



MERCIFUL PATIENCE

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT



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ABOUT THIS SESSION

This session aims to get young people thinking about how they react to things happening around them (ex. anger, judgement, indifference, love). It does so by presenting a recent national tragedy, namely the death of Paulina Dembska.

This session may be distressing for some young people and so leaders ought to be sure the session is led in a caring and sensitive way.

GOAL

- To look back on reactions, our own and those of others, and to discern how we should have responded.
- To answer the question “How does one respond to injustice with mercy?”

RESOURCES NEEDED

- A way to project concerning news articles.
- Sticky notes
- Pens/pencils
- Psalm 103:6-12 (projected or printed)

SCRIPTURE

- Psalm 103: 6-12

“Justice without mercy is unloving; mercy without justice is degrading.”
Friedrich Von Bodelschwingh

MERCIFUL PATIENCE
Summary & Team Overview

Welcoming & Opening
Prayer

Opening Game
(The Sun Shines On)

Discussion
(Sticky Note Mapping)

Cont. Discussion

Story of a Saint

Closing & Prayer

Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 min)**Game¹ (10 mins)****Discussion (45 mins)**

It is advisable that whoever will be leading this part of the session is familiar with the facts, and is aware of their own reactions, judgements and responses. Some helpful articles are linked in the appendices.

Our world:

The body of 29-year old Polish student Paulina Dembska was found in Sliema's Independence Gardens early on Sunday, 2nd January, 2022. She often went there to feed and spend time with the stray cats in the gardens. An autopsy confirmed she had been raped and strangled. She had head injuries and marks on her neck which indicated she had been suffocated.

<https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/paulina-dembska-identified-as-sliema-murder-victim.925273>

There was a wide spectrum of reactions to this murder and the news of who the perpetrator was, and what he had done. The incident highlighted issues of violence against women and mental health. People commented on the news as it unfolded: hate, disgust and insults were spewed all over social media. The aim of this session is to look back on reactions, our own and those of others, and to discern how we should have responded.

¹ Refer to appendices for a game idea.

Activity: Sticky Note Mapping

- Present to the young people 3 main questions:
 - a. How did you react to the death of Paulina?
 - b. How did you react to the news of who the perpetrator was and what he did to her?
 - c. How did the people around you/people on social media react?
- Have the participants generate responses by writing their answers on sticky notes (one response per note). Designate 3 different spaces/walls where young people can leave their answers according to the question. Encourage young people to write at least 5 responses (even if their answer to a question is "I don't know"). Each response should be written anonymously.

Once everyone is done, ask the young people to sit down and discuss their answers. Once the answers on the sticky notes are discussed, ask the following question:

- When the news broke out, what did you do? What did you post? What did you tell your friends? How did you speak about those involved?
- What happened on social media?

JUDGE

Ask young people to stand up and reorganise the sticky notes, grouping them into similar categories.

Continue the discussion:

- What would have been a just and merciful way of responding to the murder of Paulina, and the news about who the perpetrator was?
- How would Jesus have responded?

Story of Saint (10 mins)

Ahead of the session, ask a few young people to research and learn about the story of Pope St John Paul II's shooting: how it happened, and the saint's encounter with his aggressor. Invite them to prepare a presentation to share with their peers.

Invite the young people assigned this presentation to share with the group.

Closing Prayer (10 mins)

Pray Psalm 103 together

- Which of God's qualities stand out to you the most?
- Which do you need to practice more?

Young people can be invited to go round in a circle and pray for a particular quality out loud. For example: "I pray that I may be more kind."

Take some time to pray for the soul of Paulina, for her friends, family and those suffering her loss.

Pray also for the perpetrator, his family and friends, and those who he might have hurt in the past.

ACT

Appendices

Helpful articles

Activist react to Paulina Dembska's murder (Gender-based violence)

<https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/paulina-dembskas-two-bodies-ranier-fsadni.928885>

<https://lovinmalta.com/news/sheer-lack-of-sensitivityactivists-balk-at-malta-police-saying-paulina-dembska-murder-was-not-gender-based/>

Suspect being admitted to Mount Carmel Hospital

<https://newsbook.com.mt/en/sliema-murder-suspect-to-be-released-from-mount-carmel-hospital/>

Hate speech online

<https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2022-01-04/local-news/A-girl-was-killed-a-mother-is-being-murdered-PL-MP-6736239515>

<https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/why-do-we-judge-so-much-fr-frankie-cini-mssp.929530>

Icebreaker Game: The Sun Shines On

Aim: This game is a simple task of trying to find a chair to sit on, made hard by everyone else also looking for a chair. It's great for getting young people to know each other better.

Supplies: Enough chairs for everyone in the group. minus one.

Basic Structure:

- Have your group sit in a large circle with everyone but yourself sat on chairs.
- The objective is to always have a seat to sit on. There will always be 1 missing chair, as someone is always left to stand in the middle.
- To get out of the middle, the person standing up must say "Hello, my name is (Name) and the sun shines on (Topic)."
- The topic the person chooses can be anything that is true about them. For example: "Hello. my name is Fred and the sun shines on:
 - Ex. 1 All the people wearing yellow
 - Ex. 2 All those who like chocolate
 - Ex. 3 All those who support Manchester United.
- Once the person has said this, everyone who this statement refers to must now get up and find a new seat.
- When changing seats, they can't sit back in their own seat or either seat on their left and right. It is only ever one person to a chair; no sharing chairs or sitting on someone's lap

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mnMvDr0FUBs>

Reflection from the Lent Resource #YAHADMT

Our attempts at building a reconciled society founded on truth and justice do not always seem to bear fruit. Like Peter along the lake of Gennesaret, we work hard all night without catching anything. Like him, besides trusting in God, we are called to be patient, with ourselves and with others.

In this long journey, marked by uncertainty and frustration, we also have to learn the importance of being merciful. The companions we choose to accompany on this journey will at some point or another disagree with us. The temptation to surround ourselves with like-minded people is never far off. Even more challenging is the fact that, if we truly want this journey to be one of reconciliation, we will share at least parts of the journey with people who are in need of our forgiveness.

Having received God's mercy, we joyfully share with others the Good News of God's everlasting mercy towards the world. In a political context where the desire to crush the opponent is ever-present, in which political parties seek to outdo their opponents by engaging in daily shows of strength, there hardly seems to be space left for weak-looking mercy. And yet, if our aim is that of building a society, in which no one is crushed or eliminated, we first have to meet each other in our humanity. Instead of looking upwards and indulging in an alienating exultation of strength and power, we look downwards as we strive to create a culture of encounter which can only be born out of our common brokenness.