



General Reflection

When we re-frame our daily service at home in light of Gospel values and the example of Jesus, we are likely to change our attitude toward family duties and realise that they include works of mercy answering Christ's call to love God and one another.

This resource can be used in the context of family and school as an opportunity for conversation around the significance of our everyday actions; remembering that mercy is all around us and is at the heart of every relationship especially in family life. We may not talk about mercy as such, but that does not mean it is absent. Whether at home or school, or as outreach to others, works of mercy are a daily part of our lives as Christians.

It is important to help children to see that the 'works' are not a list to be learnt but actions to be lived in our lives.

Questions that might help your family/school reflection:

- Has our reflection given us an opportunity to give thanks to God for the many works of mercy carried out every day in our homes?
- Does reflecting on the 'works' present an opportunity perhaps to think about the ways we do what we do. If we largely carry out corporal works indirectly, say by supporting a charitable organisation, could we from time to time be more direct?
- Does my kindness have to be directed towards a 'stranger' or do I realise that I can also do corporal and spiritual works of mercy for a friend, family member, school friend or co-worker?
- Can you think of some of the special ways we do works of mercy at home and at school?
- Is it difficult to see the ordinary messy work of family life as spiritual work, as God's action, love and power within us?
- Who benefits from works of mercy?

Conclusion

The Year of Mercy is a call to each one of us to rediscover and to live the works of mercy every day.

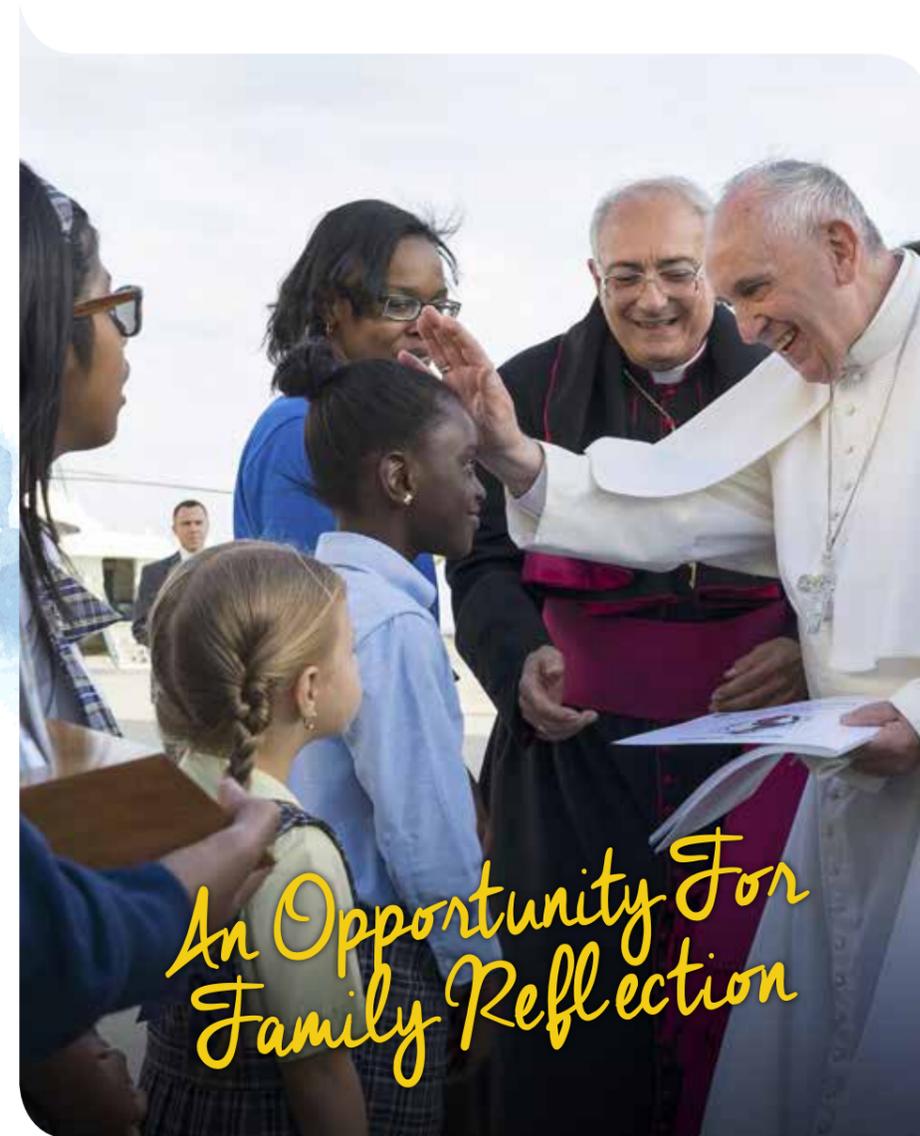
Pope Francis wants us to stop and think, especially during this year, as to how rewarding the works of mercy are, and how important they are, for a happy and meaningful life as intended for us by God our Father.

This is part of a series of handouts on Nurturing Faith in Families published by the Diocese of Broken Bay. For further information please contact Janette Davidson, Diocesan Coordinator Family Life Ministries janette.davidson@dbb.org.au



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Works of Mercy, their meaning and purpose

'Mercy' is simply love's response to suffering, and 'a work' is simply a good action. For something to be truly a work of mercy it must be done out of love for our neighbour because of our love for God.

As Christians we are called to imitate Jesus' compassionate love, service and sacrifice through works of mercy.

All works of mercy are works of love (charity) and are a particular response to the sufferings and misfortunes of others.

Often we think of these 'works' as involving extraordinary activities or as directed only to strangers, however we live out 'mercy' in the ordinary things of everyday life at home, school and work, amongst family, friends, neighbours and strangers. By using this resource we can reflect with our children on practical ways to 'live' these works in our everyday family and wider life. It may assist children if they focus on one or two of the works of mercy at a time spaced out over a number of days; perhaps as part of night time prayer (some of the suggested works will need to be adapted for younger children and will require the supervision or accompaniment of an adult).

Whilst there are two categories of works of mercy, corporal (physical) and spiritual, it is important to realise that body and spirit are part of the one person and our good actions affect the whole person; for example, a person may hunger for 'food' to nourish both the body and the spirit.



JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY

Pope Francis has called a special Holy Year, a Jubilee Year of Mercy, from 8 December 2015 (the feast of the Immaculate Conception) to 20 November 2016 (the feast of Christ the King).

In this Jubilee Year he has asked that we "rediscover the richness encompassed by the spiritual and corporal works of mercy."



The Seven Corporal Works of Mercy

(responding to physical and material needs of others)

Feeding the Hungry and Giving Drink to the Thirsty

- shopping for groceries, cooking meals, packing lunches;
- sharing meals and drinks with others;
- avoiding food wastage;
- supporting and volunteering for food pantries, soup kitchens, and agencies that feed the hungry;
- supporting charities that enable communities to access food and water and better manage their lands.

Clothing the Naked

- doing the washing, ironing, mending;
- shopping for and handing-down clothes;
- giving unwanted/excess clothes, shoes, towels, linen to charities;
- volunteering to work at a clothing drive or at a shelter where clothing is distributed to those in need.

Sheltering the Homeless

- sharing household tasks;
- repairing, painting or other tasks that make a home liveable;
- working to make mortgage or rent payments;
- offering hospitality to visitors;
- supporting and/or volunteering for charities which care for the homeless and provide support following natural disasters;
- advocating for public policies and legislation that provide housing for low-income people.

Caring for the Sick

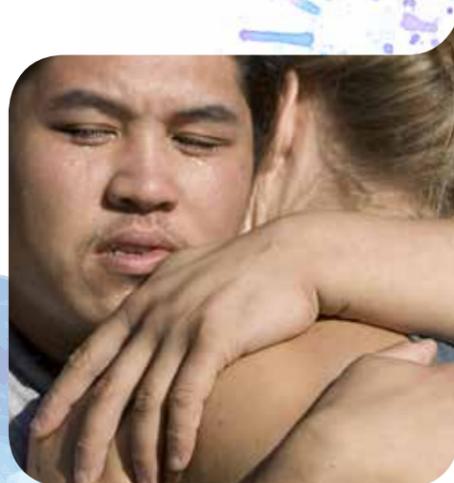
- taking someone to the doctor, pharmacy, clinic;
- giving medications, wrapping sprains, taking temperatures, changing bandages, getting up at night;
- being with a family member in a hospital or nursing home;
- spending time with and cooking and delivering meals to the sick or homebound;
- taking the time to call, send a card or an email to someone who is sick;
- volunteering at a hospital or day care/respice centre.

Visiting the Imprisoned

- 'being there' for a teenager who isolates him/herself in their room;
- actions of a teenager who volunteers to take care of his/her brothers and sisters so that parents can have a free evening - to go out to dinner or to a movie;
- praying for those imprisoned and their families;
- supporting prison chaplaincy and programs designed to rehabilitate prisoners;
- supporting agencies that advocate on behalf of refugees, asylum seekers and those who are unjustly imprisoned.

Burying the Dead

- planning or going to funerals and wakes and visiting family graves;
- cooking, babysitting or offering help to families when a death occurs;
- sending cards, flowers or remembrances to grieving families;
- cleaning out the home of a deceased parent or relative;
- supporting or volunteering at a hospice/palliative care unit;
- participating in a grief and loss/bereavement ministry.



The Seven Spiritual Works of Mercy

(responding to spiritual and emotional needs of others)

Teaching those lacking knowledge/ understanding (Instructing the Ignorant)

- helping with homework;
- showing children how to grow plants/vegetables, clean, make things;
- establishing and enforcing house rules;
- committing yourself to learning about the Catholic faith and sharing your understanding of the faith with others;
- sharing your insights, knowledge, and skills with others, especially friends, fellow students, co-workers;
- taking time to 'tutor' those who are just beginning tasks.

Correcting those who need it (Admonishing the Sinner)

- encouraging good behaviour through affirmation and praise;
- being courageous yet compassionate in calling people and institutions to be faithful to Gospel values;
- setting an example by refusing to participate in harmful/mean activities;
- drawing attention to wrong acts for the purpose of improvement, not to judge or punish.

Forgiving

- having a family practice of saying sorry and reconciling with each other before the day's end;
- praying for those who have wronged you and praying for the courage to forgive;
- asking forgiveness from others;
- letting go of grudges; going out of your way to be positive with someone you are having a difficult time with;
- understanding the importance of and participating in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Being patient when you are wronged

- working at being less critical of others;
- overlooking minor flaws and mistakes;
- giving people the benefit of the doubt;
- assuming that people who may have hurt you did so because they are enduring pain of their own;
- praying for those who have wronged you.

Advising/Counselling the Doubtful

- setting limits for children and explaining why there are consequences;
- helping children/spouse choose wisely between options in their activities/work;
- teaching children how to use their time and talents;
- intervening in situations in which people are clearly doing harm to themselves or others;
- responding to negative and prejudicial comments with positive statements;
- putting an end to gossip by walking away – setting a good example for others.

Comforting and Consoling

- holding a crying child;
- being available to listen when family members need a sounding board;
- affirming a child's efforts even when s/he doesn't succeed;
- offering positive words to fellow students or co-workers who are having a difficult time with their tasks;
- being present to those who are struggling with grief and bereavement, in emotional pain or despair;
- responding to cynicism, scepticism, and doubt with hope.

Praying for the Living and the Dead

- praying for the sick, suffering and those with terminal illnesses;
- praying during Mass for all those who have died – especially during November (the month of Holy Souls);
- praying with (as well as for) a deceased loved one (in the knowledge that they continue to be with us in spirit and are there to help us when we are in need).