



Gathered Session 4: Service Day

Overview

Ideally the service day should take place after module 8. The call to mercy challenges us to leave our four walls behind and go in search of those who are distant—those on the “outskirts” of life. The service day provides a structured way for the young people, as a community, to go beyond the four walls of their own parish in service to others; it is a day to practice “doing what you believe.” Because the experience of the service day will vary significantly from one faith community to another, the following material provides a suggested structure for the day, an opening and closing prayer, and reflection questions.

Suggested Structure

Time Frame	Activity
15 minutes	Gathering
10 minutes	Opening Prayer
20 minutes	Opening Reflection Activity
	Service Projects (Off-Site)
	Reconvene (Lunch/Snacks)
30 minutes	Closing Reflection Activity
10 minutes	Closing Prayer

Practical Considerations

Before You Go: Paperwork and People

Don't forget to secure the following:

- permission to serve at the identified work site(s)
- signed permission forms from parents or guardians (including a media waiver giving permission to photograph and film the young people, if you plan to do so)
- transportation and any necessary insurance paperwork
- adult leaders for each service site
- a parish member who is active in social justice work (preferably as part of a church ministry that is open to young people) to give a witness talk

Communicating Expectations to the Young People

The young people will do their best work if they know what to expect. It will also ease the chaos on the morning of the service day if they already know where their group is going, what they will be doing at their service site, which adult leader(s) will accompany them, what they should wear, and what (if anything) they should bring with them. Prior communication is essential.

Preparation

For the opening and closing prayers, set up a prayer table with a tablecloth, a Bible, a candle, and matches. This table should be near the wall where you have the young people tape their paper bricks in the opening reflection activity.

Materials Needed

- the *Scandal of Mercy* album (Mission Eighty5™ Music) and an audio system
- paper bricks, one for each young person, from the handout “Bricks” (Document #: TX005790)
- black markers, one for each young person
- copies of the handouts “Opening Prayer” (Document #: TX005791) and “Closing Reflection Activity and Closing Prayer” (Document #: TX005810), one of each for each young person and adult leader
- food for meals and snacks
- a roll of tape
- blank sheets of paper, one for each small group

The Session

Gathering (15 minutes)

As the young people begin to arrive, play upbeat music from the *Scandal of Mercy* album, such as “Holy Spirit,” by Steven Joubert; “Start a Fire,” by Ike Ndolo; “Searching,” by Paul J. Kim; or other appropriate popular music.

When greeting the young people, recruit prayer leaders for the opening and closing prayers. For the opening prayer, you will need three prayer leaders and two readers. For the closing prayer, you will need two prayer leaders. Give them each a copy of the prayer handouts, and ask them to review their parts ahead of time.

Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

Distribute the handout “Opening Prayer” [Document #: TX005791]).

Direct the leaders to read from their places in the larger group. As leader 1 begins, have another young person come forward to light the candle.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 25:34–40

Direct the Gospel readers to move to the front by the candle and read from there.

Share the following with the young people:

- We are called to care for the least among us, the ones Bishop Frank refers to as “the people living in the shadows,” the outsiders, the forgotten, the brokenhearted. Today we go out in service to others, to “do what we believe” and to “be the neighbor who acts with mercy.” What does it mean to be a neighbor? What walls stand in the way of seeing others as our neighbors?

Opening Reflection Activity (20 minutes)

Arrange the young people, sitting or standing, facing a blank wall on which they will tape their paper bricks. Distribute a paper brick from the handout “Bricks” (Document #: TX005790) and a black marker to each young person.

Begin to play the song or music video “Scandal of Mercy” (acoustic version) and share the following with the young people:

- This song was written by 17-year-old Thomas Muglia. As you listen to the lyrics, write on your paper brick a word or phrase that expresses how you are feeling this morning as we prepare to go out, beyond these walls, in service to others. What walls stand in the way of seeing others as our neighbors? After you have written a word or phrase, bring your brick to the front and tape it on the wall.

Conclude with the following blessing:

- Lord, bless us this day. Bless us with your mercy. Bless us with kindness, compassion, goodness, and open hearts so that we may see our neighbors and bring love to them, just as we desire to be loved ourselves. You have said that those who show mercy are the true neighbors and that this is the path of lasting happiness. We ask this blessing in the name of your Son, Jesus, who has revealed to us through the Spirit the call to mercy. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Service Project(s)

All depart to service site(s).

Reconvene

Have a light meal or snacks (depending on time) available for the young people as a transition from work site to closing-process time. Set the meal or snacks up near the “wall” that was built during the opening prayer, encouraging the young people to look at the words and phrases on the bricks.

Closing Reflection Activity (30 minutes)

Arrange the young people into small groups for the closing reflection, ensuring that all members within a group went to the same service site. These questions, along with the response and dismissal and sign of peace, are available on the handout “Closing Reflection Activity and Closing Prayer” (Document #: TX005810); you can either print copies and distribute them, or project the questions on a screen for all to see.

- Did anything surprise you about your experience today?
- What did you learn about service?
- What did you learn about those you served and those who served with you?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What were some of the feelings you had during the experience?
- How was being a part of a team—a community—helpful to you today?
- In what ways does the organization or the group of people you worked with impress, inspire, challenge, or motivate you to give of yourself in service to others?
- In what ways can you continue to support, into the future, the organization or the people you served today?

Distribute a sheet of paper to each small group and ask each to come up with a hashtag to describe their discussion to the larger group, writing it in large print on their paper.

Invite each small group to come forward and present to the large group its hashtag and to say a little bit about what it means for them as a group. Have the groups tape their hashtags on the wall, next to the bricks. Allow time for the young people to offer individual comments about their experiences.

Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

Light the candle and gather the large group near the prayer table and the wall of paper bricks while playing the song or music video “Start a Fire,” by Ike Ndolo. After the song, invite the young people to take their bricks down from the wall. On the back side of their bricks, have them write a sentence or phrase that describes how their feelings have changed from this morning. For example: “I felt nervous this morning, but now I feel proud of what we did.”

Distribute the handout “Closing Reflection Activity and Closing Prayer” (Document #: TX005810) if you haven’t already. Introduce the closing prayer with these or similar words:

- Earlier we reflected on what it means to go beyond the walls of the Church and our lives. We went beyond these walls in service. As we again listen to “Scandal of Mercy,” let us take a few minutes to think about the word or phrase we wrote on our bricks this morning. How has this day of service affected what you were feeling this morning? What new insight or perspective has this day generated for you about the call to mercy? Think about how you are feeling now. What, if anything, has changed for you?

Response

Read the prayer on the handout “Closing Reflection Activity and Closing Prayer” (Document #: TX005810).

Dismissal and Sign of Peace

Prayer leaders read from their places in the group.

Thank the young people for their commitment today (tonight). Make any announcements that may be needed before you dismiss the young people.