the menu, the introductions, spiritual journey talk, sharing, compline. In this process, remind everyone of certain funny or poignant moments, a particular song that was used, the taste of the food, and so forth.

- Ask at random (not everyone needs to share): What touched you last night? What moment still has your attention? What’s hanging around inside your own heart about what we did?

- Allow about five or ten minutes for this sharing and then dismiss the group to return to the meeting room.

- The mood of this should be light. Humor and anecdote are welcome.

- This has to move along rather quickly in order to keep us on schedule.
Guide to the Third session: Friday at 6:45 PM  

Talk Outline for “The Mercy of Christ”

This is a fifteen minute reflection given by either the Retreat Leader or someone else chosen for this presentation. Do not be tempted to talk longer than the allotted time. As the group moves its attention to this moment, the Retreat Leader stands at the podium and calls everyone to attention, using humor and gentleness. He or she then introduces this speaker, giving a personal statement about his or her competency to share about the what it means to experience the mercy of Christ. Keep the introduction short.

Purpose: to help participants see that in order for us to live in the light of Christ and understand the mercy offered by God to us through Christ, we must pass through the Paschal Mystery: We must die to ourselves in Christ. This means that we must put into practice the works of mercy: the first must be last, the most important must be the servant of all, and we must be aware of our shortcomings in order for us to allow the grace of Christ to really touch us deeply. It is necessary to distinguish between “unhealthy” dying - which implies allowing oneself to be enslaved by ideology or stronger persons - and “healthy” dying which is always motivated by deep love for God, others and oneself.

You will follow and outline a scripture story in three parts during this talk. Here are your main points:

1. First, read this short section:
Mat 18:23-27 (NIV) “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.”

Second, ask participants what image or word caught their ear? What struck them about this passage? Invite them to briefly discuss this at their tables.

Third, make these points:
- We come to God with our weaknesses, mistakes and sinfulness in our hearts and minds. We know we have treated ourselves, others, and our world badly. We know we are indebted to God for all we have. But God looks on us with mercy and offers us complete forgiveness.
- How is this forgiveness offered? In the very person of Jesus Christ. In the power and presence of the Risen Christ, we are given the power to live with love and in peace.
- This is made sacramentally plain in Reconciliation.
2. First, read this short section:
Mat 18:28-31 (NIV) "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened."

Second, ask participants what image or word caught their ear? What struck them about this passage? Invite them to briefly discuss this at their tables.

Third, make these points:
- We often treat others with harshness and cruelty.
- Sometimes this is the people close to us, and sometimes to others or the world from afar.
- Sometime we do this by what we say and do, and other times by what we fail to say and do. Think of the words of the Confiteor at Mass:
  - I confess to almighty God,
  - and to you, my brothers and sisters,
  - that I have sinned through my own fault,
  - in my thoughts and in my words,
  - in what I have done, and in what I have failed to do;

3. First, read this short section aloud:
Mat 18:32-35 (NIV) "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from the heart."

Second, ask participants what image or word caught their ear? What struck them about this passage? Invite them to briefly discuss this at their tables.

Third, make these points:
- When we don’t measure up, or when we miss the mark, it’s time to pause and see what happened. Why didn’t we love our enemies? Why did we keep gossiping? Why did we cling to money? Why did we ignore the materially poor, especially when there was so much we could have done? And so forth.
- At these times we have to admit that we let someone else be our leader and teacher, someone other than Christ: the group we hang with, our families, our society, our government or president, the promise of comfort from money.
- Now pause and ask yourself, how have I failed to live up to the teachings of Christ? How do I need to die to myself in order to know the joy of living with Christ?

When the speaker is finished, the Retreat Leader steps to the podium to make an announcement. Tell everyone that we will now begin to prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but remind them that it is always voluntary. We simply wish to make it available to them because of this special moment. But even for those who choose not to use the sacrament or who are non-Catholic spouses present, this is still a special time of being in touch with Christ and coming to terms with what it means to enter into the death of the Lord. (Don’t give a “second talk” here but only very brief comments, please.)
• Invite a small group sharing again, then the same format for large group sharing as the previous evening. In the large group, ask each participant to share (briefly) one way they could do better at dying in Christ.
• The topic or question at the tables for sharing is: When did you most need the mercy of Christ?
• After the sharing is complete, announce a break, saying that we will return to a prayerful and powerful time with Christ in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Remind those who are not Catholic of the power of this moment, of being deeply in touch with our call to join Christ in his passion, death, and resurrection.
Guide to the Fourth session: Friday at 8:00 PM

Talk outline for “Mercy in the Community”

This is a ten minute reflection given by the leader or someone else. Do not be tempted to talk longer than the allotted time. As the group moves its attention to this moment, the Retreat Leader stands at the podium and calls everyone to attention, using humor and gentleness. He or she then introduces this speaker, giving a personal statement about his or her competency to share about how the Church offers us healing. Keep the introduction short.

**Purpose**: to help the participants see that the Church offers ways for them to experience the healing power of Christ. One of these is the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

- In the old days, to some people, Confession meant simply listing sins and telling them to the priest who then prayed over us, gave us a penance, and sent us home to “sin no more.”
- But of course, we did sin again, didn’t we?
- Today the focus of this sacrament is on healing. It’s on the unending mercy of God. We prepare and come to the priest to talk about trends in our lives, ways that we are moving away from the heart of the Lord. Of course, we must also still be sorry for our sins and willing to accept God’s mercy, extended to us through the Sacrament of the church.
  - Examples: I’m just so wrapped up in materialism.
  - I find it so hard to help the materially poor by giving them my money.
  - Sometimes I feel just so selfish.
  - I really haven’t been praying much lately.
  - There is just a lot of anger within me and I don’t know why.
- The Church invites us to consider not only the “privacy” of being off the mark, of sinning, but also the “social aspects” of such living.
- Through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we make our return to the Lord. We get back on the path of our spiritual journey of faith.
- Tonight we offer you this chance. If you don’t wish to celebrate the sacrament, you may spend this time in quiet with the rest of the group. If you wish to celebrate the sacrament, the Church has been prepared. There are several priests there… (now go with the group to the Church, moving quietly)
  - We recommend that you use Form 2 of the Sacramental Rite which requires having 3 to 4 priests. See the attached Form Two celebration outline.
  - End the celebration with a closing prayer service.

**After the Celebration of the Sacrament:**
A brief closing “gathering” with wine and cheese and music playing, back in the Dining Room. The hosts can join in this gathering, along with the priests, musicians, and others.
This is a fifteen minute reflection given by the leader or someone else chosen for this job. Do not be tempted to talk longer than the allotted time. As the group moves its attention to this moment, the Retreat Leader stands at the podium and calls everyone to attention, using humor and gentleness. He or she then introduces this speaker, giving a personal statement about his or her competency to share about the Living with Christ in daily life. Keep the introduction short.

**Purpose:** to help the participants see how their journey now continues into their everyday lives. They will be asked to identify what will most help them live with Christ more closely. Here are your main points:

- The Gospels show how the journey of faith is lived. We come to know Christ and to die to ourselves in loving others, as Christ did for us. This leads us to a rhythm in our lives of pausing, examining our consciences, celebrating God’s mercy, and moving on. (Share your own personal story of this.)
- Proclaim a reading from the Word of God: Romans 12:1-2.
- We are called into service. God’s presence in our lives is always giving us a nudge toward love, always toward love. To give and receive daily love with your spouse or partner and family members. To help the materially poor by ending the causes of poverty. To visit the imprisoned. To care for an aging parent or friend. To bring viaticum, oil, and friendship to the ill. To care for a sick friend. To speak on behalf of the voiceless, the rejected, and the marginalized of our culture.
- There are many ways people are called. Each call is unique but all of them taken together show how God is caring for the world.
- One thing about this: the call is more than merely making money, or getting famous, or being comfortable, or being “right” about your theology or politics. The call is to serve and the question is to what or to whom are you called?
- Each person on this journey of faith needs different tools. For some it’s a small group with which to share Scripture and faith sharing. For others, it’s a monthly gathering like this, to help keep them on track. For still others, it’s a prayer guide, helping them know and love the Scriptures. And the question here is what tools do you need to help you answer God’s call in your life?

When the speaker is finished, the Retreat Leader comes to the podium and announces another round of sharing, first in small groups, then in the large group.

- To whom are you called? What tools will you need?
Mid-morning break. After the sharing the Retreat Leader announces a break. This break will have more substantial food in it because there really is no lunch being served.

Guide to the Sixth session: Saturday at 10:45 AM

Talk outline for
A Plan for Daily Life with Christ

This is a fifteen minute reflection from the leader or someone else designated for this job. Do not be tempted to talk longer than the allotted time. As the group moves its attention to this moment, the Retreat Leader stands at the podium and calls everyone to attention, using humor and gentleness. He or she then introduces this speaker, giving a personal statement about his or her competency to share about the Living with Christ in daily life. Keep the introduction short.

Purpose: To assist participants to make a concrete plan with which to leave the retreat, which will help them continue to practice the mercy of Christ.

Here are the speaker’s main points:

- All the good intentions in the world don’t help when you are back in the routine of your daily life. What we need then is a plan.
- If we don’t have a plan for how we will continue the journey, we will soon find we’re off the path.
- Give an example of this from your own life.
- Stress the importance of a daily life style that supports the Christian journey:
  - household meals
  - regular prayer
  - being part of a community
  - being in the Sunday Assembly
  - sharing faith with others
- Now distribute the handout below and invite people to spend some time in quiet with it. After they have completed all or most of it, invite them to return to their small groups to discuss their responses and expand on them. Explain that adding and changing their plan based on what they hear from others is perfectly OK and desirable.
- When all have finished, invite them to copy their notes into a new form (have these ready at hand) to use for the closing liturgy.
## The Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy: My Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The work of mercy</th>
<th>My own definition of this</th>
<th>My plan for living it more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Feed the hungry</td>
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<td>2 Give drink to the thirsty</td>
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<td>3 Clothe the naked</td>
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<td>4 Shelter the homeless</td>
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<td>5 Visit the sick</td>
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<td>6 Visit those in prison</td>
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<td>7 Bury the dead</td>
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## The Spiritual Works of Mercy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The work of mercy</th>
<th>My own definition of this</th>
<th>My plan for living it more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Convert the sinner</td>
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<td>2 Instruct the ignorant</td>
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<td><strong>3</strong> Counsel the doubtful</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong> Comfort the sorrowful</td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>5</strong> Bear wrongs patiently</td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>6</strong> Forgive injuries</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>7</strong> Pray for the living and the dead</td>
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</table>
guide to the
Closing Liturgy of Word & Eucharist
and the 50-50 Covenant Ritual

Introduction. This Liturgy should be a more intimate than weekend Sunday liturgies because it is being celebrated in a much smaller group. When possible, we recommend you use a smaller space than the parish church, such as a small chapel, or a room prepared as a chapel for this occasion.

Music. Music should be kept simple and singable. If possible, use the parish hymnal. Our goal is ultimately to help everyone take a more active role in the Sunday Mass. Invite the retreatants to take appropriate roles in the Mass as readers, communion distributors, and so forth.

The Liturgy. Normally, this special retreat liturgy is not the weekend liturgical celebration. It is meant to provide a special ending for retreatants, and you should not invite others to join in. Select readings and ordinary parts of the Mass to augment the retreat experience.

Blessing and sending forth. After the communion rite, the Presider might consider giving a special blessing to all to send them on their way. This would be an appropriate time for the Presider and Retreat Leader to invite each retreatant, including the retreat staff and themselves, to present and read one or two of the promises they have made on their plan for living the Mercy of Christ.

After the Mass. When the Mass is concluded, the Retreat Leader makes a formal ending of the retreat with a five minute presentation. Do not be tempted to stretch this out into a long talk. Here are the main points:

- When you arrived here for this retreat, you didn’t know what to expect. But during these few days, God has touched your life in remarkable ways. You are now a new child of God, and your journey of faith continues.
- Being at peace with God and the Church is an action of the Holy Spirit. It isn’t a result of the talks or activities of the retreat, but a result of the Spirit’s own movement within your heart.
- As you go forth now, think about someone whom you know personally who would benefit from this experience. Make a commitment now to invite that person or couple to sign up for the next retreat here in the parish. It is scheduled for [here give the date of the next retreat]. They will be forever grateful and you will be an agent of the Holy Spirit.
The Sacrament of Reconciliation
Form Two
For use in the context of a Christ Have Mercy Retreat
during which the penitents will have already examined their consciences

Plain type: leader  BOLD TYPE: ALL

Welcome and Opening Rite
Presider: (using these or similar words)
Friends, welcome to this special celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Let’s just pause for a moment, to collect the events of yesterday and today and bring ourselves, body and soul, into this period of reconciliation. We are preparing to celebrate the sacrament which heals our souls and restores our deep communion with Christ.

A moment of sacred silence.

Presider: (using these or similar words)
Friends, we now gather here as God’s family, baptized as we are into Christ and walking with Christ on our journey of faith.

May we enter into this Sacrament of Reconciliation conscious of God’s mercy and open to God’s voice within and among us.

IN THE NAME OF GOD, AMEN.

Presider: Invite all to listen to, sing or recite the opening song-prayer

Reading from Sacred Scripture
Reader: A reading from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians  [Eph 4:23-32]

You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And
do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. [NRSV]

At the end of the reading: The word of the Lord
All: THANKS BE TO GOD

Confession of Sins:
Proceed to celebrate the sacrament now, using the normal rites of the church.

Concluding Prayer
O God, you have called us to Baptism in Christ
WE EMBRACE OUR BAPTISMS WITH FAITH
and in that calling you promise us your unending mercy
WE ACCEPT YOUR MERCY WITH THANKSGIVING
We now stand before you ready to receive forgiveness
and in need of your wisdom, strength, courage, and love.
O GOD, GIVE US YOUR LOVE.
May the Church prepare the world to see you
AND MAY THE WORLD RESPOND IN FAITH.
And for each other here we pray that we might be earnest
in our search for truth and fair in our judgments of others.
MAY WE SEEK THE TRUTH AND BE FAIR IN ALL WE DO AND SAY.
AMEN.

Blessing:
May God who loves us deeply
O GOD WE LOVE YOU WITHOUT END.
May the Spirit who is our Guide
O SPIRIT WE LISTEN TO YOUR VOICE.
And may Jesus Christ in whose name we gather
O JESUS WE ADORE YOU.
now bless us,
direct us,
and be with us in love, now and forever.
WE RECEIVE YOUR BLESSING WITH FULL HEARTS
AMEN.

At the conclusion of the celebration, it would be appropriate to hold a short gathering, with wine and cheese, or other foods and beverages.
The purpose of this brief reflection tool is to help you focus on your own experience of giving and receiving mercy in your life so far. Please pause quietly for a few minutes to respond to the questions. Then prepare to share whatever part of this with others you are comfortable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVENT IN MY LIFE</th>
<th>NOTES I RECALL ABOUT IT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your childhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Who was a forgiving force in your life as a child?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- When you made mistakes or were foolish, who stepped in to affirm and support you unconditionally?</td>
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<tr>
<td>The people in your young life</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Who did you find yourself showing mercy toward?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- What moments of error or mistake did you have in your life when you really needed someone to show you mercy?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Did someone step forward?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Did you feel God’s mercy toward you?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### The Church and God’s mercy
- How did the Church help you understand the unending mercy of God?
- How does your experience of Reconciliation as a sacrament help you know God’s mercy?

### How you responded to God’s mercy during adulthood?
- How do you show mercy toward others now?
- Which of these physical works of mercy do you practice?
  - Feed the hungry
  - Give drink to the thirsty
  - Clothe the naked
  - Shelter the homeless
  - Visit the sick
  - Visit those in prison
  - Bury the dead
  - Forgive those who harm you
  - Be generous even when others are not generous to you
  - List others:

### Turning points in your adult life regarding your understanding of mercy: who were the
- Influential people?
- Influential ideas?
- Influential life events?