

FOR YOU, THE GROUP LEADER

Mini-Guide and list of materials for “A Heart in Action” (for children 9-14 yrs.)

WHICH COURSE SHALL WE CHOOSE?



Hello everyone and a good start of the year! A special year, in which the Pope invites Catholics and those who listen to his message to rejoice in the mercy of God!

- This year, we want to explore with the youth those works that put our “heart in action,” making it rich in mercy! For 2015-2016, we have prepared seven file cards to explore the seven corporal works of mercy. Then in September 2016, the spiritual works of mercy will be ready.
- **Jesus’ heart is a “heart in action.”** All through his life, he fed the crowds, took care of the weakest and most rejected among the people, and chose public sinners as friends and associates... but in many parts of the world there is still much injustice, hardship and pain, often caused by a serious lack of love and brotherhood among people. We suffer it too, either personally or through the pictures of war, violence and poverty we see on TV, in the newspapers or online. We often feel powerless or, even worse, anesthetized ... What can we do? To grow into new people means that we must expand our hearts to the degree of love in the heart of Jesus. Therefore, it will be an important educational objective for us to offer children opportunities to put their hands, hearts and heads “into action,” to accept everyone with the same love God has for them and thus change the world around us. In the Gospel, we find the answers: and when we put them into action, what a difference it makes!
- **Set out together.** We want to be challenged by the needs we see in our own cities and involve other people - youth, adults, schoolmates, friends and those who, like us, want to brighten the dark corners of the city by bringing the color of solidarity, sharing, comfort and forgiveness.
- **Grow as citizens of the world.** Our actions will have consequences in our cities, but they can also have a global effect. We can help children to grow up as citizens of the world, attentive to the needs of those who are underprivileged, even in distant countries.

WHAT IS OUR GOAL?



Are we ready then to set out together? Let’s first look at the goals we want to set for this year:

- Let’s try to make our group aware of the many needs of people who live in poverty, identifying with those who are underprivileged, becoming sensitive to the terrible situations they live in, until we feel that their needs are our own.
- Let’s strengthen our conviction that our actions, if constant, can help lessen the inequality in the world and build a more united world.
- Let’s “roll up our sleeves” and work concretely as individuals and as a group, doing many acts of mercy.

- Then let's share with others the change that we experience around us.

USEFUL INSTRUCTIONS FOR MOVING AHEAD

The route is exciting and daunting at the same time! To equip ourselves better, let's look at the many resources available to us as educators.

- **THE PRIORITY IS...**



The first step is to create a climate of communion and trust in the group! Let's do all we can to ensure that the mutual love among us brings about the presence of Jesus – “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Mt 18:20). He is the one who guides us and guarantees we are following the right way. What will help us to do this are the tools of the spirituality of communion, such as sharing experiences and the pact of unity made on special occasions. Even moments of leisure are important opportunities to nurture this atmosphere.

As far as possible let's try to participate in the life of every boy and girl, staying close to those in difficulty and by living among ourselves the corporal and spiritual works of mercy (a phone call to those who are sick, advice to someone who has doubts, etc.). Regular meetings are important to create a significant group experience and the same is true with providing frequent opportunities for them to relate with their peers in the group - this is essential; Skype conferences or groups of “whatsapp” can be helpful, but they do not replace the meetings.

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*“For youth groups to help form the adults of tomorrow, there must be authentic, continuous relationships. Rare sporadic meetings that do not connect with the reality that the youth are living become simply a waste of time and do not serve the fundamental role of reinforcing the group's identity. The groups that are most effective in promoting psychological and emotional maturity are the ones where **the youth can have the experience of making their own decisions, pursuing concrete actions that bring about visible results, and meet frequently for sincere discussions.**”*

(C. Marchisio, To the secretariats of Youth for Unity, November 2014. C. Marchisio, psychologist, psychotherapist and researcher in special education at the University of Turin)

- **THE GROUP LEADER DOES NOT ACT ALONE**



We know that unity is strength! We are aiming at having a small team that follows the youth regularly. If several people together give their contribution, the programs will be enriched with ideas, talents and freshness.

Our community is a great asset. Who can give us advice, help organize an activity or offer their experience? For example, when we go to “visit the sick,”

we can call upon the volunteers or other members of the New Humanity Movement who are experts in health care.

- **LET'S COLLABORATE WITH OTHER EDUCATORS WHO HAVE THE SAME GOALS**



In particular, let's create a network of families. Because of the policy for the protection of minors, we are required to inform parents about our meeting schedule and about the content of the material we intend to cover during the year. Perhaps some of them will be happy to collaborate in some activities or

recreation periods. In collaboration with New Families we could prepare a meeting for parents at the beginning of the year or during the year.

- **24 HOURS A DAY**



We are round-the-clock group leaders! Let's aim at being what we want to communicate. Let's ask ourselves: how important are the works of mercy for me? How do I practice them? What helps me, or what difficulties have I experienced in practicing them? Since it is our lives that make our message compelling, let's be honest with the youth about our mistakes, especially emphasizing that what is important is to start all over again each time and go forward together. That helps them accept their own limitations and not be surprised when an adult does something wrong.

- **THE WAY IS OPEN TO PARTICIPATION**



The youth want to be involved! If they feel like actors and not just receivers, they will share their ideas, put their talents at the service of others and feel that their presence in the group is important. How can they become active players in preparing activities? With the youth, choose some works of mercy that they see as the most urgent in their area or which they are most interested in pursuing. Let's welcome suggestions for other topics to deal with. A small team can take turns in helping to prepare the meetings.

- **WORK IN PROGRESS**



Do we like the challenge of getting the youth interested in new proposals closer to their needs? To accomplish all this, we know that we need time to prepare. The ideas that we propose with the material "A Heart in Action" are a stimulus to address the issues related to the individual works of mercy. Choose and modify proposals tailored to the needs and situations of your group. Send us any new idea or activity. We can put it on the website to make it accessible to other groups. In planning the meeting, it may be important to keep in mind three useful steps:

- **Arouse interest** with a game, an audiovisual, a role-playing activity or experiment, or by the youth sharing their experiences or knowledge of the topic;
- **Develop and deepen:** most of the time we will have to listen to the youth as they express their own thoughts and ideas and proposals. This can be done by posing questions, opening up a dialogue and encouraging them to participate. Then together draw the conclusions of what they will do. In this way everyone will feel that it is their decision and will be able to explain to others why they reached this decision;

- **Sum up the results and then put the project into action**, as an experience of life. In the case of the works of mercy, let the youth themselves choose which project they want to commit themselves to, so that they “roll up their sleeves” as individuals and as a group. The next time they meet, they can share the result of giving concrete service to their city.

- **RECIPROCITY, OUR CHARACTERISTIC**



Let’s not limit ourselves to helping those in need. **Let’s create a relationship of sharing and reciprocity**, creating true friendships and sincere relationships. Let’s ask ourselves: “What can we give and receive in meeting these people? How can they be involved, so that they can offer their talents?”

- **STOP TO EVALUATE**



At the end of the activity, the team leaders should make a short assessment. Have we achieved our objectives? Do we need to reformulate some of them? Which activities were particularly successful and where can we improve? Parents can also give us useful feedback. In this way, the formation of the youth becomes an ongoing process and we avoid repeating past mistakes.

LIST OF PROPOSED MATERIAL FROM THE GEN3 CENTERS AND TEENS FOR UNITY

Download from ["http://assistentigen3.focolare.org"](http://assistentigen3.focolare.org)

1. PPT “A Heart in Action” with four sections for every work of mercy: the origins (with texts or experiences of Chiara Lubich and the Focolare community in the early days) – “I know” (with testimonies of famous people taken from websites, books or other sources) – “I live” (with experiences of the youth) - input (with some ideas for living concretely the proposed work of mercy)



2. PPT “Hearts in action live” with the experiences of youth from all over the world on the works of mercy.
3. Seven cards for the group leader with accompanying texts, activities, games, PPT or video clips on each corporal work of mercy.