



# 'Light for the Path' a Resource for Families in the Holy Year of Mercy

## SESSION GUIDE

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*'God does not limit himself merely to affirming his love, but makes it visible and tangible. Love, after all, can never be just an abstraction. By its very nature, it indicates something concrete. The mercy of God is his loving concern for each one of us. He feels responsible, that is he desires our wellbeing and he wants to see us happy, full of joy, and peaceful. This is the path which the merciful love of Christians must also travel. As the Father loves, so do his children. Just as he is merciful, so we are called to be merciful to each other. MV 9*

### The 'Light for the Path' Resource Sessions

The 'Light for the Path' resource consists of six reflection sessions. At the heart of each session is a scripture passage, taken from one of the scripture texts referred to by Pope Francis in his announcement of the Holy Year of Mercy (*Misericordiae Vultus* or 'The Face of Mercy'). The sessions are designed for use in groups of 'family people' (everyone is welcome – parents, grandparents, children, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, cousins) either in their homes, perhaps with other family or friends, or in the parish. Session One begins with an Advent reflection on Mary, the Mother of Mercy. Sessions Two to Five follow bi-monthly over the first six-months of 2016, concluding with Session Six for use in the autumn of 2016, before the Year of Mercy closes on the Feast of Christ the King. The 'Light for the Path' Resource seeks to support your family, or the group you are gathered with, explore the whole idea of 'mercy' as God's constant loving kindness in action: experienced in the scriptures, and in our own lives. Through the Gospels, we meet Jesus, and somehow, without our knowing 'how', God speaks into our lives, guiding, challenging or encouraging, and we find God's ways of mercy coming alive in our ways, our relationships, and our actions. To be a Christian and to follow Christ is to live a life of mercy.

### Sessions for Adults and for Adults with Children

Each session has a choice of two downloadable guides, one for a group of adults only, and the other for use by an adult with children. The adult 'Light for the Path' session guide

contains the 7-step process, including the full scripture text, and a picture of that story to aid reflection. The adult-with-child ‘Light for the Path’ guide has simplified steps, including a child-friendly version of the Scripture, a picture of the story, some ‘wondering’ questions, ideas for being ‘merciful’ at home and a quote from Pope Francis. There are also some ‘Tips’ for using the ‘Light for the Path’ resource with children, giving a step-by-step guide for the parent or other adult to use, helping both the adults and children to engage. The ‘prayer’ moment is also in child-friendly language.

## A Simple Way of Praying with the Scripture Together

For the ‘We listen’ step of the process you may like to use a good children’s or Good News Bible, or for the very young, a children’s story book version. **However, for easy reference, each ‘Light for the Path’ session guide has the scripture text in full.** Through this simple way of praying with the scripture, anyone of any age can go deeper in their relationship with God, moving from ‘head’ and ‘history’ and ‘2000 years ago,’ across time and space, to the present moment, and God speaking into ‘my heart’ and finding God in ‘my story’. We are not praying *on* the Word of God, or *about* the Word of God, but we are meeting Jesus *through* the word – like an ‘encounter’ or ‘presence’. He is present with us through his living, active Word, in a ‘heart burning’ moment. You will find a simple ‘Lectio Divina: How to Guide’ as part of the ‘Light for the Path’ Resource.

## How Long Does Each Session Take?

Each session can be adapted to the time you have available, whether that is ten minutes or an hour. Choose your session time to fit your family life and demands. It should be an enjoyable experience and a chance for some peaceful time-out and conversation together. **Ideally, allow 45 minutes for a session to cover all the steps.** However, if you do not have that amount of time, you can adapt and condense the session omitting certain steps. The session notes in the table below will help you structure this conversation.

## A Shorter Conversation

If you only have a little time just do ‘we listen’ and ‘we respond’ steps. Allow 10-15 minutes quiet time, listening to the Scripture, using the ‘Lectio Divina: How To Guide’ and ask the ‘I wonder’ questions allowing the children/group members to respond. That simple 2-step process in itself is enough ‘food for thought’ or ‘light for the path’, and you will find your 10 or 15 minutes will give everyone something to wonder about. The experience does flow

into daily life, and often changes the way you see things, or the children see things, and how you respond differently to people and situations, being more aware and more ‘merciful’.

## How are the sessions structured?

*‘May the message of mercy reach everyone, and may no-one be indifferent to the call to experience mercy’ (MV 19)*

The resource consists of 6 user-friendly sessions (adults alone, or adults with children) for use at different points during the Holy Year. The family or group choose the best time for them. Ideally, allow 40-60minutes for a session. However, if you do not have that amount of time, it can be adapted and condensed, making choices which steps to omit. The most important section is Step 3, ‘We listen’ which can be a stand-alone step. See below:

### Step One: We gather

Ideally, the session takes place in warm and comfortable space. The ‘leader’ welcomes, ‘it is good to be here together’. In the resource material, a short introduction to the topic is given. The leader may read this, or part of it, depending on the age/ability of the group. ‘Today is about.....’

### Step Two: We look at our experience

Having heard the brief introduction, everyone has a chance to share their first thoughts on this topic, in the family, and in our Catholic tradition. Notes are given on the tradition. The leader shares these.

### Step Three: We listen to the Word of God in Scripture as ‘Light for the Path’

In each session, there is an opportunity to reflect on the Word of God in Scripture as ‘light for the path’ (*Psalm 118 (119) v105*), either through a dip into the Old Testament, Psalms, or New Testament letters, but most particularly, through the Gospels, encountering Christ in word and action. ‘We listen’ is the most important element in each session, and if you are short of time, you may wish to just do this Step Three, using the simple ‘How To’ Guide. The resource provides a simple way of reflecting with scripture, most commonly known as ‘lectio divina’, for use at this point in the session. This has been adapted into a very accessible form. From experience, this method works with all ages and abilities. For the very young, this is an opportunity to ‘play’ with the story characters and tell the story in both verbal and non-verbal ways.

## **Step Four: We respond**

An invitation to all, to ‘wonder’ what participants have seen and heard. We respond to the question ‘What does this story tell us about our family and what is important to us?’

## **Step Five: We mix it together and make sense**

This section brings together life experience, in the light of scripture and church teaching, with a reference to Pope Francis’ document for the Year of Mercy, in plain English. We identify and describe practical ‘Works of Mercy’ as we experience them at home and more widely.

## **Step Six: We plan to do something new or different this week**

The final section of each session encourages the families/groups to respond to the question, ‘What difference does this make?’ Or ‘What might we do differently this week?’ This is the challenge of connecting living ‘mercy’ in our family lives, as a real participation in the life of the parish and wider community, sharing in the Church’s mission to bring God’s mercy to the world.

## **Step Seven: We pray**

The session concludes with a simple prayer or Blessing in the group/ family. With grateful hearts, we pray for a continuing openness to the mercy of God at work in us, blessing us to live mercifully each day, as the face, hands and feet of Christ in our homes and work places, and our communities.

## **God of Surprises**

In each section of the resource, you will find a ‘God of surprises’ text box. Into the melting pot, we add reference to where we experience ‘mercy’ **in the prayers and action of the Mass**. Each session will make reference to one of these ‘moments’ in the Mass, helping families to make connections between life at home and the worship of the Church. This is both an affirmation and a challenge to living out the ‘mercy’ that we pray and believe. We bring our ‘mercy-full,’ self-giving lives to Sunday Mass, offering all our blessedness and brokenness, and ask God to continue to pour out grace and mercy on us, empowering us to live it in the week to come.

## Outline of each 'Light for the Path' Session: Guide for 45-minutes

Step	Time in minutes
<b>1.We gather:</b> creating the welcoming space, followed by brief introduction/background to the session	2 minutes
<b>2.We look:</b> At our experience, first thoughts on this topic in our Catholic tradition, and in our family	10 minutes
<b>3.We listen to the Word of God:</b> ( <i>If you are new to this way of praying with scripture, you may find the 'Lectio Divina: How To Guide' useful</i> ) This is a time of gentle exploration of the Scripture speaking to all ages and abilities, in verbal and non-verbal ways: Read/tell story from scripture, meeting Jesus, present, showing the way of mercy.	10 minutes
<b>4.We respond:</b> Invitation to 'wonder': What does this story tell us about our family and what is important to us?	10 minutes
<b>5.We mix it together and make sense:</b> reference to Pope Francis' document on mercy, in plain English	5 minutes
<b>6.We plan to do something new or different this week:</b> In the light of what we have shared, is there anything we would like to do this week in our family?	5 minutes
<b>7.We pray:</b> the session concludes with a simple prayer or Blessing in the group/ family.  NOTE: <b>God of Surprises:</b> in each sessions, a reference to 'mercy' in the celebration of the Mass	2 minutes

To download the 'Light for the Path' Session Guides and for additional information and resources please visit [catholicfamily.org.uk](http://catholicfamily.org.uk) or email Caroline Dollard MFL Project Office Catechesis Development Worker at [caroline.dollard@cbcew.org.uk](mailto:caroline.dollard@cbcew.org.uk)