

EXPLORING AND CELEBRATING THE THEME OF MERCY IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

EYFS and Key Stage 1

Activity 1

A special Year has begun – The Year of Mercy.

- Introduce the children to the idea that Pope Francis has asked us all to work hard at being the very best people we can. Pope Francis is reminding us that we are all God's children and therefore part of His family.
- Talk together about all the ways in which families show they love one another.
- Draw up a list of all the ideas the children come up with.
- Talk together about the word mercy. Explain that it means we help each other to be the best we can be even when people are not being kind.
- We show mercy to one another rather than returning bad actions with more bad actions.
- We forgive and help the other person be their best.
- We help when people are very upset or hurt. (Illustrate with pictures asking the children what is happening)
- We share our toys and games (Illustrate with pictures asking the children what is happening).
- We share our food and drink (Illustrate with pictures asking the children what is happening).

EXPLORING AND CELEBRATING THE THEME OF MERCY IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Key Stage 1-2

Creating a Door of Mercy

Using the door to the classroom, redesign the entrance to look like the doorway into a very important place. Decorate it with pictures and sayings from the children, which illustrate how they understand the concept of Mercy.

Place a bowl of blessed water on the inside of the doorway, so that as each child enters the room at the start of the day they bless themselves with Holy Water and make the sign of the cross to remind them that they are continuing to making the classroom a very happy place through the Works of Mercy.

Activity 5

Every door another doorway of Mercy

Allocate as many doors as possible to different classes and support staff, so that wherever the children go they are reminded of the different aspects of mercy and what it means for them today. Use the key words as a starting point for each door. One word per door is better than too many words, which can confuse. The children can then add their ideas during the year.

Activity 6

Select a Work of Mercy for each year group, and using the *Caritas in Action Resource*, identify a local/national area of focus to explore in more depth.

Clothe the naked- collecting baby clothes for mother and toddler charities, refugees, the homeless. Talk together about all the things mothers and babies need to be warm and happy.

Invite a mother and baby into class to help the children understand that it is not just toys that children need. What can the children do to help the mothers and their babies?

Clothe the naked – invite a speaker from a homeless project in to talk to the class about the many homeless people in their area. How can they help with warm clothing, blankets etc. Discuss the importance of the dignity and respect we need to show to people who are homeless and without their basic needs to be warm and safe. Organise a collection of specific items for each class. Emphasise the need to only give very good items that are clean and in good condition. Invite adult family members to come and sort out, mend, clean up, iron anything that needs attention.

Activity 7

Food for the poor - This activity can also be found in *Caritas in Action*. Talk to the children about how much food they/their families waste every week. Look up the website at:

<http://england.lovefoodhatewaste.com/node/2472>

"Almost 50% of the total amount of food thrown away in the UK comes from our homes. We throw away 7 million tonnes of food and drink from our homes every year in the UK, and more than half of this is food and drink we could have eaten.

Wasting this food costs the average household £470 a year, rising to £700 for a family with children, the equivalent of around £60 a month

There are two main reasons why we throw away good food: we cook or prepare too much or we don't use it in time. The foods we waste the most are fresh vegetables and salad, drink, fresh fruit and bakery items, such as bread and cakes".

Carry out a food waste survey in your school by stationing two pupils beside the food waste bin in the canteen each day. They weigh the wasted food and add it up at the end of the week. The next week they speak at a whole school assembly and explain the facts about wasted food and yet we have food banks in this country for people who can't afford to buy their own food. Explain that, this week, they are going to be helping the canteen staff to encourage everyone to only take the food they can eat and NO MORE! Same with packed lunches. Eat what you take for your lunch. Every day the food waste statistics will be circulated to each class with the aim of no waste by Friday! The saving in money, because less needs to be bought, will then be made known.

At the same time pupils will be asked to bring in non-perishable foods for a local food bank. Invite someone from a local food bank to come and talk to the class about the amount of food that is donated and why so many people are having to use it.

Activity 8

Invite your Parish Priest/pastoral assistant to come and talk to your class about how he helps to comfort the sick in the parish. Identify anyone in the school community or their relatives, who maybe unwell. Make a Get Well card for them and write a prayer inside to encourage them and let them know you are praying for them. Send the cards to the people.

Activity 9

Carry out research into the Hospice movement and identify why the Hospice movement is so important for people today. The word 'hospice' was first used in the 4th century when Christian religious orders welcomed travellers, the sick and those in many kinds of need. It was first applied to the care of dying patients by Madam Jeanne Garnier who founded the Dames de Calaire in Lyon, France, in 1842. The name was next introduced by the Irish Sisters of Charity when they opened Our Lady's Hospice in Dublin in 1879 and St Joseph's Hospice in Hackney, London (1905). Dame Cicely Saunders' experiences while working at St Joseph's and at St Luke's Hospital (Home for the Dying Poor founded in 1893) led to the founding by her of St Christopher's Hospice in 1967.

Talk together about why this movement is different from being in hospital. If you have a local Hospice invite someone from the staff to come and talk to the children about their work and how the children might help.

Activity 10

Giving alms to the poor – sharing what we have by way of having less ourselves so that others can at least have something. *Caritas in Action* is full of ideas for this activity. The Year of Mercy begins in Advent. Children will be full of excitement about the presents they hope to receive. Discuss with the class how they would feel if their family was not able to give them anything. Discuss the following information from Dr Bernado's website: *Child poverty statistics and facts*. There are currently 3.7 million children living in poverty in the UK. That's over a quarter of all children. 1.7 million of these children are living in severe poverty. In the UK, 63% of children living in poverty are in a family where someone works.

These child poverty statistics and facts will help to give you an idea of the scale of child poverty in the UK and the affect it can have on:

- a child's education
- a child's health
- the day to day lives of families.

Does child poverty affect children's health?

Three-year-olds in households with incomes below about £10,000 are 2.5 times more likely to suffer chronic illness than children in households with incomes above £52,000.

Infant mortality is 10% higher for infants in the lower social group than the average.

Does poverty affect a child's education?

Only 48% of 5 year olds entitled to free school meals have a good level of development at the end of their reception year, compared to 65% of all other pupils.

Less than half of pupils entitled to free school meals (just 34%) achieve 5 GCSEs grade C or above, including English and Maths, this compares to 61 per cent of pupils who are not eligible.

How much money do families living in poverty have?

Families living in poverty can have as little as £13 per day, per person, to buy everything they need, such as, food, heating, toys, clothes, electricity and transport.

How does poverty affect families?

Poverty impacts on what families can spend, one in ten of the poorest families can't afford to send their children on school trips, compared to one in a hundred of the richest families, 58% of the poorest families would like to go on holiday once a year but cannot, only 5% of the richest families cannot afford this luxury

The Government has a statutory requirement, enshrined in the Child Poverty Act 2010, to end child poverty by 2020. However, it is predicated that by 2020/21 another 1 million children will be pushed

into poverty as a result of the Government's policies. Talk about each person writing a letter to their family, asking them all to give up the cost of one present each, so that they can give the money to a charity for children living in poverty. Write their letter in class and then leave them free to give it to their families or not

Activity 11

Spiritual Works of Mercy - Mercy messengers

Take each of the spiritual Works of Mercy individually and discuss how they are important for their lives.

How might they help each other through each one?

1. Instruct – teach one another about God's mercy
2. Advise – one another on how to be people of mercy
3. Console – each other, or someone at home who is unhappy
4. Comfort – a friend who is unwell
5. Forgive – one another whenever a quarrel begins
6. Bear wrongs patiently – without repaying one bad deed with another

Divide the class into 6 groups and design a way of getting the "Message of Mercy" across as a thought for the week, an assembly, newsletter to go home to families, mini lesson with younger children in their RE classes.

Activity 12

Imagine that a new pupil has just arrived in your classroom. They have never heard about a God, Jesus Christ or the Catholic Church. The school is full of ideas about the Year of Mercy and they ask you what it is all about. In groups, write a play which shows how you will help this person understand why the school is celebrating the Year of Mercy. Share your plays with younger classes or choose one for an assembly.