



WORKS OF MERCY – Guidelines for Group Leaders

I WON'T LEAVE YOU ALONE!! "I was in prison and you visited me"

TO PREPARE FOR THE MEETING

The dignity and the rights of prisoners are often trampled on

- Many times the news media reinforce attitudes of condemnation and reproach for those who have committed a serious offense against their community. **The biggest problem of a prisoner is that society will always regard him as such**, and often identify him with the crime he committed. Prisons have many unsolved problems: overcrowding, poor sanitary conditions, human rights violations, etc.
- We cannot forget that often **those who commit a crime have a history of being abandoned by their parents, the lack of opportunities for a good education and cultural development**, an adolescence spent in dysfunctional relationships and living in a social setting that encourages illegal activities.
- The primary objective of a just society should be to rehabilitate and reintegrate the person into society. Even with teenagers **we can promote the awareness of human dignity issues, the proposal that imprisonment should lead to rehabilitation, the value and the power of forgiveness** and the need to reverse all the negative prejudices against ex-prisoners.

What attitudes should we promote in young people?

- Jesus gave a new opportunity to those who had failed (see Luke 19:1-10). This **does not mean having a permissive attitude towards evil**, but **giving those who failed the chance to start over again** and redeem themselves in the eyes of the community.
- Recognizing that we have all made mistakes and hurt other people, **we can convince every community, large or small, of the need for mutual forgiveness**. "Christian forgiveness" leaves open the door for the other person to start a new life.
- It is also necessary to present to youth the fact that **"justice" is a value that has to take into consideration the dignity of the human person and respect them**, always offering an opportunity for rehabilitation and redemption.
- In some countries, security issues do not permit people, especially youth, to visit prisons. However, there are alternative ways to reach the prisoners and their families (by letters, gifts and prayers).

Some useful texts to explore the topic:

- **Pope Francis' greeting to prisoners** in a visit to the rehabilitation center of Santa Cruz - Palmasola (Bolivia) (Attachment [prison A1](#) or [docx](#)) on the Vatican website translated into other languages
- **Testimony of a former inmate** – video (in Italian only) of an experience in the Pope John XXIII Community Association (attachment [prison A2](#))
- **F for forgiveness**, an article in the Città Nuova e-web publication (attachment [prison A3](#) or [docx](#))



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BEFORE THE MEETING

How can we involve the community?

POSSIBLE STEPS TO WORK ON TOGETHER (SPECIFIC GOALS)

- Rediscover the need and the value of forgiveness in every community.
- Develop a new awareness of the dignity of each person and the ability to understand and empathize with those who are in prison.
- Take some concrete action of solidarity towards people who are suffering because of a mistake they once made.

MATERIALS SUITABLE FOR TEENS

From PPT **"Heart in action"** – From slides 58 to 66 "To all those who are without freedom ..."

PPT **"Hearts in action live"** – Experiences of teens "I was in prison and you visited me"
(Attachment [PPT_I was in prison](#))

A new page, PPT with the experience of Gen Rosso with the musical Streetlight in prisons,
(Attachment [prison_R1 - ppt](#))

Working in prison, experience of Daniel Marques Barretto, Vice-director of the Sorocaba Prison,
Brazil (Attachment [prison_R2 or doc](#))

Proposals for activities to help develop the meeting:

- **On which side are you?** The game helps teens see that we can all make mistakes and may need the forgiveness of others and a new opportunity to start over. (Attachment [prison_R3 or doc](#))
- **A story to discover ...** starting with a photo we can reconstruct a pictorial story that tells the emotions, missed opportunities and hopes of a young prisoner. This activity describes some steps to help teens in their personal use of technology. (Attachment [prison_R4 or doc](#))
- **A small man with a big problem**, starting with a passage from the Gospel of Luke (19: 1-10) we can reflect on the mistakes we can make and the opportunities for recovery and beginning again. (Attachment [prison_R5 or doc](#))

EVALUATION

- Has team spirit and exchange between all increased in this meeting? Has the climate of trust and mutual love grown? Have we experienced the presence of Jesus among us?
- Does there seem to be a growth in our sensitivity towards those who, after committing a crime, repented and sought an opportunity to be healed and start over?



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- Did we find an opportunity to experience this work of mercy, possibly with a specific project?
- How did we manage to involve the community?

Look for the material on the [site for group leaders](#).