

# UNLEASHED

# UNLEASHED: LIFE

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# SETTING UP FOR SUCCESS

## Welcome to Unleashed

Welcome to Life Teen's newest resource for high school teenagers, *Unleashed*. This missionary discipleship small group resource is designed to help teenagers grow as disciples and missionaries. Each guide will focus on a different topic in a unique way.

Unlike our *Life Night* resources and *Summit* guide, every *Unleashed* will look slightly different. Some will be book studies, while others will be apologetic training. A few will be rooted deeply in prayer and contemplation. **Every *Unleashed* is designed for small groups of six to eight teenagers that are ready to dive deep into their faith.**

## Setting Up Unleashed Small Groups

The discussions and activities found in *Unleashed* are written for small groups. Each small group should have two adult facilitators to lead assigned groups and not change throughout the course of the year or, ideally, the life of the *Unleashed* Group.

Place six to eight teenagers in each small group. Since *Unleashed* small groups are more advanced, it is highly recommended that teenagers either request to be involved or are invited to be involved. Utilizing *Unleashed* for teenagers that are not yet evangelized will render the resource ineffective.

*Unleashed* works best in conjunction with a weekly large group gathering like Life Teen's Life Nights as well as Life Teen's *Summit* lectionary-based discipleship group. The large group gathering allows teenagers a safe place to meet other teens and adults prior to getting involved with an *Unleashed* Group.

## Meeting in Unleashed Groups

*Unleashed* Groups allow flexibility to meet in a variety of places that may be more comfortable for teenagers, in addition to your parish youth room. *Unleashed* Groups can meet at coffee shops, at restaurants during lunch hours, or even at a high school (if your school will permit the group to meet and adults from the parish to be present). Gather teenagers at parks or other public spaces, or even meet at your parish office. *We do not recommend meeting at the homes of Core Members or host families, as it presents challenges for maintaining a safe environment and may violate child safety guidelines in many dioceses.*

## Forming Teen Disciples

The goal of *Unleashed*, as is the goal of every Life Teen resource, is to help form teenagers as disciples of Christ. This is done primarily through intentional, Christ-centered relationships. *Unleashed* provides a context for evangelization and catechesis while growing in relationship with a teenager's peers and adult mentors.

It is important that Core Members invest in the lives of young people outside of *Unleashed* Groups by attending sporting events, musicals, extra-curricular activities, and by meeting parents and praying for teenagers whenever possible. Not only does this promote healthy relationships and a safe environment, but allows Core Members to form friendships with each other.

## How Unleashed: Life Works

Every *Unleashed* guide is different. This section will help you understand the unique methodology and content contained in the guide you are holding.

*Unleashed: Life* encourages head and heart immersion. Life issues are discussed and prayed through at facilities that uphold human dignity. For example, euthanasia is discussed at a nursing home or cancer treatment center. The discussion and prayer is followed by a time of person-to-person ministry.

*Unleashed: Life* utilizes six sections for each session: Prior, Site, Discussion, Journal Reflection, Ministry, and Debrief.

### **Prior**

This section provides important information that group leaders and teenagers need to know or do before the session.

### **Site**

Each session of *Unleashed: Life* is held at a different location. The session begins with a tour of this facility and the opportunity to hear about the mission of the organization. The tour also introduces the teens to the topic and humanizes it by associating it with individual persons. For every session, the youth minister needs to connect with a site manager that can host the group and provide this experience.

### **Discussion**

The tour is followed by a discussion on a specific life issue. Bullet points and discussion questions are found in the outline. Be sure to read over and understand the teaching before leading the small group discussion.

### **Journal Reflection**

The journal reflection offers the teens time to process what they heard in the discussion in a personal way and prepare for the time of ministry ahead of them. These reflections are found on the *Life Teen January 2016 USB* and online at [www.lifeteen.com](http://www.lifeteen.com) under Life Support: January 2016.

### **Ministry**

Every site offers a unique ministry that promotes the dignity of the human person. For this resource to be effective, facilitate service opportunities that are person-to-person. For example, if serving at a food kitchen, instead of organizing the pantry in the back, try to involve the teens in serving the meal, eating with the patrons, or working beside them. Furthermore, give the teens ample time to discover their gifts and how they are called to serve.

### **Debrief**

To conclude the session, the teens gather to process their experience. A simple small group discussion and closing prayer ends the session.

### **Parent Session**

This resource begins with parent and teen session that explains the series. It is highly recommended that this session be implemented for all *Unleashed Groups*. Consider having a large group gathering prior to the service projects beginning. Not only will this help parents understand what their son or daughter is doing at *Unleashed*, but it will challenge parents to examine their own understanding of the dignity of every human life.

### **Series Debrief**

After the final session, consider meeting to process the entire series with all *Unleashed Groups*. At this meeting, the teens can talk about their experiences and spend time in front of the Blessed Sacrament offering to the Lord the people and life stories shared. Also, consider practicing testimonies to share at Life Nights, with parents, or casually with friends. End with the prayer to St. Maria Goretti.

Know that we are praying for you and your efforts as a Life Teen staff. Please don't hesitate to call us to share glory stories, ideas, or simply to pray. May God bless your group as you lead teenagers closer to Christ!

## PREPARE

## PARENT & TEEN SESSION

Prior to the parent and teen session, intentionally and personally invite teens to discern being part of *Unleashed: Life*. When inviting teens, briefly describe what the series entails and tell them you think they have the maturity, spiritual readiness, and leadership skills to be part of it. Contact the parents of interested teens and invite them to come with their teen to an informational session to learn about *Unleashed: Life* and enter the discernment process.

For this session, the youth minister needs to have the locations and schedule set. He or she will also want to decide how much time they want to give participants to discern and apply, and then establish this deadline.

We strongly suggest the youth minister creates a Powerpoint, Keynote or other visual presentation that includes pictures of your sites, a map(s) of the various locations, schedule, main points, quotes, and pictures of St. Maria Goretti.

### PLAN AND PURPOSE

The purpose of this meeting is to explain *Unleashed: Life*, particularly the concept of pilgrimage, the logistics, and setting the tone of the series. Also, the teens and parents will be invited to begin discerning.

### OVERVIEW OF THE SESSION

Following the opening prayer and introductions, a brief talk presents the concept of pilgrimage and then takes the potential candidate on a session-by-session walkthrough of the program. A brief time is spent answering questions. Next, teens and parents go to the church to pray before the Blessed Sacrament with journal questions to help them begin the discernment process for involvement in these *Unleashed Groups*. The session will end with further Q&A, a deadline for the application, and a closing prayer.

### GATHER

The youth minister introduces himself/herself and invites the Core Members to do the same. Then, he/she asks the teens and parents to briefly introduce themselves.

For the opening prayer, read the scripture about Jacob's Ladder (Genesis 28:10-12, 13-15, 18, 20-22). This leads into the presentation, which talks about pilgrimage as a journey toward heaven.

### PRESENT

*Use the following as an outline for a presentation to the teens and parents.*

#### Pilgrimage

After hearing this Scripture reading from Genesis, we arrive here today with the same dream as Jacob — to take a journey towards Heaven. After his dream, Jacob is determined to find a ladder—a path—to Heaven. When we go on pilgrimage, we have the same goal, or final destination, Heaven.

The word “pilgrim,” comes from the Latin *peregrinum*, which paints the idea of wandering over a great distance. But a pilgrimage isn't aimless wandering. It is a journey with a purpose: to get to God.

Pilgrimages are a custom that comes from the early Church. As soon as there were Christians, there were pilgrims. Immediately after the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, Christians wanted to walk in the footsteps of their Savior, Mary and the Apostles, in attempts to get closer to God by better understanding their lives.

In a way, our entire life is a pilgrimage to get to God in Heaven. The Catechism teaches that, “*Pilgrimages evoke our earthly journey toward heaven and are traditionally very special occasions for renewal in prayer.*”

CCC 2691

Like the saints, pilgrims are willing to let down their nets and give everything up to become disciples. They are willing to leave behind family, friends, comfort, and walk into the unknown. Pilgrims follow Jesus as His first disciples did.

*Luke 5:4-10*

In the same way, this pilgrimage, *Unleashed: Life*, will help you redefine yourself as a disciple of Jesus.

Becoming a disciple means totally committing to follow Jesus with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. This decision impacts everything. As Paul says, *“destroy arguments and every pretension raising itself against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive in obedience to Christ.”*

*2 Corinthians 10:5*

We have three main goals for this pilgrimage: to get closer to God, to become more merciful, and to become a better disciple of Jesus. Additionally, each of us will make a personal petition for the dignity of someone we know whose life has not or is not being respected and uplifted.

### **Logistics**

*Now use PowerPoint, Keynote or another visual aid, to walk the parents and teens through the life issues, sites, schedule, and other important details of this series.*

### **Journeying with St. Maria Goretti**

*As you continue your presentation, consider using one of the following clips as a transition:*

Carlos Martin: “Maria Goretti Canonized.”  
[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

Life Teen: “Saintly Minute: St. Maria Goretti.”  
[www.lifeteen.com](http://www.lifeteen.com) (Edge - Scripture, Video Support 01, March 2010)

CCTNtv: “Discovering Our Saints – St. Maria Goretti”  
[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

Since we are setting out on this pilgrimage as young people, we are choosing to journey with the youngest canonized saint in the Church, St. Maria Goretti. St. Maria Goretti is a model of mercy, youthfulness and the dignity of life.

When Maria was nine, her father died, leaving her to raise her five siblings while her mother worked in the fields. During this trying time, Maria not only took care of her siblings, but she also cooked and cleaned for her two next-door neighbors who worked with her mother.

The 20-year-old son of one of those neighbors, Alessandro, developed an impure liking for Maria. He would often say crude, inappropriate, and embarrassing things to her, which would cause her to run away. At one point, Alessandro even began to make direct sexual advances towards her, demanding her virginity and threatening violence.

After months of this, Alessandro forced himself upon Maria in an attempt to rape her. Maria was able to fight him off. She did this not only to save herself, but also out of a desire to keep Alessandro from committing a horrendous sin. Alessandro, outraged by her staving off his advances, brutally stabbed her numerous times. Maria died the next day from blood loss and infection. Her last words were, “I forgive Alessandro Serenelli... and I want him with me in heaven forever.”

This story of incredible bravery and mercy is not one that is easy to hear. As we venture on this pilgrimage, we will be faced with more tough stories. We will make this journey with St. Maria Goretti and her intercession. We will continue to learn more about her life and ask her to walk with us. We will also strive to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit so that we can enter into the many other stories He leads us to.

Now that you have more information, do you think this journey of *Unleashed: Life* is something God is calling you to be part of? Can you step outside of yourself? Can you step outside of comfort?

Pope Benedict XVI challenges us by saying, “Christ did not promise an easy life. Those who desire comforts have dialed the wrong number. Rather, he shows us the way to great things, the good, towards an authentic human life.”

Jesus calls us to something greater, revealing to us that, *“man was created for greatness — for God himself; he was created to be filled by God. But his heart is too small for the greatness to which it is destined. It must be stretched.”* Are you ready to accept these challenges? Are you ready to live a life of greatness?

*Spe Salvi Sec. 33*

## **DISCERN**

The youth minister then directs the parents and teens to a time of discernment before the Blessed Sacrament. Give each person the journal/application found on the *Life Teen January 2016 USB* and on [www.lifeteen.com](http://www.lifeteen.com) under Life Support: *January 2016*. Instruct them to use this is for initial prayer and journaling — a blank copy will be available to submit as their final application.

## **CONCLUDE**

Gather the group back together and answer any questions they might have. Give them a second copy of the application and/or make it available online. Give a deadline for the applications. Also, provide them with the date you will let them know if they’ve been accepted.

Close the meeting by reading Matthew 10:7-14 and ask for the intercession of St. Maria Goretti.

# UNLEASHED



## YOU ARE THE ONLY YOU

### SCRIPTURE:

Genesis 1:1-2  
 Genesis 1:26  
 Genesis 2:16-18  
 John 1:1  
 Romans 2:14-16

### ENGAGE



#### PRIOR

Instruct the teens to find a photo of themselves as babies and bring it with them to this session. The teens will naturally share these with each other during the session and they will be used in the *Journal Reflection*.

#### SITE

Consider visiting a local hospital nursery or birthing center, the parish daycare center, or preschool. You want to find a location in which you can have a discussion and serve young children. Meet with the site manager in advance to discuss creative ways you and your teens can support and have a person-to-person encounter with those they serve.

Before the discussion, the group has the opportunity to tour the facility, encounter people, and learn about the mission of the organization.

### REFLECT



#### DISCUSSION

Use the following outline for a teaching and discussion during the session.

Welcome to *Unleashed: Life*. We begin with becoming “who we are,” with realizing and developing our potential. I invite you to be open to entering fully into the discussion, to venturing interiorly in prayer, and loving deeply during the time of ministry ahead of us.

*St. John Paul II, World Youth Day 2002*

Today we focus on who we are. At the upcoming sessions, we will learn about the dignity of others and how we can work to defend their dignity so they too can become who God made them to be.

#### Dignity

In the beginning, when God created the world, He decorated the heavens with the stars and filled the earth with plants and animals. When God looked at what He had done, He saw that it was “good.” Then, God created man and He saw that man was “very good.” Furthermore, God created man in His image and likeness.

*Genesis 1:26*

Humans occupy a higher place in the created order because we alone are created “very good” and are made in God’s image and likeness. This means that human beings have dignity unparalleled to any other animal and every person has invaluable worth.

After recognizing this truth, we often jump to learning about how to defend our dignity and the dignity of others. This is noble and needed. However, we are going to slow down, take a breath, and explore what it really means to be made in the image and likeness of God.

### Discussion Questions

- Do you consider yourself “very good”?
- Have you ever felt “not good enough,” “not smart enough,” “not athletic enough,” or “not pretty enough”?
- What’s the story? How did you overcome this feeling? Are you still struggling with them?
- How do we make peace with these two realities, we are “very good” but sometimes feel “not good enough”?
- In your own words, how would you explain what dignity means?

### God is creative, therefore we are creative.

*“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”*

*Genesis 1:1*

Everyone makes things. Students complete projects, athletes make plays, manufacturers make things with raw materials. Chefs make things with fruits, vegetables, meats and spices. Painters paint pieces of art. Writers, philosophers, and lawyers make things with ideas and the compelling use of words. Every human has the capacity to make things, to create, because we are all made in the image of a creative God.

### Discussion Questions

- What do you make or create?
- Do you care what other people think about what you create? Why?
- How do you care for what you make?
- How do you recognize God caring for you, His creation?
- How can you develop your creativity and be more like God?

### God is Spirit, therefore we are spiritual.

*“The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”*

*Genesis 1:2*

Every human possesses spiritual aptitudes and capacities. Our spiritual nature, though unseen, is as real as our physical nature. Just as it is important to our physical body to eat, drink, and exercise, we must also nurture our spiritual nature through rest, prayer, and the sacraments.

### Discussion Questions

- How have you recognized your spiritual capacity?
- How does embracing our spiritual nature uphold our dignity?
- How can you nurture your spirit and be holier?

### God is intelligent, therefore we are intelligent.

*“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*

*John 1:1*

The Greek root of the “Word” from John’s Gospel is *logos*, which means reason or logic. Logical sequential thought flows from the orderliness of God’s mind. As a result, though we are not all intellectuals, we each possess a mind and a way of thinking and learning. Each of us should develop our mental capacities to their fullest.

### Discussion Questions

- How was the creation of the heavens and the earth orderly?
- What is dignified about order and logic? What’s the opposite? Is that dignified?
- How can you become more orderly and logical?

### God is relational, therefore we are relational.

*“Let us make man in our image, in our likeness. ... It is not good for man to be alone.”*

*Genesis 1:26, Genesis 2:18*

The phrase, “Let us make man in our image” reveals an “us-ness” in the very nature of God. We have come to know God as Trinity, three persons, one God, in an eternal relationship of life and love. God’s capacity for a relationship extends to humans, which is why the Genesis story declares that God created Adam and Eve for each other because “it is not good for man to be alone.”

God is relationship. We are made for relationship and are living to our full potential when living in community with others. There are times when community blesses us and time when community challenges us to give of ourselves. Even when we are made to give, we are better off than being isolated.

### **Discussion Questions**

- What is your capacity for being alone? For how long is it good for you to be alone?
- How have relationships with others been good for you?
- Can you think of a time when you were in need and a friend or family member came through for you? What’s the story?
- Do you invest in healthy, God-centered relationships?

### **God is moral, therefore we are moral.**

*“And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.’”*

*Genesis 2:16-17*

Just as there are natural laws that govern the universe, moral laws govern human behavior. The Bible teaches that these laws are written on the human heart.

*Romans 2:14-16*

### **Discussion Questions**

- What natural laws govern the universe?

- What moral laws govern our behavior?
- What is an example of a law that is written on our hearts?
- How do moral laws uphold our dignity?

All humans possess these Godlike capacities, we are made “in His image and likeness,” and each of us has the potential to express them distinctively. In God’s infinite creativity there are no duplicates; you are the only you there has ever been or ever will be.

We feel the greatest pleasure and wholeness when who God made us to be is fully developed and expressed. What do you need to do to fully develop into who God created you to be?

### **JOURNAL REFLECTION**

Allow for a time of silence and reflection. Pass out the *You Are The Only You Journal Reflection*, found on the *Life Teen January 2016 USB* and online at [www.lifeteen.com](http://www.lifeteen.com) under Life Support: *January 2016*, and a pen to each teen.

### **RESPOND**



### **MINISTRY**

When taking care of a child, it’s hard not to dream about who that child will become. What will his or her interests be? Will they play sports or dance or be into robotics? You want them to live to their fullest potential and be happy. You do what you can to provide for them, support them, and love them. You give them freedom to be themselves.

God feels and acts the same way towards us.

We are surrounded by life, dignity, and potential. We are about to enter into a time of ministry to support, love, and defend the dignity of the lives around us. As you serve,

think of the potential of those you serve and your potential. Think of the love and care you show the babies and the love and care God has for you.

Before going into ministry, pray the following prayer asking St. Maria Goretti to accompany you during this time of ministry and throughout your life.

**Dear St. Maria Goretti,**

Your heart was so full of mercy  
that you gladly forgave your assassin,  
and prayed that he might be saved;  
Intercede for me before the Lord,  
whom you now behold face to face.

Ask Him to pour out His grace into my soul  
so that I might always be ready to imitate Jesus as you did.

I choose you as my friend this day  
and I ask you to accompany me my whole life long.

In honor of the Most Holy Name of Jesus,  
and in imitation of your example.  
I forgive all who have ever hurt me  
or who desired my suffering,  
and I ask pardon of all against whom I have sinned,  
through Christ Our Lord.  
Amen.

## DEBRIEF

To end the session, gather the teens together to process their experience. The following questions can be used to help guide the conversation. Please add and adapt as needed.

- What came easy about ministry today? Why do you think this was?
- What was challenging about ministry today? Why do you think this was? How did you overcome?

- How did you encounter potential in those you served?
- How was your potential revealed to you through this experience?
- What was revealed to you through this experience about dignity?

The youth minister closes by leading the teens in a prayer for those they encountered in ministry today and for their personal petitions.

Planning Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

## SITE CHECKLIST: *YOU ARE THE ONLY YOU*

☐ **Site Name:**

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☐ **Site Address:**

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☐ **Site Contact:**

**Name:**

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**Title:**

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**Phone:**

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**Email:**

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☐ **Session Date:**

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☐ **Session Time:**

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**Meeting Instructions:**

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**Notes:**

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## THE MOMENT OF CONCEPTION

### CATECHISM:

CCC 2271  
CCC 2270

### SCRIPTURE:

Jeremiah 1:5

### ENGAGE



#### PRIOR

Instruct the teens to fill out the *Lives Lost Handout* at home and bring it with them to this session. This handout is found on the *January 2016 Life Support USB* or online at [www.lifeteen.com](http://www.lifeteen.com) under Life Support: *January 2016*.

#### SITE

Consider visiting a crisis pregnancy center, homeless shelter for pregnant women, or an orphanage. Meet with the site manager in advance to discuss creative ways you and your teens can support and have a person-to-person encounter with those they serve.

Before the discussion, the group has the opportunity to tour the facility, encounter people, and learn about the mission of the organization.

Note: You can make plans to pray outside of an abortion clinic, such as Planned Parenthood, in addition to this session. However, this type of ministry is not ideal for the session itself. We are looking to create person-to-person interactions.

### REFLECT



#### DISCUSSION

Use the following outline for a teaching and discussion during the session.

#### Each New Life is a Miracle

Start by sharing a personal witness about the miracle of a newborn child. You can share the story of having a child of your own, the birth of a sibling, or perhaps the story of your own birth as your parents have told you. Make sure to include details about what thoughts you had the first time you held the newborn child. You can include details about what the child looked like, how small each finger was and how perfect the baby looked. You can discuss how you felt. For example, that the baby seemed fragile and helpless without parents to look after and care for him or her.

Life is precious. Each new life is a miracle. It takes more than just a man and a woman for a child to be created – God is an absolutely essential element. He is the author of life. As God told the Prophet Jeremiah, “*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.*”

*Jeremiah 1:5*

#### Discussion Questions

- Have you ever held a newborn cousin / sibling?
- What thoughts flooded your mind as you looked at their tiny face?
- Were you nervous? Why?
- Have your parents told you the story of the day you were born? Please share.
- How did your parents decide on your name?
- How is it even possible for a child to grow for nine months inside of a woman’s body and then come into the world and survive? Have you ever been overwhelmed by the awe and wonder of the miracle of life?

## Life Begins at Conception

When does life actually begin? We are going to explore this question from a scientific perspective. What is the conclusion of scientific study? What is currently taught in medical school?

Human life begins at the moment of conception or fertilization. Below is an explanation of this process as described in a current Human Embryology textbook:

*“Human life begins at fertilization, the process during which a male gamete or sperm unites with a female gamete or oocyte (ovum) to form a single cell called a zygote. This highly specialized, totipotent cell marked the beginning of each of us as a unique individual.” “A zygote is the beginning of a new human being (i.e., an embryo).” (Keith L. Moore, *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology*, 7th edition. Philadelphia, PA: Saunders, 2003. pp. 16, 2.)*

A zygote or embryo is *alive, human, and complete*.

The zygote is *alive*. It can reproduce its own cells and develop into an even more mature being.

It is *human*. It is unique from every other living organism. It contains 46 human chromosomes and, given the right environment and nutrition, will grow into a mature adult.

It is also *complete*. Even from the moment of conception, nothing new will be added to the zygote from then until the moment of death except natural growth and development.

### Discussion Questions

- Have you heard arguments before stating that life begins only outside the womb? Or when the heart of the child begins beating? Or at some particular moment during gestation?
- In your own words, how would you respond to someone who took one of the stances just mentioned?

## Why Abortion is Wrong

If life begins when a sperm and egg unite (fertilization or conception), then ending that life at any point after that time is the killing of an innocent human being or murder. This is in direct violation of the fifth commandment: Thou shall not kill.

The Church, even from the first century, has spoken out regarding the evil of abortion. The Catechism states, *“You shall not kill an embryo by abortion and shall not cause the newborn to perish.”*

CCC 2271

The Church explains to us that abortion is a type of murder and is intrinsically evil and thus cannot under any circumstances be tolerated. She encourages us to defend the unborn.

### Discussion Questions

- Why do you think it is hard for people in today’s society to see abortion as murder?
- What are some justifications you have heard for why it would be acceptable to have an abortion?
- How would you respond?

## The Littlest Have Dignity

As we just saw, life begins at the moment of fertilization or conception. Thus, even from that very tiny state, that new life has dignity - the same dignity that you and I have.

Some pro-abortion advocates argue that a life in the womb is too small to have dignity or that it cannot support itself on its own so it does not have as much dignity. Any argument that follows along these lines is simply not true. In fact, there are many people living outside the womb that would fall into these categories and they have dignity, too. Think of the premature baby, weighing only a few pounds, hooked up to numerous tubes in the NICU – does this child



have dignity? Think of the child with Down Syndrome who will never be able to fully take care of herself – does she have dignity? Think of the grandfather who is too sick to work anymore and needs help to move around – does he have dignity? Our dignity is not defined by how big we are, by our contribution to society, or by our ability to be self-sufficient. Our dignity comes from our Creator who instills it into us, His creation, at the very beginning of our lives: at our conception.

As Pope Francis tells us, *“All life has inestimable value even the weakest and most vulnerable, the sick, the old, the unborn and the poor, are masterpieces of God’s creation, made in his own image, destined to live forever, and deserving of the utmost reverence and respect.”*

*Pope Francis, Message to Catholics Taking Part in Annual Day of Life in Britain and Ireland, 2013*

### **Discussion Questions**

- What are some arguments you have heard regarding when a person has dignity?
- In your own words, how would you respond to one of these arguments?
- What does it mean to have dignity?
- Can our dignity be taken away or diminished by others?

### **How does this affect me? What am I supposed to do?**

Take time to review and discuss the *Lives Lost Handout*. The answers are:

1. Abortion (The Guttmacher Institute)
2. Car Accidents (Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, Highway Loss Data Institute)
3. Abortion (The Guttmacher Institute)
4. Ebola (World Health Organization)
5. WWII (War Chronicles)

6. Holocaust (The Rabbi Israel Miller Fund for Shoah Research)

7. 9/11 (9/11 Commission)

We should all be concerned with the grave atrocity of abortion. We should be appalled that every year over 1.2 million children in the United States die due to abortion. How we respond to our vulnerable brothers and sisters around us speaks greatly to our character.

As St. John Paul II challenges us, *“For this reason, America, your deepest identity and truest character as a nation is revealed in the position you take towards the human person. The ultimate test of your greatness in the way you treat every human being, but especially the weakest and most defenseless ones.”*

*St. John Paul II, Farewell Ceremony from the United States of America, 1987, 3*

You have been called to greatness – how will you respond? Will you be silent? Remember, your very silence denotes consent.

As the Catechism teaches us, *“Human life must be respected and protected from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person – among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life.”*

CCC 2270

Yet, if this unborn person cannot yet speak – who will speak for their rights? Who will be their voice? Who will fight for them?

If not you, then who?

There are numerous things you can do to fight abortion today. The first and most important is to *pray*: pray for pregnant mothers, the fathers, abortionists, those who work at abortion clinics, and those who work at crisis pregnancy



centers. Other things you can do are pray outside of an abortion clinic, volunteer at a pregnancy center, help out a mom in need with young children (babysit, make a meal), smile at a family having difficulty with a small child at Mass, attend pro-life rallies, lobby your politicians, or offer support and advice to a friend who finds out they are pregnant.

You never know when someone close to you or even an acquaintance may find themselves pregnant and come to you for advice. What would you say? Keep in mind no matter how difficult the circumstances may be the killing of an unborn child is never the answer.

Take a moment to reflect on the life of Mary. She was around twelve years old when she found out she was pregnant. She was not married and the man she was engaged to was not the father of her child. Yet, her yes to life changed the course of human history.

Take a moment to reflect on the life of St. Maria Goretti. Think of her as a very young girl, caring for her five siblings, while her mother worked to support the family. Even though this presented a heavy burden on Maria, she saw the importance and dignity of life. She was given an opportunity at a young age to serve and love the very young in her family. How can we follow her example?

### Discussion Questions

- What are some concrete things you can do to stand up against the evil of abortion?
- How do you think Mary felt when she found out she was pregnant with the Son of God?
- What advice would you have given her if she had come to you?
- How is Mary's "yes" to life an example of heroic virtue to us today?

- St. Maria Goretti was given a unique opportunity to serve and care for her family at a young age. What are some ways we can serve our families or the families around us?
- With what kind of spirit do you think St. Maria Goretti served with?
- St. Maria Goretti must have been exhausted each day. For, not only was she caring for her own family, but she also worked for two of her neighbors as well! What are some challenges you face in serving others?
- What are some ways you find strength to persevere?

### **JOURNAL REFLECTION**

Allow for a time of silence and reflection. Pass out the *The Moment of Conception Journal Reflection*, found on the *Life Teen January 2016 USB* and online at [www.lifeteen.com](http://www.lifeteen.com) under Life Support: *January 2016*, and a pen to each teen.

### **RESPOND**



### **MINISTRY**

We are in a care center for mothers and babies who for whatever reason need help putting a roof over their heads and getting supplies to care for their children. Right now we have an incredible opportunity to shower them with love – to show them that we applaud their resounding “yes” to life! We thank them, that despite the hardship and difficulty, they have answered God’s call to welcome a precious child into the world.

This is a time to give of yourselves. As Pope Francis stated on his visit to the United States in 2015 for the *World Meeting of Families*, “He [Jesus] said to his disciples then and he says it to us now: Go forth! Proclaim! The joy of the Gospel is something to be experienced, something to be known and lived only through giving it away, through giving ourselves away.”

Before going into ministry, pray the following prayer to St. Maria Goretti asking her to accompany you during this time of ministry and through your whole life.

**Dear St. Maria Goretti,**

Your heart was so full of mercy  
that you gladly forgave your assassin,  
and prayed that he might be saved;  
intercede for me before the Lord,  
whom you now behold face to face.

Ask Him to pour out His grace into my soul  
so that I might always be ready to imitate Jesus as you did.

I choose you as my friend this day  
and I ask you to accompany me my whole life long.

In honor of the Most Holy Name of Jesus,  
and in imitation of your example.  
I forgive all who have ever hurt me  
or who desired my suffering,  
and I ask pardon of all against whom I have sinned.  
through Christ Our Lord.  
Amen.

## DEBRIEF

To end the session, gather the teens together to process their experience. The following questions can be used to help guide the conversation. Please add and adapt as needed.

- What came easy about ministry today? Why do you think this was?
- What was challenging about ministry today? Why do you think this was? How did you overcome?
- How did you encounter Jesus in those you served?
- How do you think they might have encountered Jesus in you?

- What was revealed to you through this experience about dignity?

The youth minister closes by leading the teens in a prayer for those they encountered in ministry today and for their personal petitions.

Planning Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

## SITE CHECKLIST: *THE MOMENT OF CONCEPTION*

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## POWER IN WEAKNESS

**CATECHISM:**  
CCC 2276-2279

**SCRIPTURE:**  
Mark 8:34  
Acts 17:28

### ENGAGE



#### PRIOR

Instruct the teens to ask their parents to tell them stories from their childhood about their parents and experience growing up. These stories can be funny, serious, about getting in trouble, or about learning a lesson. Also, instruct the teens to ask for the contact information of their grandparents and bring it with them to the session.

#### SITE

Consider visiting a nursing home or cancer treatment center. You want to find a location where you can have a discussion and serve the people there. Meet with the site manager in advance to discuss creative ways you and your teens can support and have a person-to-person encounter with the people at the facility.

Before the discussion, the group has the opportunity to tour the facility, encounter people, and learn about the mission of the organization.

### REFLECT



#### DISCUSSION

Use the following outline for a teaching and discussion during the session.

#### Euthanasia

The deliberate termination of a human life to end suffering is called euthanasia or physician assisted suicide. Instead of waiting until natural death, an elderly person or terminally ill patient commits suicide and their doctor and possibly loved ones participate in their suicide.

Euthanasia is an action or omission that has the intention of causing death. For example, omitting food and water to a person in a vegetative state with the intention of starving them to death, or actively prescribing a lethal injection to someone who is terminally ill.

*Evangelium Vitae 65*

Euthanasia is not the decision to forgo “aggressive medical treatment” nor “extraordinary means” to sustain life. These are morally acceptable and express acceptance of the human condition in face of death.

*Evangelium Vitae 65*

*Consider reading over paragraphs 2276 – 2279 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church to continue to unpack the terms “extraordinary means.”*

Euthanasia is morally unacceptable because it goes against our human dignity by ending human life. God alone is the Lord of Life. It is in God who “we live and move and have our being.” No one can claim for himself the right to directly destroy an innocent human being or decide on what date he or she will die by taking his or her own life.

*Acts 17:28, CCC 56*

*“God alone has the power over life and death: “It is I who bring both death and life” (Dt 32:39; cf. 2 Kg 5:7; 1 Sam 2:6). But he only exercises this power in accordance with a plan of wisdom and love. When man usurps this power, being enslaved by a foolish and selfish way of thinking, he inevitably uses it for injustice and death. Thus the life of the person who is weak is put into the hands of the one who is strong; in society the sense of justice is lost, and mutual trust, the basis of every authentic interpersonal relationship, is undermined at its root.”*

*Evangelium Vitae 65*

### **Discussion Questions**

- How does euthanasia go against our human dignity?
- How is taking control over life and death usurping God's power?
- What are some examples of euthanasia?
- What are some examples of “extraordinary means?”
- How are euthanasia and “extraordinary means” different?

### **The Power of Suffering**

Euthanasia is not a future problem. It is a present problem. It is happening now and becoming increasingly accepted.

Take, for example, Brittany Maynard. After years of suffering from debilitating headaches, Brittany Maynard was diagnosed with brain cancer. At 29, she was given a prognosis of six months to live. She and her family decided to move to Oregon so she could have access to its “death with dignity” law. Here she received a prescription that would end her life. On the day of her choosing, she took that prescription and died.

Don't be confused by the wording of the “death with dignity” law. Physician assisted suicide is against our dignity and it is possible to die with dignity naturally.

Unfortunately, many people believe that euthanasia is a merciful response to suffering. The Church strongly disagrees. We believe that though suffering is challenging, it has meaning and can bear fruit.

To begin, look at Christ and His suffering on the cross. Was it meaningless? No, it had meaning! His suffering saved souls. Every time we pray the Stations of the Cross we acknowledge the dignity of suffering as we proclaim, “we adore You, O Christ, and we praise You, for by your holy cross You have redeemed the world.”

*Stations of the Cross*

Jesus also instructed us to embrace our cross. “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

*Mark 8:34*

We are called to unite our suffering with Christ's suffering on the cross and we can offer up our suffering for others. This is called redemptive suffering. Every time we suffer, whether we have a headache, broke a leg, or are terminally ill, we are given the opportunity to powerfully intercede for the salvation of souls.

Euthanasia is a false mercy, a disturbing distortion of mercy. True compassion leads to sharing in another's pain. The word “compassion” literally means “to suffer with.” Compassion does not kill the person whose suffering we cannot bear.

*Evangelium Vitae 66*

Furthermore, many find themselves nearer to Christ in times of suffering and many attest to the good work Jesus accomplished in them during their time of pain and hardship. Consider the elderly and terminally ill you know. Maybe Christ is drawing them nearer to Him before their final journey home? Maybe He is purifying them? Their suffering is painful, but maybe it is bearing fruit as well? Maybe it is saving souls?

*Invite a member of your community who is elderly or terminally ill to share how they suffer and how they have found Christ with them in their suffering, or how they have embraced the call to pick up their cross and unite their suffering with the suffering of Christ. After the sharing, encourage a time of question and answers between them and the teens.*

### **Discussion Questions**

- Have you ever united your suffering with the suffering of Christ to intercede for the salvation of souls?
- What are some everyday examples of how we can do this?
- How has suffering born fruit in your life?
- How can we support and have compassion on those who are suffering?

### **The Weak Have Dignity**

Another contemporary thought pattern that promotes euthanasia is the idea that the elderly and terminally ill no longer have anything to offer society therefore there is no value to caring for them. They are seen as a burden. This is misguided for several reasons.

The first reason is that human dignity and the right to live is not dependent on what we can do for society, but on who we are as sons and daughters of God, made in His image and likeness. Killing a person is still killing a person no matter how little, old, sick, or weak they are.

The second is that the elderly and terminally ill have something to offer to society, but we have overlooked it. They have wisdom, stories, love, and joy. Additionally, they are suffering and possibly uniting their suffering with Christ's for the salvation of others.

### **Discussion Questions**

- How have you seen the dignity of the sick and elderly disregarded?

- How can we promote the dignity of the sick and elderly?
- How can our actions demonstrate that we value the wisdom of the elderly?

### **JOURNAL REFLECTION**

Allow for a time of silence and reflection. Pass out the *Power Is Made Perfect In Weakness Journal Reflection*, found on the *Life Teen January 2016 USB* and online at [www.lifeteen.com](http://www.lifeteen.com) under Life Support: *January 2016*, and a pen to each teen.

### **RESPOND**



### **MINISTRY**

Embrace this opportunity to visit the sick in their beds and /or share a meal or do crafts with the elderly. Take an interest in who they are. Seek their wisdom. Ask questions about their life...

- How are you?
- What is your most wonderful memory?
- What is your most painful memory?
- What advice or wisdom can you share with me?
- What is most important to you? Why?
- How can I pray for you?

Before going into ministry, pray the following prayer to St. Maria Goretti asking her to accompany you during this time of ministry and throughout your life.

### **Dear St. Maria Goretti,**

Your heart was so full of mercy that you gladly forgave your assassin, and prayed that he might be saved; intercede for me before the Lord, whom you now behold face to face.

Ask Him to pour out His grace into my soul  
so that I might always be ready to imitate Jesus as you did.  
I choose you as my friend this day  
and I ask you to accompany me my whole life long.

In honor of the Most Holy Name of Jesus,  
and in imitation of your example.  
I forgive all who have ever hurt me  
or who desired my suffering,  
and I ask pardon of all against whom I have sinned,  
through Christ Our Lord.  
Amen.

## DEBRIEF

To end the session, gather the teens together to process their experience. The following questions can be used to help guide the conversation. Please add and adapt as needed.

- What came easy about ministry today? Why do you think this was?
- What was challenging about ministry today? Why do you think this was? How did you overcome?
- Who did you meet that knew about and was living out redemptive suffering?
- How did you encounter Jesus in those you served?
- How do you think they might have encountered Jesus in you?
- What was revealed to you through this experience about dignity?
- Do you have any sick family members or friends who would benefit from a visit?
- Will you consider calling your grandparents and catching up with them? If they live nearby, you can invite yourself over. When you visit or catch up on the phone, approach them the same way you approached the elderly here - with compassion and respect for their dignity and wisdom.

The youth minister closes by leading the teens in a prayer for those they encountered in ministry today and for their personal petitions.

Planning Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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## POUR INTO THE POOR

### YOUCAT:

448  
449  
302

### SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 4:4  
John 6:27  
John 6:68



### ENGAGE

#### PRIOR

Instruct the pilgrimage teens to begin a 24-hour fast the evening before. This will help them relate to being hungry or being in need of a basic necessity.

#### SITE

In considering a location for this session, the youth minister can go in a variety of directions. It may be safer or more accessible to serve at a homeless shelter or soup kitchen. You can find local shelters and food kitchens by consulting community organizations like Catholic Charities. With a bit of research, a low income apartment, urban development house, or transitional housing may provide a greater challenge for the teens. These are government subsidized homes for low income and at risk families. To contact Housing and Urban Development locally, there is a listing by state found at: <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/states>.

Meet with the site manager in advance to discuss creative ways you and your teens can support and have a person-to-person encounter with those they serve.

Before the discussion, the group has the opportunity to tour the facility, encounter people, and learn about the mission of the organization.

### REFLECT



### DISCUSSION

Use the following outline for a teaching and discussion during the session.

#### Material and Spiritual Needs

Does annual income have anything to do with self-worth? While it's true that those who struggle financially may feel like less or may have fewer opportunities, they have no less worth than the richest person in the world. Furthermore, the richer are not necessarily happier.

In fact, a 2015 Gallup poll showed the happiness level of those in the poorest countries ranked higher than the U.S., which ranked 33rd. The top 10 countries for happiness level were all in Latin America, despite much poverty. Why do you think this is?

[www.gallup.com/poll/182009/mood-world-upbeat-international-happiness-day.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/poll/182009/mood-world-upbeat-international-happiness-day.aspx) 448

The reality is that we are all hungry and unfulfilled in some way, so we need to surrender our needs, whether material or spiritual, to God.

Food, shelter, and clothing are some of our most basic material needs. Today we are at a place where those who are lacking these necessities get help. God has entrusted to us a rich earth that could offer all men sufficient food and living space. Yet there are whole regions, countries, and continents in which many people scarcely have the bare necessities for living.

*YouCat 448*

#### Discussion Questions

- What makes you happy? What makes most people happy?
- Why do you think the U.S. ranked in the middle of the Gallup poll for happiness levels despite little poverty?

while impoverished countries ranked at the top of the poll?

- What are some of the basic material needs of human life and how do we know this?
- What are some of our spiritual needs?
- Why do we have a rich earth, yet large regions in which many people have barely enough to live?
- How do you feel about being in the impoverished conditions that we are in today? Be honest.

### Justice

Love for the poor must be in every age the distinguished mark of Christians. The poor deserve not just a few alms; they have a claim to justice.

*YouCat 449*

The YouCat defines justice by saying: “One acts justly by always making sure to give to God and to one’s neighbor what is due to them.”

*YouCat 302*

The guiding principle of justice is: “To each his own due.” Justice is concerned with equity and longs to see people get what they are entitled to. We must allow justice to govern our relations with God also and give Him what is His: our love and worship.

*YouCat 302*

Justice is fulfilled when people are given their basic human rights in their lives.

*“He who has the goods of this world and sees his brother in need and closes his heart to him, how does the love of God abide in him?” Everyone knows that the Fathers of the Church laid down the duty of the rich toward the poor in no uncertain terms. As St. Ambrose put it: “You are not making a gift of what is yours to the poor man, but you are giving him back what is his. You have been appropriating things that are meant to be for the common use of everyone. The*

*earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich.”*

*Populorum Progressio 23*

The rich have a responsibility to help those in need. Yes, the rich are allowed to hold a sufficient amount for themselves, but people are bound to come to the aid of the poor. True justice means not just giving the left overs, or the unwanted goods.

St. John Chrysostom said: *“Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs.”*

*St. John Chrysostom, Homily in Lazzaro*

### Discussion Questions

- What is “due” to all people?
- Considering how the Church defines justice, how can we work toward justice for those whose dignity is at stake due to living in poverty?
- How can the poor gain justice?
- Do you believe not sharing with the poor is stealing from them? Do you believe that when you give to the poor you are giving back what is already theirs? Why or why not?
- Why, then, does poverty exist? How come the solution isn’t easy?

### Poverty

Some choose poverty for the sake of growing closer to God — many of us have met a religious sister or brother. Poverty is one of the three evangelical counsels many religious and vowed take on — the three evangelical counsels are poverty, chastity and obedience.

In choosing poverty, they offer to God all that belongs to Him and, in this sacrifice, unite any suffering to Jesus. This can be very rewarding as a form of delayed gratification. The eternal beatitude awaits them.

Consider the words of St. Ignatius of Loyola: *“The more generous you are toward God, the more generous you will find he is toward you.”*

YouCat 273

But what about embracing poverty when that is the only reality you’ve ever known or a person finds himself in poverty during their life? When someone feels poverty is imposed upon them — they can lack hope or feel they are in situation they can’t change. This may lead them to feeling less dignified. Often, too, they are treated with less dignity.

We don’t know the circumstances that surround people’s poverty. We ought not judge them. They are not less than. They are as dignified as the person sitting next to you. We can help those in poverty know their value and worth by giving them what is due to them.

Not only are the impoverished in need of material good, but they may also have spiritual needs. They may need to encounter the same Jesus who spent time with the poor and most vulnerable in His community. Jesus fulfills all hunger. He brings hope to those in poverty. He is the Bread of Life.

*“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”* This reminds us that our spiritual hungers cannot be satisfied by our physical hunger, or material needs.

Matthew 4:4

In a profound sense we are nourished by the one who has *‘the words of eternal life’* and *“the food that does not perish”* — the Holy Eucharist.

John 6:68, John 6:27

*“There is hunger for ordinary bread, but there is also hunger for love, kindness, and mutual respect — and that is the great poverty from which people today suffer.”*

Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, *A Gift for God: Prayers and Meditations*, pp. 19-20

### Discussion Questions

- Do you think it is easy to embrace poverty when it is your circumstances? Why or why not?
- What do you think your life would look like if you were to make a vow of poverty?
- If someone’s poor life choices led to poverty, how would you recognize their dignity and still practice mercy and justice? Do you think most people show mercy and work for justice? Can our treatment help restore dignity?
- How can you live out what St. Ignatius of Loyola said: *“The more generous you are toward God, the more generous you will find he is toward you”*?
- The YouCat says, *“For Christian there is a special obligation to share their goods”* (449). What are some challenges to living this out?
- How does the Eucharist help fulfill your hungers and desires?

### St. Maria Goretti

Growing up, young Maria’s family was poor. It got so bad that when Maria was six, her father moved the family from the east side of Italy to the west side, hoping to escape the escalating poverty. Unfortunately, Maria’s father tragically died when she was nine, leaving her to raise her five siblings while her mother farmed for the food they needed and to pay rent.

These new circumstances caused trial and suffering for the Goretti family. For Maria it was especially difficult. Besides caring for her family, she also had to cook and clean for her next door neighbors who assisted her mother with the farming.

Not everyone's story is like Maria's. Some find themselves in poverty because of difficult circumstances. Others made poor choices that rendered them impoverished. No matter the situation, we are called to recognize their dignity and justice.

### JOURNAL REFLECTION

Allow for a time of silence and reflection. Pass out the *Examination of Conscience in Light of Catholic Social Teaching* found on the USCCB website at:

<http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/penance/examination-conscience-in-light-of-catholic-social-teaching.cfm>

### RESPOND



### MINISTRY

When a person is stuck in poverty or relying on the help of others to meet basic needs, each day can present a sense of anxiety or worry. Will I be able to provide for my needs and the needs of those in my care? Sometimes, there can be a level of embarrassment for oneself or for a parent on behalf of his/her child. You want them to be accepted by the other kids in their school or neighborhood. While you may be relying on an outside source to meet needs, it is not always easy to accept this help. Do I have enough self-worth to accept authentic mercy and the justice that belongs to me?

God desires to fill every human need — most of all our spiritual hunger.

We are in a subsidized housing area. We are surrounded by poverty, brokenness, joy and potential. We are about to enter into a time of ministry to support, love, and be present to the dignity of the lives around us. As you serve, think of the physical and spiritual hunger of those you serve. Be present to them wholly, just as Jesus visited and helped

the poor. We are not called to solve their problems. We just need to be present and view them with the same respect and love as someone in our own neighborhood.

Before going into ministry, pray the following prayer to St. Maria Goretti asking her to accompany you during this time of ministry and through your whole life.

### Dear St. Maria Goretti,

Your heart was so full of mercy  
that you gladly forgave your assassin,  
and prayed that he might be saved;  
intercede for me before the Lord,  
whom you now behold face to face.

Ask Him to pour out His grace into my soul  
so that I might always be ready to imitate Jesus as you did.

I choose you as my friend this day  
and I ask you to accompany me my whole life long.

In honor of the Most Holy Name of Jesus,  
and in imitation of your example.  
I forgive all who have ever hurt me  
or who desired my suffering,  
and I ask pardon of all against whom I have sinned,  
through Christ Our Lord.  
Amen.

### DEBRIEF

To end the session, gather the teens together to process their experience. The following questions can be used to help guide the conversation. Please add and adapt as needed.

- What came easy about ministry today? Why do you think this was?
- What was challenging about ministry today? Why do you think this was? How did you overcome?

- How did you encounter Jesus in those you served?
- How do you think they might have encountered Jesus in you?
- What was revealed to you through the experience about justice?
- What was revealed to you through the experience about dignity?

End by praying for those you encountered in ministry today and for the individuals in your life you are praying will realize and live into their dignity as God's sons and daughters.

Planning Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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## WIDE MARGINS

### CATECHISM:

CCC 1931  
CCC 1932  
CCC 1933

### SCRIPTURE:

Luke 23:43  
Matthew 6:14



### ENGAGE

#### PRIOR

Have the group spend some time with someone involved in jail ministry so they can prepare themselves for the experience. This person could meet with the group before arrival or on site.

#### SITE

Look for a local or county jail/prison that offers a time for ministry. Your chancery likely has a listing of how to get involved in jail ministry. You could see if your parish or a neighboring parish has a jail ministry coordinator (often a deacon). If someone who regularly does jail ministry is available, ask this person to help with the session.

Jail ministry is unique and not meant for everyone. Keep this in mind as your teens get a glimpse into this.

Alternatives: If a jail is not available or unsafe, consider a drug rehab center, juvenile detention center or immigration center. The people ministered to in these places also live on the fringe of society.

Meet with the site manager in advance to discuss creative ways you and your teens can support and have a person-to-person encounter with those they serve.

Before the discussion, the group has the opportunity to tour the facility, encounter people, and learn about the mission of the organization.

### REFLECT



### DISCUSSION

*Use the following outline for a teaching and discussion during the session.*

#### Finding Jesus

We don't often think of running into Jesus in a jail. Aren't these people criminals?

Jail is not the last place we should expect to see Jesus. Jesus was incarcerated during His life. He was arrested and jailed. He hung from chains in His jail cell — a dungeon inside Caiaphas' home — for a night before He went on trial to Pilate.

Although innocent, Jesus spent time in jail and was even condemned to die. Both of these realities are crimes against justice. Yet, Jesus can still be found in the jail. This isn't to say that jail is full of innocent people. Yes, there might be some. This is to say that Jesus always goes where the vulnerable are.

Jesus may be in those unjustly imprisoned. Jesus may be in those who have changed their heart since being incarcerated — some who even evangelize and convert other inmates! Jesus is in those who go to minister to the imprisoned.

Compassion is needed because of the frailty of those marginalized by being imprisoned. Misery exists for all because of a broken world, but we must be willing to serve even those in prison — to bring the compassion of Jesus to them.



Pope Francis famously modeled this when he washed the feet of prisoners on Holy Thursday in 2015.

### Discussion Questions

- Had you ever considered that Jesus spent time in jail? How does this help you look with greater compassion on the imprisoned?
- Why is it difficult to show human dignity to those who are incarcerated?
- How can we be witnesses of joy to the imprisoned? Realistically, how can we display the compassion of Jesus?

### The Need for Dignity

Those who find themselves in jail, regardless of the crime they've committed, have no less dignity than any other person. Being guilty of a crime doesn't make them less of a person or have less dignity.

It can be tough to treat someone with dignity when they are convicted of a heinous crime, but Jesus calls us to a love much deeper than we limit ourselves to at times.

Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that "everyone should look upon his neighbor (without any exception) as 'another self,' above all bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity."

CCC 1931

The duty of making oneself a neighbor to others and actively serving them becomes even more urgent when it involves the disadvantaged, in whatever area this may be. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

CCC 1932

### Discussion Questions

- How can we show mercy to those who are imprisoned?

- Is it easy to view someone who has committed a terrible crime as "neighbor"? Why?
- Considering the Catechism specifically says making oneself a neighbor becomes "more urgent" when it involves the disadvantaged, how is human dignity for the life of inmates important?
- How can ministering to those in jail help us live as Jesus said: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."?

### Don't Dismiss, Think Dismas

Just because someone is in prison, does not mean that they have unforgiven sin. They may have repented and received forgiveness. Consider St. Dismas. St. Dismas was the thief hanging on the cross next to Jesus. He asked for forgiveness and Jesus had mercy on him saying, "*Today you will be with me in paradise.*"

Luke 23:43

Each person you encounter in jail has the opportunity to encounter Jesus and become a saint. Each and every person can seek redemption in Jesus' name. It's never too late. St. Dismas is now a canonized saint.

### Discussion Questions

- How does the forgiveness of St. Dismas show that God's mercy is limitless?
- What do we make of the unrepentant man hanging next to Jesus? How will you react to someone you may encounter that resembles this man?

### True Forgiveness

Many criminals are repeat offenders. Is it because of inner hatred? Can they not forgive themselves? While we cannot control someone not believing in their own dignity, it ought to be our goal to help them see their dignity and help them restore their self-worth.



Forgiveness is a basic human need. We are deprived when we don't receive forgiveness — we become a worse version of ourselves. Depravity produces more depravity.

Jesus sets the bar high on this, telling us to forgive our enemies. That's not exactly easy. But this is love.

The teaching of Christ goes so far as to require the forgiveness of offenses. He extends the commandment of love, which is that of the New Law, to all enemies. Liberation in the spirit of the Gospel is incompatible with hatred of one's enemy as a person, but not with hatred of the evil that he does as an enemy.

CCC 1933

Forgiving liberates the person who has offended and it also liberates the person who forgives. We ought not be prisoners to any level of hate, resentment or lack of forgiveness.

### Discussion Questions

- Why are many criminals repeat offenders?
- How does lack of forgiveness (from self, from others) lead to more depravity?
- Do you think restoring dignity will lead to less crime?

### St. Maria's Virtue To Forgive

St. Maria Goretti is known for her example of purity, because she defended herself to the point of death to remain pure. Yet, her even greater example was the forgiveness she gave to her attacker on her deathbed. This forgiveness led to his conversion and set him on a path to personal holiness.

Maria understood that forgiveness is part of being a Christian. While all major religions offer some value to forgiveness, only Christianity upholds forgiveness as a central precept.

We see this in God the Father's forgiveness. Think of the Prodigal Son. We see this most clearly in Jesus becoming human and accepting his suffering and death. Jesus died for the forgiveness of your sins. He became human to take away the sins of all humans — to restore, redeem, reconcile and save.

For many, forgiveness is a barrier (one that is often never approached). For Christians, forgiveness is part of our love for Jesus. Jesus doesn't merely require forgiveness, He tells us we must forgive or relinquish our own forgiveness.

Matthew 6:14

### Discussion Questions

- How is forgiveness central to being Christian?
- Maria Goretti's assailant was jailed for his crime, but received forgiveness from her. How is her example of forgiveness pertinent to jail ministry?

### Forgiving Alessandro

Alessandro's father was gripped by alcoholism, which caused Alessandro to become reclusive and withdrawn. These unhealthy behaviors resulted in a growth of lust towards Maria.

Alessandro would make lewd jokes and gestures towards Maria. He also made repeated attempts to seduce her. Maria wanted nothing to do with Alessandro and rejected him. She avoided situations that would leave her alone with him, but Alessandro eventually approached the house in the middle of the day — when Maria would be alone and everyone else would be at work in the fields — and attempted to rape her.

Maria resisted him and he was unable to rape her. Enraged, Alessandro struck Maria repeatedly with a metal file, delivering fourteen puncture wounds, which cause Maria to die within twenty-four hours.

Sentenced to thirty years in prison, Alessandro blamed Maria and his anger was so bad they had to put him in isolation. One night, six years into his prison sentence, Maria appeared to Alessandro. She appeared in a garden with fourteen white lillies, handing them to him one by one. This gesture of forgiveness, this act of love, filled Alessandro with love and hope. His dignity was restored. He was immediately contrite.

Alessandro peacefully finished his prison sentence. He became so peaceful that he was released three years early. Shortly after his release he sought out, and received, the forgiveness of Maria's mother. He eventually joined the Capuchin Franciscans, working as a lay brother.

Following his death, the Capuchin friars with whom he lived found a sealed envelope among his personal effects. It contains an appeal that all follow the way of Christ. It also paints a dramatic and touching picture of a man who was able to regain his dignity through the generous mercy that those he wounded extended to him.

### **Discussion Questions**

- Maria forgave Alessandro before she died. She also appeared to him in a vision, offering forgiveness. What does this teach us about forgiving others?
- How does this story of Alessandro receiving forgiveness, having contrition, and turning to Jesus tell you about the power of forgiveness?
- How does forgiveness restore dignity?

### **JOURNAL REFLECTION**

Allow for a time of silence and reflection. Pass out the *Wide Margins Journal Reflection*, found on the *Life Teen January 2016 USB* and online at [www.lifeteen.com](http://www.lifeteen.com) under Life Support: *January 2016*, and a pen to each teen.

## **RESPOND**



### **MINISTRY**

We are in a jail. People who are hurt and lost surround us. There is a barrage of feelings. Many hearts are hard, some are broken, and some are lost in a way we may not understand. As we get to know some of the inmates, be prepared to share how Jesus has liberated you; how Jesus has lead you to live a life that is complete and full.

Observe what is going on before, during, and after we lead a bible study and/or go to Mass with the inmates.

Before going into ministry, pray the following prayer to St. Maria Goretti asking her to accompany you during this time of ministry and through your whole life.

#### **Dear St. Maria Goretti,**

Your heart was so full of mercy  
that you gladly forgave your assassin,  
and prayed that he might be saved;  
intercede for me before the Lord,  
whom you now behold face to face.

Ask Him to pour out His grace into my soul  
so that I might always be ready to imitate Jesus as you did.

I choose you as my friend this day  
and I ask you to accompany me my whole life long.  
In honor of the Most Holy Name of Jesus,  
and in imitation of your example.  
I forgive all who have ever hurt me  
or who desired my suffering,  
and I ask pardon of all against whom I have sinned,  
through Christ Our Lord.  
Amen.

## DEBRIEF

To end the session, gather the teens together to process their experience. The following questions can be used to help guide the conversation. Please add and adapt as needed.

- This was probably one of our most challenging site visits. Did anyone have anything happen that needs to be shared?
- What came easy about ministry today? Why do you think this was?
- What kind of prisoners did you meet today? Consider the examples we had during our discussion.
- What was challenging about ministry today? Why do you think this was? How did you overcome?
- Who did you meet that already knew and followed Jesus?
- Who did you meet that was open to hearing about Jesus?
- How did you encounter Jesus in those you served?
- How do you think they might have encountered Jesus in you?
- What was revealed to you through this experience about dignity?

End by praying for those you encountered in ministry today and for the individuals in your life you are praying will realize and live into their dignity as God's sons and daughters.

Planning Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

## SITE CHECKLIST: *WIDE MARGINS*

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☐ **Site Address:**

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☐ **Site Contact:**

**Name:**

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**Title:**

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**Phone:**

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**Email:**

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☐ **Session Date:**

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☐ **Session Time:**

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**Meeting Instructions:**

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**Notes:**

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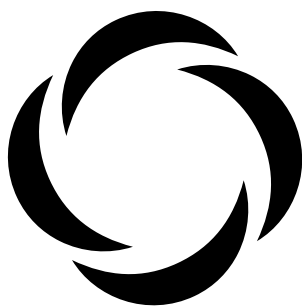
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