# Prayer Service

# Hands of Compassion and Forgiveness

#### Gather

We begin our prayer in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Compassionate God, your love is constant and persistent. Jesus showed us the way of compassion and invites us to be his compassionate presence in the world today. Help us to respond to his call and to bring his love to the world. Amen

#### Listen

"You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.’ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5: 43-48).

#### Respond

**Leader**: Jesus’ command to love our enemies is a hard one and a message that the world so desperately needs to hear. Love, forgiveness, and compassion are needed to bring our homes, communities, and world to healing and fullness of life. So we pray….

**Response**: May our hands be instruments of compassion.

**Leader**: “As the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various kinds of diseases brought them to Jesus; and he laid his hands on each of them and cured them” (Luke 4:40).

**Response**: May our hands be instruments of compassion.

**Leader**: “On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, ’Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands!’” (Mark 6:2).

**Response**: May our hands be instruments of compassion.

**Leader**: “The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, ’Unbind him, and let him go’" (John 11:44).

**Response**: May our hands be instruments of compassion.

**Leader**: “Jesus replied, ’A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead’” (Luke 10:30).

**Response**: May our hands be instruments of compassion.

**Leader**: “Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray” (Matthew 19:13).

Response: May our hands be instruments of compassion.

**Leader**: “Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ’Father, into your hands I commend my spirit’" (Luke 23:46).

Response: May our hands be instruments of compassion.

**Our Father, who art in heaven. . .**

Resp**o**nse: May we witness to your truth.

**Amen.**

#### Go Forth

May the love of God help us to love.

**Amen**

May the compassion of Christ help us to serve.

**Amen**

May the wisdom of the Spirit help us to make compassionate decisions.

**Amen**

We close our prayer in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,

**Amen**

# Handout #1.

# The Cast of the Prodigal Son Speak Out

##### Audience

I was there that day listening to Jesus. What a story – to imagine that a son would be so bold as to disobey our laws, traditions, and customs by asking his father for his inheritance before his father passed away. By law, the firstborn son receives a double share of the inheritance, and the second son only a third—*after* the father dies. With the younger son gone and his inheritance too, the older brother and father would have to work that much harder to care for the estate. That son did not deserve anything from his father. His father should have just told him to go away and make it on his own. I, for one, was not surprised to hear that the younger son ended up penniless and broke—that would be a just punishment for his sinful choices.

##### Farmer

I am a farmer. The younger son worked on my pig farm. I knew he was lost and desperate. No Jew would work with pigs because they are seen as unclean in their culture. I thought for sure he would be around my farm for a long time because his family certainly would not want him back.

##### The Father

I can see why people have a hard time understanding why I welcomed my youngest son back. I know they thought for sure I would disown him, but he was my son! I bent social customs by running to see him, and I hugged him even though he was not clean and needed a cleansing ceremony to become pure again. In my joy and desire to offer him forgiveness, I kissed him. I wanted him to know that I was ready to forgive him. I gave him shoes, so he would know that he was to be a free man and not a barefoot slave. I gave him a ring and a robe to re-establish his sense of self-esteem and to help him feel good about himself again. Of course we killed the fatted calf! I needed the whole community to know of my love for my son, to let them know that he was home!!

##### Younger Son

I know that no one really likes me and most people think I deserve punishment, not a party. I needed to go home, I needed to make amends with my father, and I was tired and hungry. I didn’t think my father would welcome me back as his son, but I hoped that at least I could be one of his slaves. What an incredible gift of love my father gave me. He warmly welcomed me home as if I had never done anything wrong.

##### The Older Son

I bet many of you can relate to me the most. When I heard that my brother had returned and how my father had welcomed him, I became angry. I had faithfully stayed and worked with my father while my brother ran off to play. It just did not seem fair to me that Father was treating him so well. I don’t care that my father was treating me the same way; it just did not seem fair to me that my brother got such a great welcome home. He should have at least had to earn his way back into our lives.

##### Everyone

I am one of you, someone trying to understand how this story is asking me to respond. Jesus ends the story with a positive message of forgiveness, which flows from the bountiful and unconditional love of the father. However, Jesus does not resolve the anger felt by the older son. Each of us must decide for ourselves how to handle God’s incredible acts of forgiveness. One’s condemnation of another’s sin will not change how God decides to forgive that person. God embraces each of us in our sinfulness, and models for us how we are called to forgive one another as well as ourselves.

# Handout #2

# Prodigal Son Reflection Questions

**Which character in the story do you identify with most? Why?**

**Why does our society tend to see forgiveness as a “foolish act”? What is gained by not reconciling with another?**

**If you could make forgiveness happen anywhere in the world, what situation would you apply it to? Why?**

**How is compassion part of forgiveness? What role does it play?**

**What is the connection between moral living and forgiveness?**

# Handout #3

# Compassion and the People Who Met Jesus

#### Bartimaeus

Bartimaeus was a beggar. Sick and disabled persons in Jesus’ time had to beg for a living unless he or she had family or friends to care for them. They could not get a job, and there were no hospitals, welfare, or disability grants. Beggars were totally dependent on the charity of others. In Jesus’ time, which was really not that different from our own in this attitude, if you didn’t have money or a home or education, you did not have much dignity, honor, or prestige. You were a member of the lowest class, utterly dependent on the charity of others for food, shelter, and clothing.

**Read Mark Chapter 10:46-52.**

Imagine the circumstances of Bartimaeus’ life. Imagine for a moment the impact Jesus would have had on his life.

If you had been there when Bartimaeus was healed, and if you could have asked Bartimaeus the question, “What difference did Jesus make in your life?” what do you think he would have said?

In light of Bartimaeus’ experience of Jesus, what do you think he would say the compassion of Jesus is like … or what does the compassion of Jesus include?

#### Widow of Nain

In Jesus’ society, widowed women and children had no one to provide for them and no way to make a living. They would have been dependent on the charity and almsgiving of various groups and the Temple. In Jesus’ time, being born female was to be born into a lower class; women were not allowed to be disciples of a scribe, nor could they take on any leadership roles outside the home. They were not allowed to be Pharisees or lead prayer in the Temple.

**Read Luke 7:11-17.**

Imagine the circumstances of the widow’s life. Imagine for a moment the impact Jesus would have had on her life.

What impact was her son’s death going to have on the widow’s life?

In light of the widow’s experience of Jesus, what do you think she would say the compassion of Jesus is like … or what does the compassion of Jesus include?

#### Sinners – Tax Collectors

Sinners were social outcasts. If you did not fully obey the law and the major customs of the middle class (the educated, the scribes and Pharisees) you were treated as inferior, as a low-class citizen. The laws and customs of the times were so complicated that the uneducated were quite incapable of knowing what was expected of them. If you could not read or were unable to study the law, you were constantly breaking the rules and the laws, and that simply became your existence: a sinner.

There was no practical way out for the sinner—to be a sinner was simply one’s role in life. To be a designated sinner was to be frustrated, guilty, and anxious. Lacking self-esteem and prestige, sinners were even told by the educated that God was not accessible to them as they were displeasing to God and ought to know how to live more righteous lives. Living in fear of divine punishment, isolated and alone, sinners had few doors open to them.

Tax collectors were considered sinners and considered unclean. To reconcile and purify themselves they were expected to give up their profession and then make restitution plus one fifth to everyone they had wronged, rendering them penniless, jobless, and poor.

Imagine the circumstances of Zacchaeus’ life as a tax collector. Imagine for a moment the impact Jesus would have had on his life.

**Read the story of Zacchaeus, Luke 19:1-10.**

What potential impact did Jesus’ going to his house have on Zacchaeus?

In light of Zacchaeus’ experience of Jesus, what do you think he would say the compassion of Jesus is like … or what does the compassion of Jesus include?

#### The Physically Ill

Some physical illnesses were thought of as the work of an evil spirit. All misfortunes, sicknesses, and other disorders were evil. They were afflictions sent by God as punishments for sin—one’s own sin or the sin of someone in one’s household or the sin of one’s ancestors. God did not “punish,” but handed that work over to the evil spirit. Even if the sin was a result of not understanding the laws, the illness was seen as punishment for it.

**Read the story of the crippled woman, Luke 13:10-17.**

Imagine the circumstances of the crippled woman’s life. Imagine for a moment the impact Jesus would have had on her life.

What potential impact did Jesus have on the life of the crippled woman?

In light of her experience of Jesus, what do you think she would say the compassion of Jesus is like…or what does the compassion of Jesus include?

#### The Mentally Ill

In Jesus’ time the body was considered the abode of a spirit. God breathed a spirit into a person to make him/her live. During a lifetime other spirits could also inhabit a person’s body—either a good spirit (the Spirit of God) or an evil, unclean spirit, a demon. This spirit could be observable in a person’s behavior. The pathological behavior of the mentally ill would be conceptualized as possession by an evil spirit.

**Read the story of the Gerasene demoniac, Mark 5:1-20.**

Imagine the circumstances of the demoniac’s life. Would he have had the support of family and friends? Would he have had easy access to food and shelter? Would he have experienced love and support from anyone?

What potential impact did Jesus have on this man?

In light of his experience of Jesus, what do you think he would say the compassion of Jesus is like … or what does the compassion of Jesus include?

#### The Upper Class

The upper or ruling classes of Jesus’ time generally were very healthy and lived in great luxury and splendor. There was a huge gap of income and resources between the upper and lower classes.

**Read the story of the rich aristocrat, Luke 18:19-23.**

Imagine the circumstances of the aristocrat’s life. What do you think his daily activities would include?

What potential impact did Jesus have on this man? Did he judge him, affirm him, challenge him?

In light of his experience of Jesus, what do you think the rich aristocrat would say the compassion of Jesus is like …or what does the compassion of Jesus include?

# Handout #4

# Creating An Examination of Conscience

There are times when we are not faithful to God’s commandments and teachings—times when we have broken one of God’s commandments—when we have said or done things that have hurt others and hurt our relationship with God.

An examination of conscience is a series of questions that help us review our life by examining how faithfully we have made loving choices and how faithfully we have been bringing God’s compassion and love to the world.

Use what you have just learned about Jesus and how he shared love and compassion with others to create a series of questions to help you review your life.

Here are a few examples to get you started. Feel free to make them specific to the people and activities in your life:

* Do I honor and love God always? Do I pray to God each day?
* Do I speak God’s name with reverence and respect?
* Do I worship God every week at Mass?
* Do I love, respect, and obey my parents?
* Do I show respect and care for the lives of others?
* Am I faithful and loyal to my family and friends?
* Do I share what I have with others, especially those in need?
* Do I help people who need me? Do I serve people in need?
* Do I respect what belongs to others? Do I steal?
* Am I honest and truthful? Did I cheat? Do I lie?
* Do I forgive people who hurt me? Do I ask people for forgiveness when I hurt them?
* Was I friendly to people who are different from me?

Develop at least five more questions to round out your Examination of Conscience

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

# Use Your Examination of Conscience

Now that you have created you Examination of Conscience, here’s how to use it.

**Step 1. Remember how much God loves you** and how Jesus calls you to follow him. Recite these Scripture passages:

“Happy are those who follow God’s commands who obey him with all their heart” (Psalm 119:2).

“Your word is a lamp to guide me and a light for my path” (Psalm 119:105).

**Step 2. Pray to the Holy Spirit.**

*Holy Spirit, help me to understand how to follow God’s commandments each day, to know my sins—the times I have not obeyed God’s commands, and to be sorry for them with all my heart. Amen.*

**Step 3. Reflect upon each Examination question** you wrote. Remember those times you have not followed God’s commandments. God is always ready to forgive you if you ask. Think about the things you want to ask God to forgive in your life.

**Step 4. Ask for God’s forgiveness.** In your own words tell God you are sorry for your sins. You might also say this prayer: *Dear God, I am sorry for doing wrong. I know you love me very much. Help me to live your commandments. Help me to change and grow in your love. Amen.*

**Step 5. Make a decision to do better.** Do something positive to make up for your sins.

**Step 6. Thank God.** Praise God for loving you even when you fail to love him or others as you should.

**Step 7. Pray an Act of Contrition.**

*My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.*

*In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good,*

*I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things.*

*I firmly intend, with your help,*

*to do penance,*

*to sin no more,*

*and to avoid whatever leads to sin.*

*Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us.*

*In his name, my God, have mercy.*

# Handout #5

# People of Compassion

#### St. Marguerite d’Youville

We learn compassion from allowing our lives to be influenced by compassionate people, by seeing life from their perspective, and by reconsidering our own values.

Born in Varennes, Canada, Marie Marguerite Dufrost de Lajemmerais had to interrupt her schooling at the age of 12 to help her widowed mother. Eight years later she married Francois d'Youville; they had six children, four of whom died young. Despite the fact that her husband gambled, sold liquor illegally to Native Americans, and treated her indifferently, she cared for him compassionately in the two years before his death in 1730.

Even though she was caring for two small children and running a store to help pay off her husband's debts, Marguerite still helped the poor. Once her children were grown, she and several companions rescued a Quebec hospital which was in danger of failing. She formed a community which she named the Institute of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal. People called them the "Grey Nuns" because of the color of their habit. In time, a proverb arose among the poor people of Montreal, "Go to the Grey Nuns; they never refuse to serve." In time, five other religious communities traced their roots to the Grey Nuns.

The General Hospital in Montreal became known as the Hotel Dieu (House of God) and set a standard for medical care and Christian compassion. When the hospital was destroyed by fire in 1766, she knelt in the ashes, led the *Te Deum* (a hymn to God's providence in all circumstances), and began the rebuilding process. She fought the attempts of government officials to restrain her charity and established the first foundling home in North America.

Pope John XXIII, who beatified her in 1959, called her the "Mother of Universal Charity." She was canonized in 1990.   
  
Saints deal with plenty of discouragement, plenty of reasons to say, "Life isn't fair" and wonder where God is in the rubble of their lives. We honor saints like Marguerite because they show us that, with God's grace and their cooperation, suffering can lead to compassion rather than to bitterness.

#### Fr. Mychal Judge

“You know what I want for Christmas? You know what I *really* want? Absolutely nothing! I have everything in the world."

Those words of Father Mychal Judge, O.F.M., characterize the simplicity of the New York City Fire Department chaplain killed during a rescue mission immediately following the September 11, 2001, World Trade Center attack. Chaplain to the department since 1992, the 68-year-old died in a hail of steel and concrete as he anointed a firefighter and a fallen office worker. Father Judge became the first officially recorded fatality following the attack.

His close friend, Michael Duffy, O.F.M., remembers how Father Judge would joke with him about his wish list every gift-giving season. After saying he wanted nothing, says Father Duffy, "he would go on for 10 minutes, listing all the blessings he was given: his family, his friends. He loved his Franciscan priesthood, his work with the fire department, his health, his exciting life. Then he'd always wind up almost in tears, saying, 'I don't deserve it! Why is God doing this to me?' He really believed that."

Born in Brooklyn May 11, 1933, Judge was the son of two Irish immigrants from County Leitrim. The seeds of suffering were planted early when at age six he watched his father die from a long illness. To help his mother and two sisters make ends meet, he shined shoes at Penn Station (in the vicinity of St. Francis Church), ran errands, and did odd jobs. Responding to his calling amidst the care and attention of the friars, he entered the Franciscans in 1954, made his final profession in 1958, and was ordained in 1961.

St. Francis of Assisi comes to mind when Father Duffy thinks of his friend Mychal: "Bonaventure writes that Francis had a certain natural bent for compassion. I think Mychal Judge did, too. That's what made him such a good Franciscan. He just felt so bad for people who were not cared for."

So many people loved Judge, recalls Duffy, because he "treated *everyone* like family." At funerals, he never just opened the book and started praying for people. He made it really personal. "Countless people told me that on birthdays, anniversaries, dates of sobriety—whatever—they would get a little note from him. He must have kept a *huge* calendar! In everyone's lives, whatever was significant, he'd write them a little note about it or give them a telephone call. Everyone considered him family."

Mychal Judge held no distinction between himself and the people, recalls Duffy. "Even though initially a person might approach him as pastor, chaplain, whatever, within 30 seconds all of those titles just fell down and he was just a friend. He wasn't afraid gently to mention God's presence."

Father Mychal was known also for his ministry to those suffering from AIDS, even years back when very few people would go near an AIDS patient. Often, at the end of long days, Fathers Judge and Duffy would talk by phone, sharing experiences. During one of those conversations, Duffy recalls Mychal telling him about an encounter with a particularly difficult situation. This was in the days before medications had been developed to help stem the effects of AIDS. Father Mychal had gone to visit a man who was in such advanced illness that no one would go near him because of the stench.

"Mychal said to me, 'You know, no one touches the man. He must feel so lonely.' So he'd go visit him, and hold his hand. He told me that even once he bent over and kissed him on the forehead because he felt so bad that no one would come near him.”

Mychal Judge never built a church or a school, or raised a lot of money, says Duffy. "What he did was build a kingdom spiritually, so people feel close to God. You can't measure that, and you can't see that. He didn't realize that that was his gift. But that was evident in the thousands of people who came out to his wake and to his funeral." Father Judge parked his fire-department chaplain's car at Engine 1/Ladder 24 and often took his meals with those firefighters (six of whom died in the World Trade Center attack). When there was an emergency, recalls Duffy, "He would throw caution to the wind. But sometimes I don't think he knew it was there! He would just go help."

When tragedy struck on September 11, Father Brian Carroll, O.F.M., went up to Father Judge's room to inform him that a plane had just crashed into one of the World Trade Center towers. Father Carroll recalls that Father Judge quickly took off his Franciscan habit, changed into his chaplain's uniform, and headed for the door. That was the last time the friar would see his friend alive.

Cassian Miles, O.F.M., communications director for the Holy Name Province, confirmed with the fire department battalion leader on-site at the World Trade Center that Mychal was anointing a firefighter and the woman who had fallen on the firefighter. Father Judge had removed his helmet in prayer and was struck in the back of the head by falling debris.

The firemen took his body and because they respected and loved him so much, they didn't want to leave it in the street. So they quickly carried it into a church and up the center aisle. They covered it with a sheet. And on the sheet, they placed his stole and his fire badge. And then they knelt down and they thanked God. And then they rushed back to continue their work.

In the numb days following the catastrophe, his brother firefighters from Engine 1/Ladder 24 expressed their gratitude for his life among them. Captain Kenneth Herb, a 22-year veteran, says, "I could always go to him with my problems. He was with us 100 percent of the time." Brian Thomas, a 14-year veteran, fondly recalls, "Father Mychal was the kindest guy in the world. He had such a way with words! When he spoke in public, it was very relaxing—I wish he were here with us now. He always had time for everyone."

#### Mother Teresa

Mother Teresa of Calcutta, the tiny woman recognized throughout the world for her work among the poorest of the poor, was canonized September 4, 2016. Among those present were hundreds of Missionaries of Charity, the Order she founded in 1950 as a diocesan religious community. Today the congregation also includes contemplative sisters and brothers and an order of priests.

Speaking in a strained, weary voice at the her beatification, Pope John Paul II declared her blessed, prompting waves of applause before the 300,000 pilgrims in St. Peter's Square. In his homily, read by an aide for the aging pope, the Holy Father called Mother Teresa “one of the most relevant personalities of our age” and “an icon of the Good Samaritan.” Her life, he said, was “a bold proclamation of the gospel.”

Born to Albanian parents in what is now Skopje, Macedonia (then part of the Ottoman Empire), Gonxha (Agnes) Bojaxhiu was the youngest of the three children who survived. For a time, the family lived comfortably, and her father's construction business thrived. But life changed overnight following his unexpected death.

During her years in public school Agnes participated in a Catholic sodality and showed a strong interest in the foreign missions. At age 18 she entered the Loreto Sisters of Dublin. It was 1928 when she said goodbye to her mother for the final time and made her way to a new land and a new life. The following year she was sent to the Loreto novitiate in Darjeeling, India. There she chose the name Teresa and prepared for a life of service. She was assigned to a high school for girls in Calcutta, where she taught history and geography to the daughters of the wealthy. But she could not escape the realities around her—the poverty, the suffering, the overwhelming numbers of destitute people.

In 1946, while riding a train to Darjeeling to make a retreat, Sister Teresa heard what she later explained as “a call within a call. The message was clear. I was to leave the convent and help the poor while living among them.” She also heard a call to give up her life with the Sisters of Loreto and, instead, to “follow Christ into the slums to serve him among the poorest of the poor.”

After receiving permission to leave Loreto, establish a new religious community, and undertake her new work, she took a nursing course for several months. She returned to Calcutta, where she lived in the slums and opened a school for poor children. Dressed in a white sari and sandals (the ordinary dress of an Indian woman), she soon began getting to know her neighbors—especially the poor and sick—and getting to know their needs through visits.

The work was exhausting, but she was not alone for long. Volunteers who came to join her in the work, some of them former students, became the core of the Missionaries of Charity. Others helped by donating food, clothing, supplies, and the use of buildings. In 1952 the city of Calcutta gave Mother Teresa a former hostel, which became a home for the dying and the destitute. As the Order expanded, services were also offered to orphans, abandoned children, alcoholics, the elderly, and street people.

For the next four decades Mother Teresa worked tirelessly on behalf of the poor. Her love knew no bounds. Nor did her energy, as she crisscrossed the globe pleading for support and inviting others to see the face of Jesus in the poorest of the poor. In 1979 she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. On September 5, 1997, God called her home.

# Handout #6

# Conscience—Our Guiding Star

# Handout #7

# A Children’s Guide to Making Good Moral Choices

Every day when you make choices about how to behave, you are making moral choices. The good news is that you are not alone. You can turn to the teachings of Jesus and the Church for help in making choices between right and wrong. Remember, God loves you every minute of every day.

Here are several simple things to remember to make good choices each day. And don’t forget that it takes practice to develop the ability to make good moral decisions.

##### Step 1. REMEMBER God’s Commandments.

* Honor and love God always. Pray.
* Speak God’s name with reverence and respect.
* Worship God every week at Mass.
* Love, respect, and obey your parents.
* Show respect and kindness to all people.
* Be honest. Tell the truth.
* Be faithful and loyal to your family and friends.
* Forgive people who hurt you. Ask for forgiveness when you hurt others.
* Share what you have with others.
* Serve people in need.
* Respect what belongs to others.

##### Step 2. LEARN from Others.

* Draw upon what you have learned from your family, from adults you respect, and from your parish community about right and wrong behavior.

##### Step 3. LISTEN to Your Conscience.

* Let your conscience, the voice of God inside you, tell you what is right and wrong.
* Think about why you want to do one thing or the other. Pay attention to your feelings as well as to your thoughts.

##### Step 4. PRAY to the Holy Spirit.

* The Holy Spirit will guide you in forming your conscience. Pray for help in doing what your conscience tells you is right.

##### Step 5. ACT.

* Make your decision, live the decision, and then think about how the way you live affects others such as your family, friends, and classmates.

# Handout #8

# The Power of Forgiveness

**Forgiving is woven into the life of the Amish. Their forgiveness of a killer mystifies. But anger and revenge simply aren't an option.**

By Donald B. Kraybill

The blood was hardly dry on the bare, board floor of the West Nickel Mines School when Amish parents sent words of forgiveness to the family of the killer who had executed their children.

Forgiveness? So quickly, and for such a heinous crime? Out of the hundreds of media queries I've received in the last week, the forgiveness question rose to the top. Why and how could they do such a thing so quickly? Was it a genuine gesture or just an Amish gimmick?

The world was outraged by the senseless assault on 10 Amish girls in the one-room West Nickel Mines School. Why would a killer turn his gun on the most innocent of the innocent? Questions first focused on the killer's motivations: Why did he unleash his anger on the Amish? Then questions shifted to the Amish: How would they cope with such an unprecedented tragedy?

In many ways, the Amish are better equipped to process grief than are many other Americans. First, their faith sees even tragic events under the canopy of divine providence, having a higher purpose or meaning hidden from human sight at first glance. The Amish don't argue with God. They have an enormous capacity to absorb adversity - a willingness to yield to divine providence in the face of hostility. Such religious resolve enables them to move forward without the endless paralysis of analysis that asks why, letting the analysis rest in the hands of God.

Second, their historic habits of mutual aid - such as barn-raising - arise from their understanding that Christian teaching compels them to care for one another in time of disaster. This is why they reject commercial insurance and government-funded Social Security, believing that the Bible teaches them to care for one another. In moments of disaster, the resources of this socio-spiritual capital spring into action. Meals are brought to grieving families. Neighbors milk cows and perform other daily chores. Hundreds of friends and neighbors visit the home of the bereaved to share quiet words and simply the gift of presence. After the burial, adult women who have lost a close family member will wear black dresses in public for as long as a year to signal their mourning and welcome visits of support.

In all these ways, Amish faith and culture provide profound resources for processing the sting of death. Make no mistake: Death is painful. Many tears are shed. The pain is sharp, searing the hearts of Amish mothers and fathers as it would those of any other parents.

But why forgiveness? Surely some anger - at least some *grudges* - are justifiable in the face of such a slaughter.

But a frequent phrase in Amish life is "forgive and forget." That's the recipe for responding to Amish members who transgress Amish rules if they confess their failures. Amish forgiveness also reaches to outsiders, even to killers of their children.

Amish roots stretch back to the Anabaptist movement at the time of the Protestant Reformation in 16th-century Europe. Hundreds of Anabaptists were burned at the stake, decapitated and tortured because they contended that individuals should have the freedom to make voluntary decisions about religion. This insistence that the church, not the state, had the authority to decide matters such as the age of baptism laid the foundation for our modern notions of religious liberty and the separation of church and state.

Anabaptist martyrs emphasized yielding one's life completely to God. Songs by imprisoned Anabaptists, recorded in the *Ausbund*, the Amish hymn book, are regularly used in Amish church services today. The 1,200-page *Martyrs Mirror*, first printed in 1660, which tells the martyr stories, is found in many Amish houses and is cited by preachers in their sermons. The martyr voice still rings loudly in Amish ears with the message of forgiveness of those who tortured them and burned their bodies at the stake.

The martyr testimony springs from the example of Jesus, the cornerstone of Amish faith. As do other Anabaptists, the Amish take the life and teachings of Jesus seriously. Without formal creeds, their simple (but not simplistic) faith accents living in the way of Jesus rather than comprehending the complexities of religious doctrine. Their model is the suffering Jesus who carried his cross without complaint. And who, hanging on the cross, extended forgiveness to his tormentors: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Beyond his example, the Amish try to practice Jesus' admonitions to turn the other cheek, to love one's enemies, to forgive 70 times seven times, and to leave vengeance to the Lord. Retaliation and revenge are not part of their vocabulary.

As pragmatic as they are about other things, the Amish do not ask if forgiveness works; they simply seek to practice it as the Jesus way of responding to adversaries, even enemies. Rest assured, grudges are not always easily tossed aside in Amish life. Sometimes forgiveness is harder to dispense to fellow church members, whom Amish people know too well, than to unknown strangers.

Forgiveness is woven into the fabric of Amish faith. And that is why words of forgiveness were sent to the killer's family before the blood had dried on the schoolhouse floor. It was just the natural thing to do, the Amish way of doing things. Such courage to forgive has jolted the watching world as much as the killing itself. The transforming power of forgiveness may be the one redeeming thing that flows from the blood shed in Nickel Mines this week.

# Handout #9

# A Young Person’s Guide to Making Good Moral Choices

#### The Basics

“Moral decision-making is like preparing for a football game. Attention to the many factors involved in a football game results in a better overall game. Similarly, if we were seriously ill we would seek as much information, advice, and guidance as possible to help us make the best decision about how to treat the illness. If we were faced with other decisions, such as what kind of car to buy or whether to go to college, we would take steps to ensure that our decisions are thoughtful and responsible.

“Like, the decisions that affect our moral life should not be made quickly or without forethought. Being alert to the many factors involved will improve our moral decision-making.

“We have the freedom and the wisdom to judge whether an act is good or bad. That wisdom comes from God the Father, who has placed his natural law within us, endowed us with conscience, and has given us the Ten Commandments, the witness of his Son, and the grace of the Holy Spirit. And if that isn’t enough, God has given us the Church to teach us about faith and morals. The Church identifies three traditional sources of morality—the object chosen, the intention, and the circumstances surrounding the act—to help us judge the goodness or evil of an act.

“The ***object* *chosen*** refers to what we do. Good acts involve something we know is good—feeding the poor, refusing to ridicule a classmate, visiting the sick, telling the truth, and so on. Bad acts involve matters that we know are bad—selling drugs, killing an innocent person, stealing, deliberately harming another person’s reputation, and so on.

“The ***intention*** refers to our motive or intention in performing an act. Giving a blanket to a homeless person because we are concerned for his well-being is a good act with a good intention. Cleaning a neighbor’s house because we want to steal from that neighbor is an example of a good act done with an evil motive. Murdering a tyrannical dictator because we want to free a nation from oppression is an evil act for what appears to be good reasons. But we cannot justify an evil act performed for good reasons.

“The ***circumstances*** of an act refers to conditions surrounding the act that affect its goodness or evil. Certain factors can “contribute to increasing or diminishing the moral goodness or evil of human acts (for example, the amount of a theft). They can also diminish or increase the agent’s responsibility (such as acting out of a fear of death)” (*Catechism*, #1754). Thus, there are factors that come into play when judging the goodness and evil of an act. Fear, ignorance, and pressure are some examples of these mitigating factors.

“It is important to realize that a ’morally good act requires the goodness of its object, of its end [intention], and of its circumstances together’ (*Catechism*, #1760) However there are certain acts that are always wrong to choose, such as blasphemy and perjury, murder and adultery” *Morality*, p. 123).

#### Making Good Moral Choices

A well-formed conscience will guide us to do what is right and good, and we can make good decisions if we have the help of Christ’s teachings, the Church, the Holy Spirit, prayer, and wise people.

##### Step 1: CONSIDER the Situation.

* What moral values and moral choices are at stake in this situation?
* What are the consequences of the different choices?

##### Step 2: Inform Your Conscience.

* What is God saying through the Bible and especially the Ten Commandments about this moral choice?
* What would Jesus want you to do? What is he teaching you through his words and deeds in the Gospels?
* What is the Church teaching you about this moral choice?
* What are your family, adults you respect, and your parish community teaching you about right and wrong behavior in this situation?

##### Step 3: LISTEN to Your Conscience.

* What choice would be most faithful to God’s commandments and teachings?
* Let your conscience, the voice of God inside you, tell you what is right and wrong.
* Think about why you want to do one thing or the other. Pay attention to your motives, feelings, and thoughts.

##### Step 4: PRAY to the Holy Spirit.

* The Holy Spirit will guide you in forming your conscience. Pray for help in doing what your conscience tells you is right.

##### Step 5: ACT.

* Make your decision, live the decision, and then think about how the way you live affects others such as your family, friends, and community.

# Handout #10

# Moral Decision-Making and Personal Discernment

In “Moral Decision Making and Personal Discernment: A Catholic Approach”, the United States Catholic Bishops identify key elements of moral decision-making and personal discernment, including:

* openness to God’s wisdom as manifested in many sources: family, Church, Scripture, sacraments, communal and private prayer, stories of the saints, data from the physical and social sciences, etc.
* objective standards, core principles, values, and norms for behavior that are basic to human nature.
* the ability to exercise “prudential judgment” in the process of moving from absolute values to general norms to specific judgments in issues of morality.
* attentiveness to the teaching of the hierarchy.
* faithfulness to one’s conscience: “With all the input and support possible, both from individuals and communities, one must still face the future based on decisions made before God in the recesses of one’s own heart.”

Moral decision-making is a particular type of discernment process. In order to decide the right course of action, particularly about matters that may be complex or controversial, Catholics must be open to the wisdom of God manifest in all these sources – one’s family, the Church, the Word of God, the sacraments, communal and private prayer, the stories of the saints. At the same time, data from the physical sciences, information from the social sciences, and the insights of human reason can all contribute to one’s discovering moral truth.

#### Critical Points to Remember

The Catholic tradition has generally accepted a tiered or sequential approach to Christian ethics, as reflected in the traditional levels of natural law theory. Certain values and derived norms remain timeless and absolute. The belief that “good is to be sought and evil avoided” is one such fundamental principle.

Basic values such as life, love, and truth are indisputable. Each is a crucial part of human well-being. People of all races, nations, and times have been able to discover and affirm these as true. Values imply certain actions. For example, we know that human life is a value. Therefore, in literally all cases, human life must be respected and honored with dignity.

In some cases, linking behavior to values is more difficult to discern. While we agree that one should always do the “loving thing” or the “life-respecting thing,” determining what that means in a given case may not be so self-evident. For example, when, if ever, is it “loving” or “life-respecting” to cease life-sustaining treatment on a terminally ill patient?

As the bishops reaffirmed at Vatican II, there is a special teaching role or office within the Church to discern and to teach the faith that is to be believed and put into practice.

The Church has consistently taught that a person of sincere conscience may have perceived and acted on a moral situation in a manner inconsistent with the teaching of the Church. Still, provided she or he did so with no intentional malice or desire to do wrong, the Christian tradition recognizes “mitigated subjective culpability” for a decision that objectively is wrong and ought not to have been made. Subjective culpability is determined by how diligently one strives to form correctly his or her conscience and how sincerely one follows that conscience.

In the end, whether choosing one’s vocation or making a moral decision that relates to or affects one’s vocation, each person is bound to live with and to stand by his or her own discernment or perception of God’s will. Ultimately, each person must discern his or her own moral decisions and wider vocational calling. With all the input and support possible, both from individuals and communities, one must still face the future based on decisions made before God in the recesses of one’s own heart.

**Reflection**

* What did you find helpful in the Bishop’s teaching? What will be challenging or difficult for you?
* How do you feel about the Church’s belief that Christian morality is determined by objective standards?
* How do you feel about the emphasis the Bishops place on developing an informed Christian conscience and being faithful to one’s conscience?
* What are the implications of the Bishops’ teachings for your moral decision-making?
* In what ways are forgiveness and compassion inherent in the Church’s teaching on moral living?

(*Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning* by the Catholic Bishops of the United States, November 21, 1990, United States Catholic Conference, Office of Publishing.)

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# Prayer Service

# Compassion and Forgiveness—Gifts for the World

#### Gather

#### Listen

"You have heard that it was said, ’You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.’ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5: 43-48).

#### Respond

When we see someone in need…

May we bring compassion and forgiveness to the world.

When we have hurt someone we love…

May we bring compassion and forgiveness to the world.

When we are with the sick and the dying…

May we bring compassion and forgiveness to the world.

When we serve the poor…

May we bring compassion and forgiveness to the world.

When someone asks for more than we think we are capable of giving…

May we bring compassion and forgiveness to the world.

When peace seems impossible…

May we bring compassion and forgiveness to the world.

When despair and apathy are present …

May we bring compassion and forgiveness to the world.

When God calls our name …

May we bring compassion and forgiveness **to the world.**

#### Go Forth

May God bless us with compassionate hearts to help those in need. **Amen.**

May Jesus bless us with forgiveness to create a world of peace. **Amen.**

May the Spirit give us wisdom to make loving decisions. **Amen.**

And we close our prayer in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**