

# Mercy in the Mirror



an 8 week course on the  
intersectionality of mercy & justice  
and seeing it in ourselves and others

cover art by Gabriela Riveros Paredes

**Teacher Manual**  
**by McKenna Smith**  
**for MELF Cohort 4**  
**Dublin, Ireland**  
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# ABOUT THE PROGRAM

***Mercy in the Mirror*** was designed to bring awareness to the gifts that women who have faced incarceration, addiction, and/or mental illness bring to the table. It serves as a reminder that each of us adds a necessary voice to the conversation and we are not our mistakes.

*Mercy in the Mirror* is an 8-week program that helps people learn about what mercy is, how mercy can foster change, and the intersectionality of mercy and justice. During the program, participants will have the opportunity to look at themselves and do self-examination and reflection. Throughout the program, participants will create works of art that represent where they are on their journey and where they hope to go. At the end of the 8-week program, these self-portraits will be displayed for the community to view the impact of mercy on people with experience relating to incarceration, addiction, and/or mental illness.

While there is no obligation to be a religious or practicing faithful person, this course does use Catholic doctrines and teachings to help define concepts. We will also use secular examples and practices. People who have a complicated relationship with religion should take this course with care, and those who run it should give them grace and understanding. The goal is to help, not cause harm.

# AN INVITATION

This program was written with women who have been impacted by incarceration in mind, however, it is truly an open source. I would encourage any women, or person for that matter, who struggles with their self-worth and finding mercy in themselves and others, to participate.

You are loved and needed and I hope that this program allows you the opportunity to see that.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**McKenna Smith (she/her)** is the creator and lead instructor for *Mercy in the Mirror*.

She is a Mercy Emerging Leader Fellow for 2024-25. She has a Th.M from St. Joseph's College of Maine and BA's in Criminal Justice and Political Science from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

She has a passion for creating a more just and merciful world; particularly through investing time and resources into communities that have been impacted by incarceration, addiction, and mental illness. McKenna hopes to break the stigma around rehabilitation.

Through her familial and practical experience in the mental health and the criminal justice systems, McKenna has found that the world could use more empathy - which she believes is a result of mercy. She has also spent time volunteering in prisons and finds joy helping other people see their worth.

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To the women incarcerated at Maine Correctional Center, now and particularly between 2023 & 2025. You changed my life and this project would not exist had you not welcomed me into your space. By being vulnerable to a complete stranger, you have and will transform many lives. I will never be able to fully express my gratitude. Working with each of you was like a dream come true because it allowed me to see that we are all worthy of love, forgiveness, and mercy, and we are not our past.

To the Diocese of Portland, Maine Catholic Communion Volunteers and the women of Kairos, I would not be here without you. You helped me begin my work in prison ministry and find my vocation. You saw my potential.

With love and gratitude and hope for a merciful and just future,  
McKenna Smith

# INTRODUCTION

As of 2021, nearly 70% of women, globally, struggle with self confidence (White Paper 2021). When we focus on women who have been incarcerated, that number becomes greater (Annett et al 2023). Women who have been incarcerated often come from backgrounds of abuse, addiction, and mental illnesses. These are not uncommon problems but so often, they go untreated. By leaving abuse, addiction, and mental illness untreated, we create a system where women enter a vicious cycle with the criminal justice system.

The unfortunate reality is that women are entering the criminal justice system, on a global scale, at faster rates than ever before. Since 2000, there has been a 53% global increase of women in jails and prisons (World Prison Brief 2025). For the vast majority of these women, their crimes are relatively minor but they face harsh punishments due to the societal expectations on what we consider constitutes “good” behavior (Penal Reform International 2019).

In Cambodia, the number of incarcerated women has grown to nearly 9% of the overall population. A significant portion of those women are facing minor drug charges that carry heavy sentences. Many of the Khmer women come from areas of extreme poverty (Penal Reform International 2019).

The idea that poverty and addiction worsen the criminal justice system is not local to Cambodia; it is one that I have seen first hand in the United States, and exists throughout the world. In the United States, laws are often enacted that sharply impact people who suffer from addiction and mental illness. These laws are often painted as “cleaning up our streets”, when in reality it is criminalizing poverty (Institute for Research on Poverty 2020).

The global criminal justice system is set up to make those in it feel like they cannot escape and that they will never be more than they are. If that belief continues, then we are headed for a worsening society. We must approach this system with the understanding that “Each of us is more than the worst thing that we have ever done” (Bryan Stevenson, Founder of the Equal Justice Initiative).

Research has shown that offering classes to women who are, or have been, incarcerated that work on self confidence and empowerment leads to lower recidivism rates (National Institute of Justice). Despite this knowledge and the growth of women in prisons, most facilities lack the ability to offer such programs. In some countries, such as the United States, there is a stigma associated with incarceration: *if someone is locked up, they must have done something wrong, and if they have done something wrong, why is it my job to fix it?* And so, these women go without classes because communities will not fund them or support them.

*Mercy in the Mirror* hopes to erase the stigma associated with rehabilitating women after incarceration. We all deserve to love ourselves for who we are, as well as the possibility of who we might become. In order to love ourselves and others, we must have people in our support system who openly believe in the goodness we have to offer. This program seeks to display how an understanding of mercy and justice can make us grow in a global community. For the next 8 weeks, I invite you look inwards with grace and understanding and know that I will be praying for you on this journey.

# PROGRAM OUTLINE

**Week One:** Who Am I?

**Week Two:** What is Mercy?

**Week Three:** Mercy Towards Self  
& Mercy Towards Others

**Week Four:** Practical Applications of Mercy

**Week Five:** Spiritual Works of Mercy

**Week Six:** Intersectionality of Mercy & Justice

**Week Seven:** Mercy in My Life

**Week Eight:** Conclusion & Graduation

# NOTICES

Hello and Welcome! We are glad that you are here.

This program will cover some heavy topics and your wellbeing is our priority.

If a topic ever becomes too much, you are welcomed and encouraged to take a break.

This is a confidential and secure space. The things you say here, will not be repeated and your stories and truths will be heard and respected.

The artwork displayed at the end of this course will only be done so with your permission.

No two experiences are the same but each of us have endured something that has brought us here.

This program requires participation.

Please show up each week ready to learn and explore how mercy interacts in our lives.

You will be asked to create several pieces of artwork that, with your permission and consent, will be displayed for the community at the conclusion of the program.

You are welcome to put your name on it, use an alias, or remain anonymous.

Following the conclusion of the program, the artwork you created will be yours for you to keep or do with what you will.

For your protection, the Mercy in the Mirror team will not take photographs of you without your prior, informed, and written consent.

# WEEK ONE

## Who am I?

### Introductions

Take a name badge and write what you would like to be known by. Please also include your preferred pronouns.

We will gather as a group and each of us will introduce ourselves and share what brings us here and what we hope to learn. Encourage participation by asking an introductory question, such as where the participants call home.

We will go over the course structure and sign agreement forms that some work will be used in a gallery setting but will remain anonymous (unless the participant would like named credit)

### Opening Prayer:

Lord, we ask for your presence to be upon us today as we begin our journey of self-reflection and discovery. We know that looking at ourselves with compassion and mercy might be a daunting task and so we ask for your arm to lean on. We ask that you allow us to see ourselves with forgiveness. As we work to undo the parts of ourselves that are not like you, we ask that you lead us to be where and who you want us to be. Give us the grace to be all that we are and not hide away our shortcomings for fear of rejection. Help us to know and believe that this is a space meant for inclusion that will lead to love of ourselves and others through mercy and justice.

Amen.

## **Check in:**

Although this is the first week, it is good practice to do a check in and see where everyone is. Perhaps the participants are having a great week or maybe they are suffering from things that they have not had the opportunity to share.

Questions you could ask:

1. How was your week?
2. How do you feel entering this program?
3. Are there things about this program that you have questions about or are worried about?

## **Reminder:**

As we begin, this is a quick reminder that you can participate as much or as little as you would like. Your participation is completely voluntary. At the end of this program, the hope is that you will feel lighter, more forgiving of yourself and others, and know that you are capable of doing great things. Many of the topics we will cover will come with some heaviness. It is okay if you need to step out and take a minute. You are encouraged to let someone in your support system know what you are embarking on so that they can be there to accompany you.

# Introduction to Lesson:

**Round table: Ask some or all of these questions**  
**Take at least 15 minutes**

- When I look in the mirror, what do I see?
- Am I proud of this person?
- What are things I am proud of?
- Does this person carry around sadness?
- Is there a possibility for nuance and complexity within ourselves?
- What are my shortcomings?
- What would I change?
- Why would I change that?
- Who do I want to be?

## Pre-Activity Message

Wherever you are starting from on this journey, you are not alone! Together, we will work to deconstruct the mentality that who we have been is who we have to be. This will not always be easy work. A lot of it will likely feel heavy and bring up difficult emotions. That is okay. You are loved and needed in this space.

## Activity #1:

Before we get into what mercy and justice are and how they appear in our lives, let us first look at who we are.

1. Grab a piece of paper and a writing utensil.
2. Take 10 minutes to make a list of everything you think of yourself. The good, the bad, the weird, the parts that you hide away.
3. Then, take 10-15 minutes and grab another piece of paper and some art supplies and draw a self-portrait, based on the description you created.
4. Take 5-10 minutes for silent reflection. Sit back and reflect on your portrait. Do you think it looks like you? Is this the you that the world gets to see? Are there parts of this portrait that are for your eyes only? What would you change? What would you keep? Why?
5. Take 10 minutes to share with a partner, or the whole group, depending on comfort levels.



## Activity #2:

Now, let's talk about who you want to be:

1. Grab another piece of paper and a writing utensil.
2. Take 5 minutes to make a list of everything that you want to be; including things that you already are.
3. Take 10 minutes to grab another piece of paper and some art supplies and draw a portrait of what you think this person would look like, based upon the description that you drew.
4. Take 5 minutes for silent reflection. What changes would you need to make in your life to look like the person you drew? Are these things obtainable? Will they take a lot of effort? Consider your support system, are there people around you who would help you become this person? Compare and contrast this image with the first one that you drew.
5. Take 10 minutes to share with a partner, or the whole group, depending on comfort levels.



## **Closing Remarks:**

Knowing who we are is a great place to start on our journey to where we want to be. If we do not know what makes us tick, then we cannot work out the kinks. As you leave this session and go into the next week, know that who you are is enough. You are whole because you are human. You matter because you exist. To prepare for next week, come up with your own definition of what mercy is to you and what it looks like in your life.

## **Closing Prayer:**

Gracious God, help us to know and love ourselves and each other. Allow us to look in the mirror and see your love and kindness reflected in us. Help us to know that who we have been is not who we have to be. Remember us as we walk through this journey of self-discovery.

Amen.



# WEEK TWO

## What is Mercy?

### Coming Together:

Take a name badge and write what you would like to be known by. Please also include your preferred pronouns. Feel free to take some time to grab a snack or a drink, go to the bathroom, get some tissues, anything that will help make you more comfortable. Now is a great time to answer any questions that may have arisen about last week's content. Optional but encouraged: hold a moment of silence prior to officially beginning.

### Opening Prayer:

Lord, we come to you after a week of looking for you in all that we are and do. We ask for your continued guidance as we talk about what mercy is and what it looks like in our life. We search for wisdom and grace as we look at ourselves and others and hope to lead with compassion and grace. Be with us during this session and grant us healing and understanding. Help us to see the mercy that has existed in our life and where we can find more of it going forward.

In your name,  
Amen.

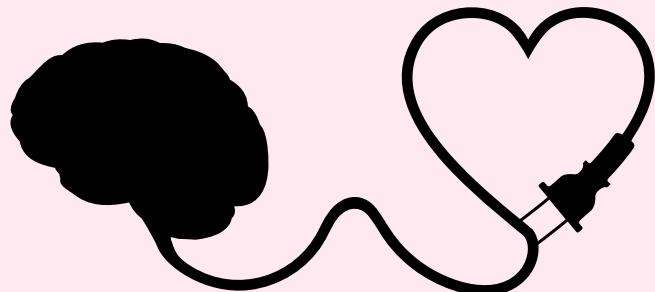
## Check in:

*Remind the group that participation is voluntary but encouraged and that confidentiality needs to be respected and maintained.*

**Ask and discuss the following questions.**

**Take at least 10 minutes to allow for time to decompress. This is a time for listening.**

- How was your week?
  - Think about something good that happened.
  - Think about something bad.
- Are there things you would like to have done differently?
- Are there moments that you were proud of yourself?
- Were there moments when you noticed things that we discussed last week?



# Introduction to Lesson: What is Mercy?

Mercy is “the loving kindness, compassion, or forbearance shown to the one who offends” (CCC 1422, 1829). Said differently, “mercy is the act of compassion”. Mercy means that we need to lead with kindness and forgiveness. This can be really challenging because we live in an imperfect world, with imperfect people.

It is also difficult because mercy is a “two-way street”. In order to give mercy, the other person has to be willing to receive it. And to receive mercy, the person we offended has to be willing to give us mercy.

The word mercy comes from the Latin word, “merces”, which means “price paid”. From a biblical standpoint, there is something beautiful about this definition because it reinforces the Christian belief that Jesus died for our sins and those of the whole world.

## ***Mercy in the Bible***

Mercy is not just a New Testament idea. We see examples of mercy in Exodus, when Moses goes to the top of Mount Sinai and speaks to the people.

(Exodus 34:6-7)

6 So the LORD passed before him and proclaimed: The LORD, a God gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love and fidelity,\*  
7 continuing his love for a thousand generations, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin; yet not declaring the guilty guiltless, but bringing punishment for their parents’ wickedness on children and children’s children to the third and fourth generation!

## Activity #3:

*This weeks activity focuses on religion. For many people, this can be a complicated topic. If you need to sit this one out or would like a separate activity, please let your instructor know. Those who struggle with religion can use friendships and/or family in place of a higher power.*

Take a piece of paper and a writing utensil and think about some examples of mercy in your higher power.

- Where does your higher power show people mercy?
  - Has your higher power been merciful to you? How so?
- If you have struggled with a high power, what would you want from them that would make you feel known?

Take a few minutes to draw what your higher looks like and their relationship with you.



## **Activity #4:**

Take another piece of paper and art supplies and draw what mercy through faith looks like for you or what you want it to look like.

*If people are struggling with this, ask questions about how they care for others and how others care for them. Ask them questions about how they want to be loved and protected and what that might look like in a faith context.*

Now, take a few minutes to discuss with another person what your thoughts were.

Again, there is no shame in your answer. Some people are dependent on religion and a higher power, while others have been harmed by religion and/or a higher power. Both are valid experiences and deserve the space to be shared.

As a group, discuss both images that you created:

- Were there common things or places where mercy was found or given?
- Were there places where mercy was missing?
- What are steps we can take to be more accepting or giving of mercy?

Given that religion can be a heavy topic, it is important that everyone has the opportunity to have their voice heard and to know and feel welcome in this space. Do not let one voice dominate the conversation. If the conversation seems to be approaching an unhealthy dialogue, take some time to reframe and redirect what is being asked.

## **Closing Remarks:**

Mercy has a way of showing up for us in the most unexpected of ways. There are days that mercy may look like someone holding a door open for you when your hands are full and other days it may look like forgiving someone who harmed you.

While mercy is not always easy, it is always a choice. We can choose to grant someone kindness and compassion. Oftentimes, the more merciful we are to others, the more merciful others will be to us.

Getting to a point where mercy becomes second-nature will likely take some time. Many of us come from backgrounds that made us rely heavily on our own skills and abilities that we do not know how to ask for help. Many of us struggle with trusting others and that is a barrier to giving and receiving mercy. It is important to strive for progress, not perfection. Give yourself grace.

## **Closing Prayer:**

Heavenly Father, we have come to ask you for your grace and compassion for us. Teach us to allow others in so that we may receive the help that we need. Allow us to forgive others so that may take the knives that have been put into our backs and not use them to harm anyone else. Encourage us to walk down a path that champions kindness. Help us to see mercy in the big things and the small. Allow us to know your love in all that we encounter. Amen.

# **Mercy Towards Self & Mercy Towards Others**

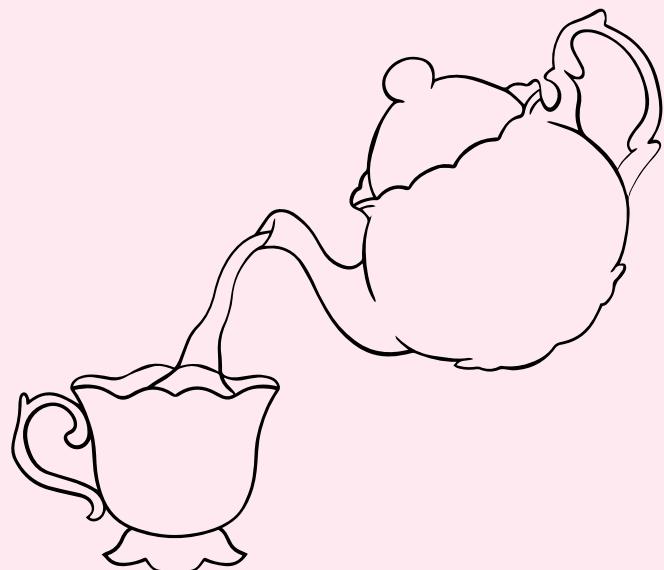
## **Coming Together**

Take a name badge and write what you would like to be known by. Please also include your preferred pronouns.

Feel free to take some time to grab a snack or a drink, go to the bathroom, get some tissues, anything that will help make you more comfortable.

Now is a great time to answer any questions that may have arisen about last weeks content.

Optional but encouraged: hold a moment of silence prior to officially beginning.



## Individual Check In

Do an individual check in during today's session. Make sure each member knows that they are seen, heard, loved, and valued. What they share to you may be different than what they are willing to share as a group.

Take this time to ask deeper questions, allow them to tell you their stories. Never make them feel like they are box that needs to be checked. Give them your full and undivided attention, for as long as you can do so.

It would be best to do this during the activity, while people are working separately.

Best practice would be to have a separate, quiet and comfortable space. This is hard work and the participants deserve privacy.

These individual check ins highlight the importance of having at least two moderators.



## **Opening Prayer:**

Lord, we ask that you watch over us as we discuss mercy towards ourselves and others. Be with us as we discuss harm and harm reduction, trauma and peace. Meet us in the pain and let us know that we are not alone. Help us to recognize that mercy, while a choice, is not one that is made lightly and one that can take time to become a priority. Allow us to remember that by choosing mercy, it does not mean that we have forgotten our pasts or that we have not been formed by them. Instead, use what we have been through to encourage hope and healing.

Amen.

## **Check In:**

*Remind the group that participation is voluntary but encouraged and that confidentiality needs to be respected and maintained.*

**Ask and discuss the following questions. Take at least 10 minutes to allow for time to decompress. This is a time for listening.**

- How was the past week?
  - Think about something good that happened.
  - Think about something that you wish you could have changed.
- Did you notice yourself being more compassionate?
- Were you more receptive to mercy?

# **Introduction to Lesson:**

## **Mercy Towards Self &**

## **Mercy Towards Others**

Last week we discussed what mercy is and began to discuss what it looks like. We looked for examples in the media, pop culture, and religious spaces. Today, we will look at mercy in ourselves and those around us.

A big component of mercy is forgiveness. It is something that makes mercy hard. There is no adult on this planet who has not been harmed or caused harm to another person. Whether or not that was the intention, the impact is that someone ends up hurt. Despite our best efforts, we will come up short. There are things that we say, that might sound fine in our heads, but the second we say them we wish we could take it back. There may be actions we do that we do not give a second thought to but in reality, they harm people, including ourselves.

Forgiveness is hard because living in pain, while not comfortable, is known. It is easier to live in a place of resentment because it means that we do not have to put in the work or effort to heal.

As it is with mercy, forgiveness is a choice. And like with mercy, people are imperfect. We can forgive ourselves or others over and over, and still wake up in pain. Forgiveness is not an immediate cure for resentment, but it is a lifetime treatment. It takes the edge off. To be forgiving means that we have to be willing to be merciful. We have to take time to see where someone is coming from. It does not have to excuse their actions and it does not negate the hurt or harm caused, but it allows for compassion.

Make sure that you are extending forgiveness to yourself. We are often our own worst critics. We can be doing everything that is expected of us and still only considering our shortcomings.

## **Activity #5 & #6 Introduction:**

Take a piece of paper and a writing utensil and describe how mercy impacts your life.

- Have there been times when you have shown mercy to someone?
- Are there times when someone has shown mercy to you?
- Think about: is mercy true mercy if it is simply self-serving?
- What would mercy towards yourself look like?
  - How would you achieve that?
- Are there times that situations could have or should have been handled differently if mercy had been at the forefront?
  - How does that make you feel?
  - What would you do differently now?

## **Activity #5:**

Take another piece of paper and a writing utensil and think about what forgiveness would mean in your life.

What would forgiving yourself look like?

What would forgiving the people who caused you harm look like?

What would allowing yourself to be forgiven look like?

Grab two pieces of paper and art supplies.

On one page, draw what receiving mercy looks like to you.

- Think about how the reception of mercy feels.
  - Is there shame?
  - Is there happiness?
  - Is there fear?
  - Is there joy?
  - Maybe you feel something different?



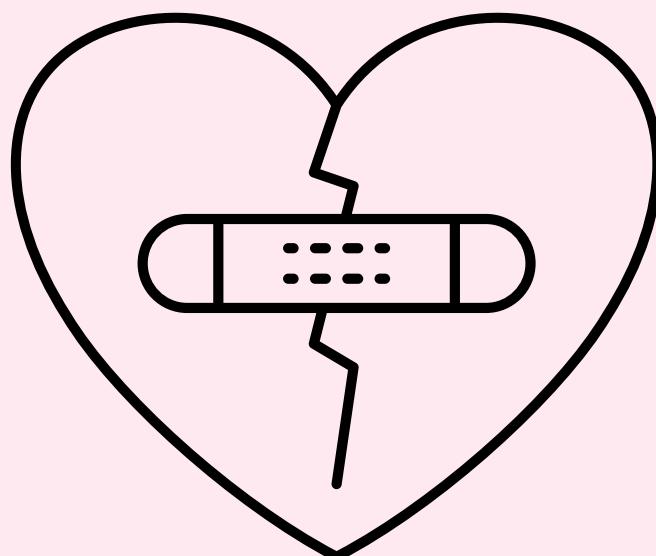
## Activity #6:

On the other page, draw what giving mercy looks like to you.

- Think about how giving mercy feels.
  - Can it be frustrating?
  - Can it be freeing?
  - Is it something that you want to do more often?
  - Is it something you need more practice with?
- Think about a time that you encountered someone who was struggling.
  - Did you offer them mercy?
    - If you did not, was there an opportunity to?
    - If there was, knowing what you know now, how would you have presented mercy as an option?

## Activity Wrap Up:

Now, take a few minutes to discuss what you came up with with another person. It is okay if your ideas and experiences of mercy look different. Some people may see mercy as a big action, while others find it in the smaller details.



## **Closing Remarks:**

Mercy, giving and receiving, can be intimidating. It is so easy to get caught up in what others think of us or things that we have done. It is human nature to worry about judgement and perception.

Mercy allows us to find joy in the pain. It allows us to write the ending to our story. Maybe you spent a lot of time causing hurt because you were in pain, maybe it caused a lot of people to walk out of your life, maybe you want to make up for that. Mercy gives you that option.

*Add personal anecdote here*

End with Bryan Stevenson quote, “Each of us is more than the worst thing that we’ve ever done”.

## **Closing Prayer:**

Our great Redeemer, meet us in our brokenness and shortcomings. You know our potential. You have seen all that we are capable of being. Take us to where we can be like you. Let us forgive like your Son, allow us to recognize that we may not always know the harm that we have caused. Help us to make amends and to look at each other, and ourselves, with grace and mercy. Teach us to emulate you in our approach. Show us that mercy stretches far and wide and has been made for the masses.

Amen.

# WEEK FOUR

## Practical Applications of Mercy

### Coming Together

Take a name badge and write what you would like to be known by. Please also include your preferred pronouns.

Feel free to take some time to grab a snack or a drink, go to the bathroom, get some tissues, anything that will help make you more comfortable.

Now is a great time to answer any questions that may have arisen about last weeks content.

Optional but encouraged: hold a moment of silence prior to officially beginning.

## Opening Prayer:

Read Matthew 25:31-46 (Parable of Sheep & Goats). *This is a long passage so invite people to help read.*

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, 32 and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

34 Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.'

37 Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' 40 And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'

41 Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.'

44 Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?' 45 He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.' 46 And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

## **Check In:**

*Remind the group that participation is voluntary but encouraged and that confidentiality needs to be respected and maintained.*

**Ask and discuss the following questions.**

**Take at least 10 minutes to allow for time to decompress. This is a time for listening.**

How was the past week?

Think about the good things.

Think about the things that you could have lived without.

Were there moments that you noticed the progress and implementation of mercy in?

Were there moments that could have used more mercy?

Have others started to notice a shift in you? Have you started to notice a shift in yourself?

## **Introduction to Lesson:**

One of the most quoted passages from the New Testament comes from our Opening Prayer. This is a story that displays what Jesus will come to find during the second coming. It is a guideline for how we should treat the world and all who dwell upon it. As we are all made in the image and likeness of God, what we do to the “least” is what we would do to Jesus.

In the Catholic tradition, we have two types of mercies: Spiritual and Corporal. Next week, we will get into Spiritual but today our focus is on Corporal.

To begin, the word “corporal” means “of the body”. The corporal works of mercy are the ones that impact ourselves and others physically. We must listen to the needs of our bodies.

## **Introduction to Lesson:**

There are 7 corporal works of mercy:

1. Feed the hungry
2. Give drink to the thirsty
3. Clothe the naked
4. Shelter the homeless
5. Visit the sick
6. Visit the imprisoned
7. Bury the dead

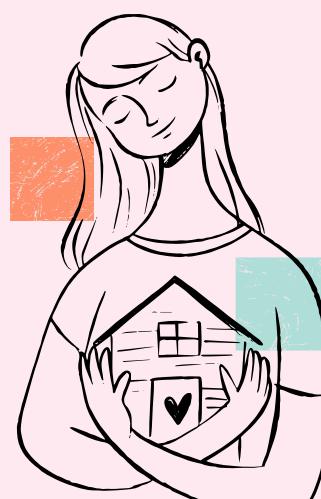
## **Introduction to Lesson:**

Feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty can mean both those who are literally hungry and thirsty, as well as those who are craving spiritual fulfillment.

To feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty means that we bring food, drinks, and supplies to those in need but it can also mean that we bring prayer and education. We meet people where they are.

Clothing the naked can mean giving someone the shirt off our back or ensuring that they have adequate resources to survive the season of life that they are in.

Sheltering the homeless can mean bringing someone into our home or helping to prepare safe, adequate spaces that are full of love and support to help someone get back on their feet.



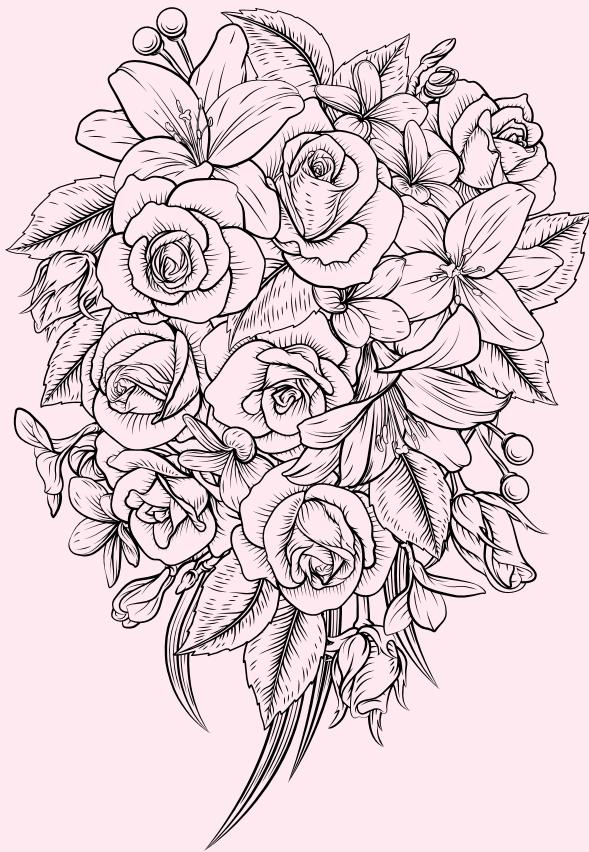
## **Introduction to Lesson:**

Visiting the sick can look like someone who is undergoing cancer treatments or someone who is dealing with addiction or mental health conditions. It means not giving up on people. It takes very little to let people know that they are loved.

Visiting the imprisoned can look like going to prisons and jails and offering classes, or church services, or activities, but it can also look like going to detention and immigration camps.

- Imprisonment also does not have to be physical, so many people are suffering from things that bind them that they do not know how to talk about.

Burying the dead is making sure that we respect bodies. Bodies should be revered and given a proper send off.



## **Activity #7:**

Grab a piece of paper and something to write with.

Come up with a list of ways that you can implement the corporal works of mercy into your life.

- Some will be easier, or at least more prevalent, than others.
- Feel free to look back at the previous examples given but also try to come up with some on your own.

How do you see the corporal works of mercy in your life? Are there parts of the corporal works of mercy that are easy for you to participate in? What are elements that are harder? Create a word map of your current use of the corporal works of mercy.

## **Activity #8:**

Grab another piece of paper and art supplies to create a way that you will be able to visualize the corporal works of mercy.

- You could do an “I statement” chart
- You could make a board game
- You could make a calendar
- You could make playing cards
- The opportunities are endless!

## **Closing Remarks:**

If you are a task oriented person, then the corporal works of mercy are a great place to start. They give us tasks that we can check off. Some of them are more attainable than others but all of them are reachable.

Find ways to implement the corporal works of mercy in your daily life.

- Maybe you could donate your clothes to a homeless shelter?
- Maybe you buy someone a meal?
- Maybe you write letters to people who are incarcerated.

Mercy is not something that should be earned. It should be given. Starting small and finding ways to give back to others is a great way to incorporate mercy into your own life.

## **Closing Prayer:**

Lord, we ask for your guidance as we work towards living the corporal works of mercy. Allow us to know and love others through the actions that you gave us. Help us to be good stewards of the earth. Let our love shine through in our actions. Let your love be known through us.

Amen.

# WEEK FIVE

## Spiritual Works of Mercy

### Coming Together

Take a name badge and write what you would like to be known by. Please also include your preferred pronouns.

Feel free to take some time to grab a snack or a drink, go to the bathroom, get some tissues, anything that will help make you more comfortable.

Now is a great time to answer any questions that may have arisen about last week's content.

Optional but encouraged: hold a moment of silence prior to officially beginning.

### Opening Prayer:

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:11-18 - *Invite people to help read.*

11 "Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, as indeed you do. 12 We ask you, brothers, to respect those who are laboring among you and who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you, 13 and to show esteem for them with special love on account of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

14 We urge you, (sisters), admonish the idle, cheer the fainthearted, support the weak, be patient with all. 15 See that no one returns evil for evil; rather, always seek what is good both for each other and for all. 16 Rejoice always. 17 Pray without ceasing. 18 In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus."

## **Check In:**

*Remind the group that participation is voluntary but encouraged and that confidentiality needs to be respected and maintained.*

For the instructors: Let the group know that they are at the halfway point. Take some time to speak with the participants individually. A frustrating truth of bettering oneself is that often, that is when others try to get to us and knock us off course. Give learners a space to vent their frustrations and to know that they are not alone. This is necessary work but it is not easy work. Aim to do this during the allotted activity time.

***Ask and discuss the following questions.***

***Take at least 10 minutes to allow for time to decompress. This is a time for listening.***

- How was the last week for you?
- What were the highlights?
- What are some things that could have been done differently?
- Were you able to use things that we have learned over the past few weeks in your daily life?
- Has forgiveness gotten easier?
- Has mercy started to become more natural?

*It is okay if you are not seeing results yet, this is a process. And for so many of us, we lived in a space of anger and resentment for such a long time. Changing the way we look at the world, and expect it to look at us, will not happen overnight, or even over the course of a few weeks.*

## Introduction to Lesson:

Last week we talked about the Corporal Works of Mercy. These are physical tasks given to us by Jesus about how we should treat one another. He also gave us the Spiritual Works of Mercy. These are actions that Jesus did to help others on their faith journeys. For example, the woman at the well, was outcast from her society for her past but Jesus cleansed her of her sins and made her new.

There are seven Spiritual Works of Mercy. They are:

1. Counsel the doubtful
2. Instruct the ignorant
3. Admonish sinners
4. Comfort the afflicted
5. Forgive offenses
6. Bear patiently those who do us ill
7. Pray for living and dead

**Counseling the Doubtful** allows us to bring us people who are struggling with their faith back to the message of Jesus and to the Church. We are called to be mirrors of the love of God and counseling the doubtful is a great way to reflect that love.

**Instructing the Ignorant** makes room for us to help educate others. Oftentimes, there are things that we do not know, and for many of us, we can cling to those beliefs as if they were the Gospel. However, by allowing ourselves to grow and learn and by helping others grow and learn, we are participating in an act of mercy.

**Admonishing Sinners** helps us to redirect those who are leading lives that lean into sin. It also gives us space to change our own sinful behaviors. This is not meant as a form of judgement but it should allow us to walk together through life. None of us are perfect, but that does not mean that we cannot or should not try to be like Jesus and follow the Gospels.

## Introduction to Lesson:

**Comforting the afflicted (sorrowful)** is a way to meet others where they are in their journeys. Many of us come from backgrounds that were not always pleasant. For most of us, we carry guilt, sorrow, anger, resentment, or a host of other emotions. By reaching out to those who are in those spaces, we are granting them a reprieve and allowing them to take a deep breath. We cannot take their pain but we can lighten the burden. This also works with us as the receptors. We carry so much and it can be unbearably heavy without someone to share the load with. By accepting mercy, we are able to shoulder the things that weigh us down.

**Forgiving Offenses** is something that we have touched upon in previous weeks. It is something that is rarely an easy task but it is one that we can and should do frequently. As human beings, we are destined to fail others, just as they are destined to fail us. To be human means that we must make space for love and patience.

As we are taught in 1 Corinthians 13:7, “(Love) bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things”.

Forgiveness can look like actively working on a relationship with someone or it can be using what happened to you and not using it to harm anyone else.

We also need to give ourselves pardon. Sometimes we do things that we regret or would do differently with what we know now. Sometimes we are put into situations where we have to make quick, difficult decisions. We do the best we can with the information available to us at the time. And sometimes we get it wrong. Forgiveness is a large part of mercy for that reason. The Savior of the World died for our wrongs. If He can forgive us, you can forgive yourself and work towards forgiving those who have harmed you.

# Introduction to Lesson:

**Bearing Wrongs Patiently** - Looking at those who do us wrong with kindness and patience is an important aspect of mercy because as much as we have talked about forgiveness, what about the people who will never apologize? We must learn to turn the other cheek, to be okay with the idea of never getting a formal apology. And that is hard. We often want the apology because it makes our pain real. Many of us have been in relationships with people who make us feel like what we are experiencing is only in our heads. It is easy to form resentments in these instances. We also must remember that sometimes we are the source of other's frustrations. They still have to put up with us and it is something that we owe to each other.

**Praying for the living and the dead** is our direct line to God. The things we cling to, the anger and resentments, the fears and trials, do not have to be carried alone. We can give them to God, who saved the world and already knows our problems. He sees what we are going through. He loves us through our heartache. He wants us to be closer to him. Allow Him to see you in your brokenness. We should also pray for those around us. Each of us are fighting battles that others may never know about. Many people will never share the fullness of themselves with the world and are left to carry things that are not meant for one soul. Prayer is an act of mercy because it puts us in a space to ask for help and allows us to know and shoulder the burden of what others are experiencing.

## **Activity #9:**

Grab a piece of paper and a writing utensil. Make a list of ways that you can incorporate the spiritual works of mercy into your daily life.

- Some of these may be easier than others but all are achievable.

Feel free to decorate this list to make it something that you want to look at and share in.

## **Activity #10**

Grab another piece of paper and art supplies. Turn your life into a creative display of ways that you can use the spiritual works of mercy.

- This could mean how you do the spiritual works of mercy or it could mean how you receive the spiritual works of mercy.
- You could pick one or two themes and focus on them or use the entire list to create goals. There is no wrong way to do this!

## **Closing Remarks:**

Think about a time that you felt like you were suffering in silence. Did anyone come to your rescue? If so, how? If not, how could they have helped you? Think about the spiritual works of mercy, what do they look like in your life? Are there places you are already thinking about implementing them? Or is it something that you need to work on? As you begin to live the spiritual works of mercy, know that it is okay to not get it right all the time. Jesus meets us where we are. All He asks of us is that we offer the same compassion to those around us.

## **Closing Prayer:**

### **Listen to the St. Francis of Assisi Prayer (Make me a channel of your peace)**

Make me a channel of your peace:

Where there is hatred, let me bring your love; where there is injury, your healing power, and where there's doubt, true faith in you.

Make me a channel of your peace:

where there's despair in life let me bring hope; Where there is darkness, only light,  
and where there's sadness, ever joy.

O, Spirit, grant that I may never seek so much to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love with all my soul.

Make me a channel of your peace: it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, in giving to all that we receive, and in dying that we're born to eternal life.

# WEEK SIX

## Intersectionality of Mercy & Justice

### Coming Together

Take a name badge and write what you would like to be known by. Please also include your preferred pronouns.

Feel free to take some time to grab a snack or a drink, go to the bathroom, get some tissues, anything that will help make you more comfortable.

Now is a great time to answer any questions that may have arisen about last weeks content.

Optional but encouraged: hold a moment of silence prior to officially beginning.

### Opening Prayer:

Read Psalm 72: 2-4 - *Invite people to help read.*

O God, give your judgment to the king; your justice to the king's son;\* That he may govern your people with justice, your oppressed with right judgment, That the mountains may yield their bounty for the people, and the hills great abundance, That he may defend the oppressed among the people, save the children of the poor and crush the oppressor.

Amen.

## **Check In:**

*Remind the group that participation is voluntary but encouraged and that confidentiality needs to be respected and maintained.*

**Ask and discuss the following questions.**

**Take at least 10 minutes to allow for time to decompress. This is a time for listening and reflection.**

- How was your week?
- What was a highlight?
- How did you see the spiritual works of mercy being used?
- How do you address yourself using the spiritual works of mercy?
- Were you able to use the spiritual works of mercy towards someone else?

## **Introduction to Lesson:**

We have spent the past several weeks talking about mercy. Mercy is important because it is the act of compassion that we give to ourselves and others. However, we cannot have mercy without justice and we cannot have justice without mercy. Justice, as we know it today, is based off of John Rawl's Theory of Justice that established two key components.

- First, every person should have access to justice and that justice should include the ability to speak freely, vote for who they want in charge, and be able to think for themselves.
- Second, people who face disadvantages should be given priority, except when doing so would cause more harm than good. John Rawls felt strongly that gifted people, regardless of status, should be given the opportunity to be all that they are.

## Introduction to Lesson:

*This weeks lesson focuses around injustice. Topics that we will discuss include racism, poverty, and gender-based violence, as well as other heavy material. This can be a hard topic to cover. Please take care of yourself. Step out if you need to.*

While each of you have had your own experience with some idea of justice, that idea can often be warped or perceived differently based upon our own experiences.

- For example, people who grew up in poverty or in areas where they were not as well off as others may have had limited access to opportunities. Additionally, people who live in a lower economic condition often face barriers to education, food security, and health care. All of these things can impact how a person views the world and how they are viewed.
- Others may have experienced racial injustice or gender-based injustice. These are instances where a person is made to feel less than based on who they are, and often parts that they have no control over.
- In instances of racial injustice, Black and Brown people find themselves involved in the criminal justice system at higher rates than their White counterparts. This is due to implicit and systemic bias. Bias is a natural component of humanity but it becomes harmful when we fail to address our flaws.
- Gender-based injustice is often a result of gender-based violence. Nearly 30% of women have or will be abused, typically by an intimate partner. Women also face economic barriers, such as unequal wages and systems that disenfranchise single parents when it comes to housing and food security.

## **Activity #11:**

Think about ways that you have experienced injustice.

- What were things that you wish could have been done differently?
- What are things that you wish other people could have known or seen?
- Do you think that it would have impacted the way that you were treated or made to feel?

Take a piece of paper and something to write with and create a word cloud of your thoughts and emotions. Feel free to use images to help convey your thought process.

## **Activity #12:**

Now think about your gifts and what you bring to the table. This could be anything from your lived experience, to how you sing in the choir, to just things that bring you joy. There are no wrong answers.

Take a piece of paper and something to write with and create a word cloud of your gifts and talents.

Take some time to consider both pieces of paper.

Think about:

- Are there moments of injustice that could have been remedied if your gifts were noticed? How so?
- Are there pieces of who you are now that are different than who you were?
- Have you had opportunities for growth and to let your gifts shine?
  - Has that altered your view of what justice could look like?

## **Closing Remarks:**

You are so loved. What you have been through does not need to define you. Justice means that we need to look at ourselves and others with compassion. We need to view our talents and gifts. If we consider all the good that we do, we can reevaluate how we perceive justice and mercy.

## **Closing Prayer:**

Loving God, hold us in our shortcomings and see us in our strengths. Allow us to use our talents to glorify you and honor your creation. Give us pathways that lead us closer to you. Teach us to advocate for each other as well as ourselves. Show us how to forgive those who have harmed us through injustice, intentional or not. Allow us to not use our anger for retribution but to create a pathway for mercy and forgiveness.

Amen.

# WEEK SEVEN

## Mercy In My Life

### Coming Together

Take a name badge and write what you would like to be known by. Please also include your preferred pronouns.

Feel free to take some time to grab a snack or a drink, go to the bathroom, get some tissues, anything that will help make you more comfortable.

Now is a great time to answer any questions that may have arisen about last weeks content.

Optional but encouraged: hold a moment of silence prior to officially beginning.

### Opening Prayer:

God of Mercy, join us as we gather here today to reflect on the impact of mercy in our lives and how we can implement it going forward. Allow us to look at the earth with light and to view ourselves with dignity. In your merciful wisdom, help us to know that who we are is worthwhile. Encourage us to not be afraid of our shortcomings but to see them as tools to help us lead lives that will change the world, even if we are the only people they touch. Show us that who we are is enough and your love is infinite.

Amen.

## **Check In:**

*Remind the group that participation is voluntary but encouraged and that confidentiality needs to be respected and maintained.*

**Ask and discuss the following questions.**

**Take at least 10 minutes to allow for time to decompress. This is a time for listening.**

- How was your week?
- Did you view instances of justice this week?
- Were you able to reflect on last week's lesson within the context of your daily life?
- We are coming to the end. How are you feeling? Are you excited? Stressed? Still processing?
- What are ways that you will feel supported once you leave this program?

## **Introduction to Lesson:**

Mercy is present in our lives all the time. However, it can be hard to look for it or to know that it is there, especially when we are not accustomed to looking for it. We hope that as you have participated in this course you have found it easier to see mercy and compassion in your life and in other people.

Today, we will craft two more images and then revisit the artwork you have created throughout this course. Next week, we will celebrate you, your progress, and your artwork. We invite you to bring your loved ones and will also encourage community leaders to join us.

If you are so called, you are welcome to prepare some remarks about what your journey has looked like and what you will carry with you.

## **Activity #13:**

Grab a piece of paper and a writing utensil.

Take 10 minutes to make a list of everything you think of yourself. The good, the bad, the weird, the parts that you hide away.

Then, take 10-15 minutes and grab another piece of paper and some art supplies and draw a self-portrait, based on the description you created.

After, we will take some time for individual and group reflection of how our views of self have changed during the past several weeks together.

## **Activity #14:**

Take another piece of paper and a writing utensil

Take a few minutes and write down all the ways that you have come to encounter mercy and justice in your life.

Then, take 10-15 minutes and grab another piece of paper, some art supplies, and create an image that reflects how you view mercy in your life.

After, we will take sometime for individual and group reflection of how our views of mercy and justice have changed during the past several weeks.

## **Closing Remarks:**

You made it. Mercy and justice are not easy concepts. We often fight learning about mercy because it forces us to make changes and pain can be incredibly comfortable. Mercy helps us to love ourselves and others, and for a lot of us, that is a new / underutilized concept. The parts of ourselves that we do not like, the things that we desperately want to change, the ways that the world knows us, are all worthy of love and forgiveness. The parts of others that have caused us harm or frustration, the people who have failed to acknowledge our good qualities, the moments that have led us away from faith, are all apart of our story but they do not define us or how we must react.

Next week, we will share your progress. We will talk about your accomplishments and how far you have come. Just because we are coming to an end does not mean that the work stops. Mercy and justice are things that must be continually learned and practiced. Make a point to check in with yourself and those in your life who have helped you on this journey. Allow yourself, as much as you are able, to be a beacon of light for others as they begin this path. You are loved.

To help us plan and celebrate you, we ask that you take a few minutes to go over all of the artwork you have created during your time with Mercy in the Mirror. Come up with titles for the pieces and let your instructors know how you would like it presented. For example, maybe you want it showcased as a week by week progression, or perhaps you would like it displayed in groups of “who I was”, “who I am”, and “who I want to be”. Additionally, please include any descriptions that you would like with each piece. If you would like to give details to the significance you’re welcome to do so. If you want to keep it simple and label it “Week 1, A” that is also completely fine! This is a celebration of you and your progress.

During the week, preferably at least 2 days before the celebration, let your instructors know how many people we should expect from your circle, so that we can plan for food and drinks.

## **Closing Prayer:**

May healing and peace be among you. May you know that all that you have struggled and fought for will one day make sense. May you know that you can rest your tired body upon your faith and on the shoulders of those around you. May you never forget how loved and needed that you are. May joy never cease. May fear never stop you. May you continue, even when it is hard, even when you feel like giving up. May you always know that you deserve mercy.

Amen.

# WEEK EIGHT

## Conclusion and Graduation

### Coming Together

Take a name badge and write what you would like to be known by. Please also include your preferred pronouns.

Feel free to take some time to grab a snack or a drink, go to the bathroom, get some tissues, anything that will help make you more comfortable.

Optional but encouraged: hold a moment of silence prior to officially beginning.



## **Opening Notes & Announcements:**

This celebration will work best if there are at least two rooms. You should have a room with snacks and (non-alcoholic) drinks laid out and another with the artwork displayed. As people arrive, keep them in the snack room. You can include descriptions of what each week covered, research about justice, things to keep them occupied. Soft music would work well.

*Invite the participants to join you in the room where their artwork is, while keeping their loved ones in the other room. Welcome the women:*

Welcome to the *Mercy in the Mirror* finale! You have worked so hard to get here and your effort has not gone unnoticed. There have been moments of sadness and frustration, as well as joy and hope! You have come such a long way, even if it doesn't feel like it. Today, your loved ones will gather shortly but before they do, let us take a few moments to view your strength and resilience.

While the women are reviewing their work, welcome their loved ones:

Families, friends, loved ones, and community of our *Mercy in the Mirror* participants, we welcome you to our gallery night and graduation! These women have spent the past 8 weeks working on learning about mercy, viewing themselves and others with kindness and compassion, and talking about justice. They have created artwork that symbolizes things that they have endured, who they are now, and who they hope to be. These pieces are representative of heartbreak and hope. These women are survivors and fighters and lovers and neighbors, and above all worthy of knowing that they cannot be replaced.

# Opening Notes & Announcements:

Throughout the room you will see different collections from the women. The women have helped construct how they wish for their art to be presented. The order in which it is presented, the titles, and descriptions, as well as the actual artwork come from the minds of these women.

Over the course of the next few minutes, we will pray together, share together, learn together, and participate with one another, just as these women have done for the past 8 weeks.

As a matter of housekeeping, we ask that you do not touch the artwork. We also ask that you do not take pictures or videos of the artwork or the artists. Those who have consented to photography will have professional pictures taken, which will be made available to them. Some of the women may want to maintain their privacy and we appreciate your cooperation in respecting this. Thank you and we hope you enjoy!

## Opening Prayer:

*At this time, invite the women back into the snack room.*

Gracious God, we welcome you into this space. We offer to you our joys, woes, dreams, shortcomings, everything that has made us who we are and led us to this moment. We sing to you with gratitude for the love that fills this room. To support and forgive one another in ways that highlight your abounding mercy. We ask for your blessing on these women who have journeyed together to find more about themselves through justice and mercy practices. We ask for your continued guidance as they leave this space and continue with their lives. We ask for your grace as we move through this life and to extend your love to all we encounter, never forgetting to include ourselves.

Amen.

## **Mercy in the Mirror Graduation**

*Opening Remarks: Mercy in the Mirror began as a way to highlight the need for an investment in women in our community. Women who have had struggles and doubts but who were ready to take a leap of faith and believe in themselves and others. Women in our community face obstacles to success, including but not limited to incarceration, addiction, and mental health challenges. For many women, these are things that they have fought alone. Our program was created by and for women who have endured hardships, with the goal of letting women know that it can get better and that there is support available.*

*Over the past 8 weeks, these women have been learning about the importance of mercy in their lives. They have learned about how forgiveness is a daily choice and that there are many ways to show someone grace. These women have created a dozen pieces of art to showcase their progress and growth.*

*(It might be worthwhile to mention something about funding and how the community can help more Mercy in the Mirror programs continue, but know your audience. Make sure to include that this program is free for the women in it because money should not be a barrier to growing in community or knowing oneself.)*

*(Add personal anecdotes about the participants as well as things that you have learned from instructing/moderating this course.)*

*Introduce any of the women who prepared remarks (remind the crowd that there should not be any photography, videography, or other forms of recording).*

*Allow time for community members to speak (maybe parole officers, addiction counselors, mental health therapists, local officials).*

## **Mercy in the Mirror Graduation**

*Graduation Ceremony: call up each woman, one at a time. Say a few things about their artwork and progress. Allow time for applause. Present them with a certificate (templates can be found in the back of this booklet).*

*Conclusion: Without further ado, we are honored and pleased to welcome you to our (community name) Mercy in the Mirror Gallery!*

### ***Mercy in the Mirror Gallery***

*Open up the doors and allow the guests to view the art work. Have the women on hand to answer questions about the pieces. It might be helpful to spend some time in Week 7 preparing them for the kind of questions that they may receive.*

*Ideally, the gallery should be open for a minimum of 90 minutes, depending on how many participants you had in the Mercy in the Mirror program.*

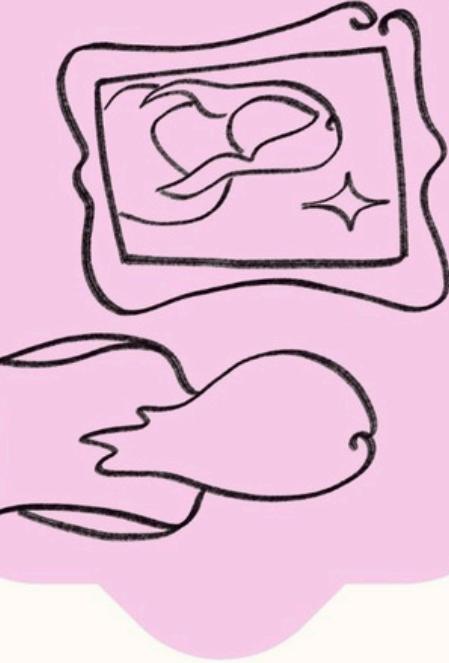
*The opportunities for the gallery are up to you, and the women who have created the work. You could hold a Question and Answer segment, you could hold an art auction (be sure to only include pieces that the artists are okay with auctioning off).*

# CERTIFICATE

THIS AWARD IS GIVEN TO

# PARTICIPANT NAME HERE

for successfully completing Mercy in the Mirror



*Mckenna Smith*

—

**MCKENNA SMITH**  
Author of Program

**NAME HERE**  
Instructor Here

—



# ART RELEASE FORM

mercyinthemirror@gmail.com

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## MERCY IN THE MIRROR PROGRAMMING

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Please read through this form and fill out accordingly.

### NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

I am allowing Mercy in the Mirror programming to use artwork created by me for a community art show and potential online publishing

I am not allowing Mercy in the Mirror programming to use artwork created by me for a community art show and potential online publishing

By signing this form, I acknowledge the terms and conditions of Mercy in the Mirror Programming.

### CONTACT DETAILS

NAME

MOBILE

E-MAIL

ADDRESS

---

Signature of Participant

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