Misericordiae Vultus: Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy
By Pope Francis

Mercy Discussion Groups Facilitator Instructions

The Mercy Discussion groups are designed as a series of three short (30-60 minute) group meetings where small groups (three or more participants) read and discuss the entirety of the Papal document (Bull of Indiction) establishing the Jubilee Year of Mercy. The following information will help you facilitate your meeting and make use of the provided materials.

Note: These materials were developed by staff at Catholic Charities, Diocese of Camden as part of internal development and education surrounding the Jubilee of Mercy. They were designed with this particular audience in mind. Please feel free to adapt or modify any of these materials to best serve the needs of your community.

About the Jubilee of Mercy and Misericordiae Vultus:

Pope Francis has declared the upcoming church calendar year the “Jubilee of Mercy,” beginning December 8, 2015 and ending Nov. 20, 2016. It’s the “Jubilee of Mercy” rather than the “Year of Mercy” because a Jubilee year in the Catholic tradition refers to a special time for reconciliation and forgiveness of sins.

The document to be studied in these sessions (Misericordiae Vultus: Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy) is the one Pope Francis used to announce the year and lay out the themes and practices that he wants the Church to focus on to celebrate it. He takes time to explain what mercy is from several different angles to help guide our reflections during this year. A Papal “Bull” is a letter, patent or charter issued by a Pope and named for the official seal (bulla) appended to the end of the document for authentication.

The text of the document is available on the Vatican website and comes to about 15 printed pages: https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html

More information and resources related to the Jubilee of Mercy can be found on the following websites:

From the Vatican: http://www.im.va/content/gdm/en.html
From the US Conference of Catholic Bishops: www.usccb.org/jubilee-of-mercy
From the Diocese of Camden: www.camdendiocese.org/mercy
General Guidelines for Facilitators:

1. Remember, as the facilitator, you are an equal member of the group. You are not the ‘teacher’ and don’t necessarily have all the answers! These groups are meant for everyone to work through this document together.

2. Try whenever possible to refer back to the text and encourage group members to do the same when they comment. Participants should be encouraged to take notes and mark document passages as they read for reference during discussion.

3. Open each meeting with a prayer. Pope Francis’ prayer for the Jubilee of Mercy is included below, or groups can design their own prayers.

4. The document is broken into three sections for each of the discussion groups:
   a. Meeting One: Sections 1-9
   b. Meeting Two: Sections 10-18
   c. Meeting Three: Sections 19-25

5. Distribute the outline packets to participants in advance of each meeting. This packet informs participants of the readings for that session and provides an outline of the assigned readings, short-answer questions to be prepared by the participant before the meeting, and group discussion questions.

6. Discussion can begin with each member of the group being given the opportunity to share their responses to the three general questions found on the back of each outline. If distributed in advance, participants’ reflections on and answers to these three questions (which remain constant throughout the three sessions) can help facilitate and open discussion.

7. With remaining time, talk through the discussion questions at the end of each outline. See where the discussion leads and be open to questions and tangential conversations!

8. The participant feedback survey may be distributed at the end of the final session and used to help facilitators collect feedback from the program’s participants and make improvements that may apply to future Mercy Discussion Groups or similar activities.

9. Catholic Charities would welcome any feedback from your groups if you choose to share the feedback surveys with us! We also welcome your feedback as a facilitator. All comments can be sent to Joanna.Gardner@CamdenDiocese.org
Prayer of Pope Francis for the Jubilee of Mercy:

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father,
and have told us that whoever sees you sees Him.
Show us your face and we will be saved.
Your loving gaze freed Zacchaeus and Matthew from being enslaved by money;
the adulteress and Magdalene from seeking happiness only in created things;
made Peter weep after his betrayal,
and assured Paradise to the repentant thief.
Let us hear, as if addressed to each one of us, the words that you spoke to the Samaritan woman: “If you knew the gift of God!”

You are the visible face of the invisible Father,
of the God who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy:
let the Church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified.
You willed that your ministers would also be clothed in weakness
in order that they may feel compassion for those in ignorance and error:
let everyone who approaches them feel sought after, loved, and forgiven by God.

Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing,
so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord,
and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor,
proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed,
and restore sight to the blind.

We ask this of you, Lord Jesus, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy; you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever.

Amen.
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Outline of Part One: Sections 1-9

What is Mercy/the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy?

Sections 1-5: Introduction

• 1-2: Jesus and Mercy
  o Pope Francis opens the encyclical by putting the whole document in the context of Jesus
  o “Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy.” – essence of the Christian faith
  o “Our salvation depends on” contemplation of the “mystery of mercy”
  o Note the four “definitions” of mercy listed in section 2

• 3-5: Introduction to the Jubilee Year of Mercy
  o Starts Dec. 8 (Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception)
  o Establishment of a “Door of Mercy” in every Diocese
  o 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council – the Jubilee Year of Mercy will be a way to “keep this event alive”
  o Vatican II embraced a more merciful approach to individuals and to the modern world
  o The Jubilee of Mercy Ends on Nov. 20, 2016 (Solemnity of Christ the King)

Sections 6-9: Mercy in the Bible

• 6-7: God in the Old Testament and Mercy
  o God is “patient and merciful” in the Old Testament – comes through especially in the Psalms (quoted)
  o Psalm: “His mercy endures forever” very important – prayed by Jesus before his death

• 8-9: Jesus in the New Testament and Mercy
  o Everything Jesus does is full of compassion
  o Jesus presents God’s mercy through the parables
  o Forgiveness (a form of mercy) is key, or we are not really followers of God
  o “we are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us.”
**Short Answer Questions:** Please answer in a sentence or two and bring with you to session one:

1. What is one question you have after reading part one? OR: What is one thing you didn’t understand from the reading?

2. What is one quote or idea from this section that struck you during your reading?

3. What is an idea from part one that you could apply to your daily life? How?

**Questions for Group Discussion**

1. What does the word ‘mercy’ mean to you?

2. In section 2, one of the “definitions” of mercy is “the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life.” How could this definition be applied in concrete ways in daily life?

3. In section 9, Pope Francis writes: “In short, we are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us.” What does this sentence mean?
Themes of the Jubilee Year for the Church

Sections 10-12: The Church’s Mission of Mercy

- 10: “The Church’s very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love”
- The Church has become distracted by justice. It’s not just the Church – this is a problem in the broader culture: People have forgotten about mercy
- 10: “It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters.”
- 11: Technology and “dominion over the earth” has pushed mercy out of the culture
- The Church’s role is to teach mercy to society by living Christ’s example
- 12: “Wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy.”

Sections 13-18: Themes of the Jubilee Year of Mercy

- 13: “Merciful Like the Father”
  - Requires being more open to Scripture, contemplating it in silence
  - Makes us better able to adopt it in our lifestyle
- 14: Pilgrimage/ Being non-judgmental
  - People will be encouraged to make pilgrimages to their “Holy Door” – an important Christian tradition
  - The “steps” of this pilgrimage are not judging others, but instead being forgiving and giving, as we have been forgiven
- 15: The Works of Mercy*
  - This year is a time to focus on people on the “fringes of society”
  - It is easy to fall into a routine and ignore, or become indifferent to, the suffering of others
  - Reflecting on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy during this year will be a way to “reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty.”
  - We will be judged based on how well we carry out the works of mercy
- 16: Isaiah Passage – another way to think about living mercy
  - “…the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty
to the captives, and freedom to those in captivity; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Is 61:1-2)

- 17: Lent this year – emphasis on confession, God’s mercy
  - During Lent, the Church should focus on confession
  - Fasting means giving
  - Priests who hear confessions should be a “sign of mercy”

- 18: “Missionaries of Mercy”
  - Priests with special powers of absolution usually reserved for the Pope will be sent out during the year of mercy

*Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy*

**Corporal works of mercy:**

- Feed the hungry
- Give drink to the thirsty
- Clothe the naked
- Welcome the stranger
- Heal the sick
- Visit the imprisoned
- Bury the dead

**Spiritual works of mercy:**

- Counsel the doubtful
- Instruct the ignorant
- Admonish sinners
- Comfort the afflicted
- Forgive offences
- Bear wrongs patiently
- Pray for the living and the dead
Short Answer Questions: Please answer in a sentence or two and bring with you to session two:

1. What is one question you have after reading part one? OR: What is one thing you didn’t understand from the reading?

2. What is one quote or idea from this section that struck you during your reading?

3. What is an idea from part one that you could apply to your daily life? How?

Questions for Group Discussion

1. Are there ways we have “forgotten to show and live the way of mercy” in our culture? Why do you think this has happened?

2. Which of the works of mercy particularly speaks to you or most applies to your daily experience?

3. What are some of the things that make it difficult to be merciful, especially in our daily interactions with co-workers, friends, or family? How can we overcome these challenges and show mercy?
Mercy in a Broader Context

Sections 19-21: Justice and Mercy
- 19: Specific call-outs to groups who must change their lives:
  - organized crime
  - the corrupt
    - money isn’t everything
    - crimes victimize the poor and the innocent
- 20-21: Justice and mercy
  - Justice is not opposed to mercy; it needs to be understood in context of mercy
  - “in Sacred Scripture, justice is conceived essentially as the faithful abandonment of oneself to God’s will”
  - We should be careful of not become too legalistic
  - “God’s justice is his mercy.”
  - Mercy is God’s way of reaching out the sinner and offering him “a new chance to look at himself”

Section 22: Indulgences
- A Catholic practice where people can have certain sins forgiven by doing particular actions
- Pope Francis uses the Jubilee of Mercy to explain this somewhat controversial practice

Section 23: Mercy in other religions (Judaism and Islam)
- Both religions believe mercy to be an important characteristic of God
- Pope Francis hopes the Jubilee will be a time of increased dialogue between Christians and these religions

Section 24: Mary
- As the mother of Jesus, Mary understands better than anyone else how Jesus represents God’s fundamental mercy
- Pope asks for her intercession over the Jubilee of Mercy

Section 25: Conclusion
- This year will be “dedicated to living out in our daily lives the mercy which the Father constantly extends to all of us.”
Short Answer Questions: Please answer in a sentence or two and bring with you to session three:

1. What is one question you have after reading part one? OR: What is one thing you didn’t understand from the reading?

2. What is one quote or idea from this section that struck you during your reading?

3. What is an idea from part one that you could apply to your daily life? How?

Questions for Group Discussion

1. What is the connection between mercy and justice?

2. Does anyone have experiences with the way mercy is taught in other religions or spiritualties that they would like to share?

3. Pope Francis says in the concluding section (25) that this year will be dedicated to living out mercy in our daily lives. What are some concrete ways we can do this at home, work, or school?
Discussion Participant Feedback Survey

Please take a few moments to respond honestly to the questions below about your experience participating in the Jubilee of Mercy discussion groups. Use the comments sections to offer your feedback on each of the components. Thank you!

1. How helpful did you find the outlines?
   - [ ] Very helpful in understanding and processing the readings
   - [ ] Somewhat helpful in completing the assigned readings
   - [ ] Not very helpful
   - [ ] I did not use the outlines during my reading
   Comments:

2. How useful were the written responses in facilitating discussion?
   - [ ] Very useful – they helped me process my thoughts and contribute to discussion
   - [ ] Somewhat useful – they were a starting point for our group’s discussion
   - [ ] Not very helpful – my group did not discuss the written responses
   - [ ] I did not complete the written responses
   Comments:

3. How useful were the discussion questions in facilitating discussion?
   - [ ] Very useful – they helped keep the discussion focused and moving
   - [ ] Somewhat useful – some of the questions were useful to my group
   - [ ] Not very helpful – most of the questions were not applicable to my group
   - [ ] My group did not use the discussion questions
   Comments:
4. Overall, how would you rate your group’s discussions?

- [ ] Excellent and very applicable to my life
- [ ] Very good and somewhat applicable to my life
- [ ] Good but not applicable to my life
- [ ] Not good

Comments:

5. For you, what was the biggest benefit of the discussions? Check all that apply and add additional benefits in the comments section

- [ ] Bonding with and forming deeper relationships with group members
- [ ] Opportunity to work through issues in my life
- [ ] Education on Catholic teaching and spirituality
- [ ] Personal enrichment and development
- [ ] Introduction to the Jubilee of Mercy

Comments:

6. How could the discussion groups have been improved?
7. Which of the three discussions was the most interesting and why?

8. What is your “big takeaway” from these discussions? This can be related to the discussion topics, the format, the activity itself, a specific personal goal, etc.

9. Would you like to see more opportunities like this in the future?
   □ Yes  □ No

   Comments:

Name (optional): ___________________________________________________________