



WORKS OF MERCY – Guidelines for Group Leaders

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

TO PREPARE FOR THE MEETING

The dignity and the rights of prisoners are often trampled on

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

What attitudes should we promote in young people?

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

Some useful texts to explore the topic:

- **Pope Francis' greeting to prisoners** in a visit to the rehabilitation center of Santa Cruz - Palmasola (Bolivia) (pages 3-4: **Pope Francis—I was in prison.doc**) on the Vatican website translated into other languages
- **"F" for forgiveness** - From an article about how Chiara Lubich promoted peace and justice in society (page 5: **Chiara Lubich—I was in prison.doc**)

BEFORE THE MEETING

How can we involve the community?



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POSSIBLE STEPS TO WORK ON TOGETHER (SPECIFIC GOALS)

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

MATERIALS SUITABLE FOR TEENS

Pages 6-14: PPT "**Heart in action**" – "To all those who are without freedom ..."

Attachment PPT "**Hearts in action live**" – Experiences of teens "I was in prison and you visited me"

Working in prison, experience of Daniel Marques Barretto, Vice-director of the Sorocaba Prison, Brazil (page 15 "**Exp. of a guard – I was in prison**")

Proposals for activities to help develop the meeting:

- **On which side are you?** The game helps teens see that we can all make mistakes and may need the forgiveness of others and a new opportunity to start over. (pages 16-17: **Game - I was in prison**)
- **A story to discover ...** starting with a photo we can reconstruct a pictorial story that tells the emotions, missed opportunities and hopes of a young prisoner. This activity describes some steps to help teens in their personal use of technology. (pages 18-20: **Activity Prepare a powerpoint – I was in prison**)
- **A small man with a big problem**, starting with a passage from the Gospel of Luke (19: 1-10) we can reflect on the mistakes we can make and the opportunities for recovery and beginning again. (pages 21-22: **Activity prepare a story – I was in prison**)

EVALUATION

- Has team spirit and exchange between all increased in this meeting? Has the climate of trust and mutual love grown? Have we experienced the presence of Jesus among us?
 - Does there seem to be a growth in our sensitivity towards those who, after committing a crime, repented and sought an opportunity to be healed and start over?
 - Did we find an opportunity to experience this work of mercy, possibly with a specific project?
 - How did we manage to involve the community?
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VISIT TO SANTA CRUZ-PALMASOLA REHABILITATION CENTER

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

Santa Cruz de la Sierra (Bolivia)

Friday, 10 July 2015

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Good morning!*

I could not leave Bolivia without seeing you, without sharing that faith and hope which are the fruit of the love revealed on the cross of Christ. Thank you for welcoming me; I know that you have prepared yourselves for this moment and that you have been praying for me. I am deeply grateful for this.

In the words of Archbishop Jesús Juárez and in the testimonies of our brothers who have spoken, I have seen how pain does not stifle the hope deep within the human heart, and how life goes on, finding new strength even in the midst of difficulties.

You may be asking yourselves: “Who is this man standing before us?”. I would like to reply to that question with something absolutely certain about my own life. **The man standing before you is a man who has experienced forgiveness. A man who was, and is, saved from his many sins. That is who I am.** I don’t have much more to give you or to offer you, but I want to share with you what I do have and what I love. It is Jesus Christ, the mercy of the Father.

Jesus came to show the love which God has for us. For you, for each of you, and for me. It is a love which is powerful and real. It is a love which takes seriously the plight of those he loves. It is a love which heals, forgives, raises up and shows concern. It is a love which draws near and restores dignity. We can lose this dignity in so many ways. But Jesus is stubborn: he gave his very life in order to restore the identity we had lost, to clothe us with the power of his dignity.

Here is something which can help us to understand this. **Peter and Paul, disciples of Jesus, were also prisoners. They too lost their freedom. But there was something that sustained them,** something that did not let them yield to despair, which did not let them sink into darkness and meaninglessness. That something was prayer; **it was prayer. Prayer, both individually and with others. They prayed, and they prayed for one another. These two forms of prayer became a network to maintain life and hope.** And that network keeps us from yielding to despair. It encourages us to keep moving forward. It is a network which supports life, your own lives and those of your families. You spoke about your mother [*the Holy Father is speaking to the person who gave his testimony at the beginning*]. The prayer of mothers, the prayer of wives, the prayers of your sons and daughters, and your own prayers: this is a network of support which encourages you to move forward.

When Jesus becomes part of our lives, we can no longer remain imprisoned by our past. Instead, we begin to look to the present, and we see it differently, with a different kind of hope. We begin to see ourselves and our lives in a different light. We are no longer stuck in the past, but capable of shedding tears and finding in them the strength to make a new start. If there are times when we experience sadness, when we’re in a bad way, when we’re depressed or have negative feelings, I ask you to look at Christ crucified. Look at his face; in his eyes there is a place for us. We can all bring to Christ our wounds, our pain, our mistakes, our sins, and all those things which perhaps we got wrong. In the wounds of Jesus, there is a place for our own wounds. Because we are all wounded, in one way or another. And so we bring our wounds to the wounds of Jesus. Why? So that there they can be soothed, washed clean, changed and healed. He died for us, for me, so that he could stretch out his hand and lift us up. Speak to the priests who

come here, talk to them! Speak to the brothers and sisters who come, speak to them. Speak to everyone who comes here to talk to you about Jesus. Jesus wants to help you get up, always.

This certainty makes us work hard to preserve our dignity. Being imprisoned, “shut in”, is not the same thing as being “shut out”, and I want to be clear on this point, detention is part of a process of reintegration into society. I know that there are many things here that make it hard, and you have spoken very clearly about some of them [*the Holy Father is speaking once again to the person who gave his testimony at the beginning*]: overcrowding, delayed justice, a lack of training opportunities and rehabilitation policies, violence, the lack of adequate educational facilities. All these things point to the need for a speedy and efficient cooperation between institutions in order to come up with solutions.

And yet, while working for this, we should not think that everything is lost. There are things that we can do today.

Here, in this rehabilitation center, the way you live together depends to some extent on yourselves. Suffering and deprivation can make us selfish of heart and lead to confrontation, but we also have the capacity to make these things an opportunity for genuine fraternity. Help one another. Do not be afraid to help one another. The devil wants quarrels, rivalry, division, gangs. Don’t let him play with you. Keep working to make progress, together.

I would ask you also to convey my greetings to your families, some of whom are here. The presence and support of families are so important! Grandparents, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, couples, children: all of them remind us that life is worth living and that we should keep fighting for a better world.

Finally, I offer a word of encouragement to all who work at this center: to the administrators, the police officials and all the personnel. You carry out a vital public service. You have an important responsibility for facilitating the process of reintegration. It is your responsibility to raise up, not to put down, to restore dignity and not to humiliate; to encourage and not to inflict hardship. This means putting aside a mentality which sees people as “good” or “bad”, and instead trying to focus on helping others. And the mindset of wanting to help each person will also save you from every form of corruption and will improve conditions for everyone. In so doing, it will give us dignity, motivate us, and make us all better people.

Before giving each of you my blessing, I would like for us to pray for a few moments in silence. In silence, and from the heart. Each of you in the way you are able...

I ask you, please, to keep praying for me, because I too make mistakes and I also must do penance. Thank you very much.

May God our Father look upon our hearts, may God our Father who loves us give us his strength, his patience, his fatherly tenderness, and may he bless us. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Please do not forget to pray for me.

Thank you.

"F" for forgiveness

From an article about how Chiara Lubich promoted peace and justice in society:

The introduction of the article by Luigino Bruno states: "Forgiveness is intimately linked to peace and social justice. But to what extent can it be achieved in an age of globalization? And how much more it is asked of us now, in times of crisis, when people's needs are ignored? (...) Chiara Lubich gave an answer to this question in the talk she gave in Rimini on June 22, 2002, and in many other talks. Following is a quote from the talk in Rimini:

«This year Pope John Paul II chose the following title as the theme for World Peace Day on January 1st: "There is no peace without justice; there is no justice without forgiveness." The word "forgive" comes from a Latin word meaning "to give totally." What is the purpose of this gift? That we might live justice ourselves. However, justice obtained by the use of force, even when it is legitimate force, as happens normally in our civil societies, is never the ultimate solution, because there is no guarantee that the guilty person has repented and is therefore willing to atone for their fault.

"Forgiveness instead is an act which is both rational and wise at the same time, because it helps the guilty person take responsibility for their actions and so declare they are ready to give something back to society, or to others, for what they have done. It does not take much to understand that this is the highest level of justice, towards which our societies must tend. But here is the point: to become capable of forgiveness we need to be able to give; we cannot forgive if we are not able to give."

"So we can understand then why we need to spread with open hands the seeds of a culture of giving, of gift. But the culture of giving cannot be preached; it must be witnessed."

http://www.cittanuova.it/c/417570/P_di_perdono.html



For...

**ALL
THOSE
WHO...**

**...ARE NOT
FREE!**



VISIT THE IMPRISONED





WITHOUT EXCEPTION



“In our society there are many marginalized people who are excluded from society, even though we talk a lot about equality among all people. But who in reality loves and is a sincere friend of the poor, of repentant sinners and the unfortunate, as if they were all nice, fault-free and well off like the rest of us?



Chiara, from the Beatitudes, June 1975

Continue...



WITHOUT EXCEPTION



VISIT THE IMPRISONED

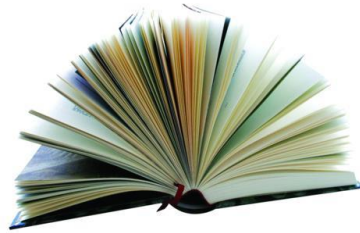
- ■ ■ Who are they who forget failings and forgive injuries inflicted on them? They are the saints. They have acted in this way, because they have understood the lesson of Jesus and have gone against the current, and then gone to be with the migrants to share their terrible hardships.

(Like Frances Cabrini, like Joseph Cafasso among the prisoners or like the Mercedari who personally gave themselves as a substitute for the slaves in order to free them, when they had insufficient funds to pay the ransom.).

”



LEARN HOW TO LISTEN



Browse thru...

**GET TO
KNOW**

VISIT THE IMPRISONED

"I was in prison and you came to visit me (Matthew 25:36) (...) Wherever someone is starving, a stranger, sick or in prison, there is Christ himself who waits for our visit and our help. I would really like to listen to each of your personal stories, but unfortunately it is not possible; but I have come however to tell you simply that God loves you with an infinite love and you are always children of God (...).

Let us ask him in silence and in prayer that all may be delivered from the prison of sin, from conceit and pride: indeed each of us needs to escape from this interior prison to be truly free from evil, from distress and from death (...).

I would like to end by telling you that the Church supports and encourages every effort directed to guaranteeing everyone a dignified life. You can be assured that I am near each of you, your families and your children...

Benedict XVI - pastoral visit to the district prison in Rebibbia - Rome, December 18, 2011



EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE

LIVE

*Experiences from
around the world*

VISIT THE IMPRISONED



"With our group of 'Teens for Unity', we decided to look for the prisoners in our city.

We knew that it would not be easy to obtain the various permits, but we tried anyway. As soon as the warden saw us he said:

It is not easy for people of your age to get in, but I've been waiting for you since I heard one of your radio broadcasts. You are really exceptional!").



Continue...



Everything is possible *(cont.)*



So with experiences and songs we presented ourselves before a dozen guards and a hundred prisoners.

At the end, one of them thanked us on behalf of all, asking that our friendship not end there.

That same afternoon a journalist came to interview us for an article in the widely read daily newspaper.

We experienced that with Jesus in the midst everything is possible!

LIVE

Teens for Unity
Uganda

VISIT THE IMPRISONED



INPUT

Some ideas for...
**GETTING INTO
ACTION**

VISIT THE IMPRISONED



Is there a prison in our city? Let's **contact the chaplain** to find out what we can do for those prisoners who never get visits. A nice gift basket for them could be a concrete sign of our closeness.





I WELCOMED
EVERYONE
WITHOUT
EXCEPTION...

redazione.gen3@focolare.org

WORKING IN A PRISON



Daniel Marques Barretto, Vice-director of the prison of Sorocaba, Brazil

The Brazilian penitentiary system today arouses curiosity as well as sadness and rebellion. I started working in prisons as a prison officer, after passing a test in competition with others. In the first few months, I saw shocking situations. After a while, I was transferred to the administrative sector.

For some time now, I have been the technical supervisor and temporary director of the Sorocaba Prison, near San Paolo, which has about 1,300 prisoners. Most of the prisoners are there for rehabilitation, and show interest in being reintegrated into society, which greatly facilitates our task.

During my life, I have picked up important values, and living for the good of others gives us an unparalleled quality of life. That is what I have professed, practiced and lived, recognizing that all men and women are equal. Having faith in people and in the brotherhood of all has helped me a lot in this job, and so have all the people I have met here.

One of them is Claudiano, who is in charge of the education department of the penitentiary. He is always ready to help and sincerely wants to renew the organizations of the prison. He manages to involve the prisoners so that they can acquire new values, such as respect for each other. He was the one who organized for "Gen Rosso" to come to the prison, a musical group of the Focolare Movement, which I got to know then and discovered that we share common ideals.

Some news flashes: I started to bring my skateboard to work so that the prisoners could use it in the courtyard, out in the sun. Another time I went to a conference in a prison for teenagers and brought L. with me. He told them of his decision to leave a life of crime, changing his whole lifestyle. I told my own experience of how I made the choice to make a difference by doing good to others (instead of evil) and helped them see the benefits that comes from this kind of choice. Those teens got the idea that it is possible to start another life and be free from crime and evil.

We recently started a social experience in which the prisoners volunteer to help people in need or who are rejected by society, like street children, the disabled, sick, elderly, etc ... In the Sorocaba prison we continue to work on these projects, and put forward a new vision of prison life that aims at improving the conditions and relationships inside the penitentiary.

<http://www.focolare.org/news/2008/05/22/esperienza-quotidiana-lavorando-in-carcere/>

WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?



OBJECTIVES:

- Rediscover that we all have our limits, are vulnerable and at risk of doing wrong.
- Dialogue on the fragility of human nature and the possibility of beginning again with the help of others.

MATERIALS:

Red and yellow chalk to mark on the floor two circles of two colors; cards with phrases for the group leader

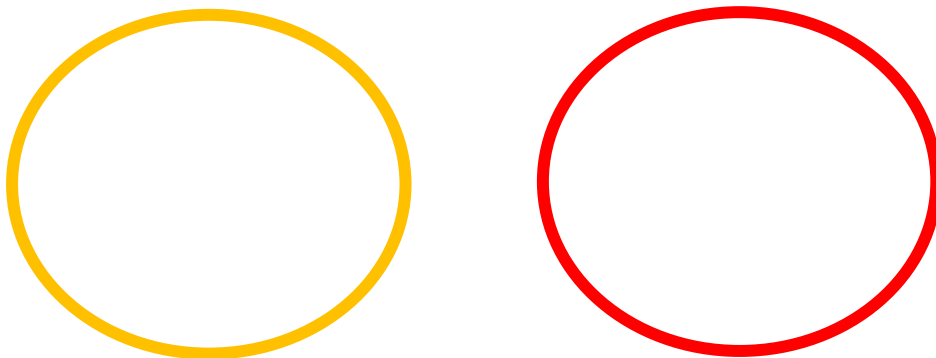
DURATION:

About 30 minutes including dialogue at the end

STEP BY STEP

Create a climate of trust and spontaneity.

Mark on the floor two circles with a diameter of 7 or 8 feet or more, one Red and the other YELLOW. The coordinator will have the cards to be read aloud. Each card has a question. The players are spread out in order to be outside the two circles. When they hear the question, they jump into one of the two circles: red if the answer is YES and yellow if the answer is NO.



Examples of questions on the cards:

- Which one of you leaves your room in a mess almost every day?
- Which one of you wants a more modern cell phone than your companion?
- Which of you ever teased a companion and that person got very angry about it?
- Which one of you fights with your brothers or sisters at least once a week?
- Which of you ever yelled at or gotten angry with your parents and slammed the door?
- Which of you has spoken badly about a classmate?
- Which of you has copied someone else's work at least once or more during an exam at school?
- Which of you has at times not kept the rules?
- Which one of you were punished by your parents or teachers for something you did wrong?
- Etc.

After the game you can make room for a guided reflection. Here are some possible questions:

- Who has never been in the RED circle? (Prediction: none of the players)
- Almost everyone at some time hurts other people in small or big ways, or did something wrong to others. What do you think of this statement?

- What do you need most to be able to begin again when you made a mistake toward others?
- Sometimes people commit serious crimes. In your opinion what leads a person or a teen to commit crimes in violation of the laws?
- What purpose should imprisonment have for those guilty of serious misconduct and what opportunities should they have?



COMING UP WITH A STORY

OBJECTIVES:

Through imagination and creation of a photo-story facilitate the practice of empathy and understanding in the situation that a young detainee is going through. Live the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do to you" and look for an opportunity to visit people who are suffering in prison.

DURATION:

About 1½ hours

MATERIALS AND SPACE:

A PC to use to create a Power Point; a cell phone or digital camera to take photos; papers and pens; some post-its and the photo of someone in prison (see photo [carcerato allegatoR4](#)).

DESCRIPTION:

Show the group a photo of a young man in prison.

Distribute to every participant two or three post-its. Everyone writes on each card the feelings that the photo arouses in them and places it next to or around the photo.

Then they read and comment on what is written on the post-its, encouraging everyone to join in the discussion.

Then the group tries to come up with a possible story of what led this person to jail or what awaits him in the near future. The following data sheet offers some steps that the youngsters take to draw a picture story on their own. The leader's role is only to support and assist in case the youngsters require it.



COMING UP WITH A STORY

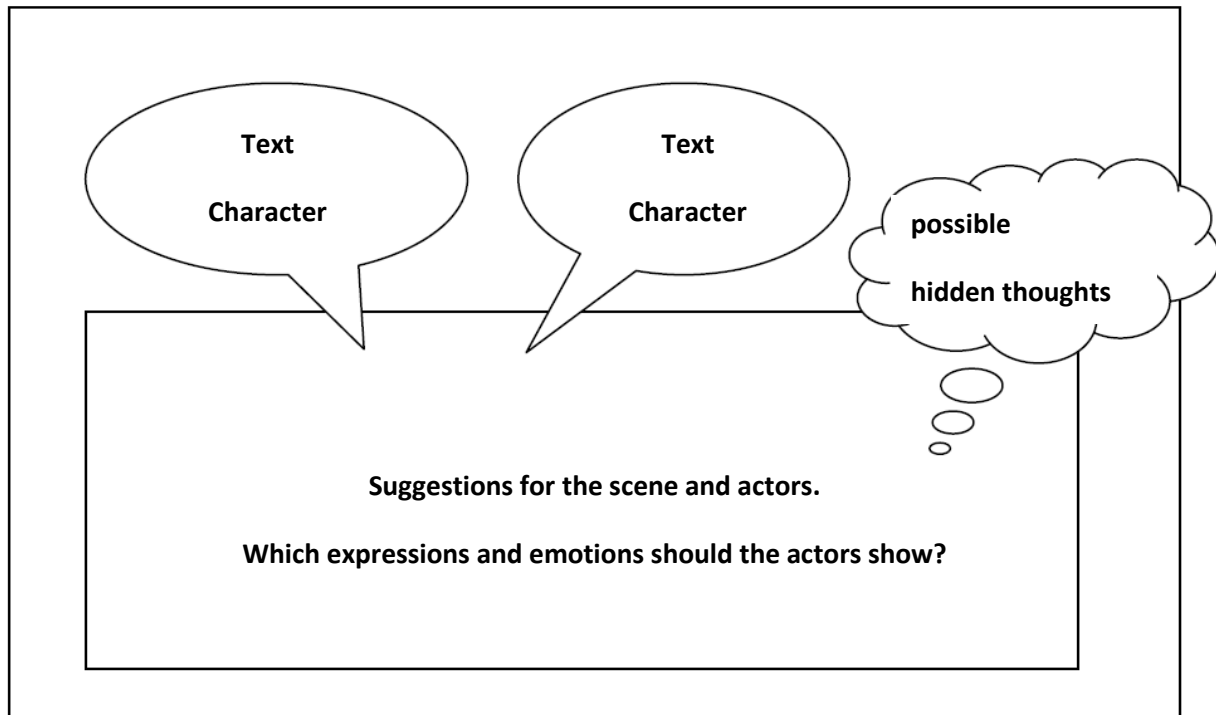
Starting from a picture try to reconstruct the story of what this young man has lived, is living and will live. You are the screenwriters, directors and actors. Here's how:

1. Look at the picture and find a suitable title. This can become the title of your picture story. Use the picture with these three possibilities:
 - As the **first image** at the beginning of your story
 - As a **picture in the middle** of the story you will write
 - As the **final image**
2. Now think about how to develop the story and make a sketch on the storyboard. What is the central theme in your story? What scenes do you want to set up? In what order? What message do you want to convey to those who read the story? All together you can take 8-10 photos, but no more than ten. This is important: think about how many people are involved in the scene, considering the number of available players, and who they are (names).

3. Check that the selected scenes have a logical order and give a sense of history. All those who read your photo-story must be able to understand the main thread and the message you wish to convey!

COMING UP WITH A STORY

4. You can then let the characters speak and write the text for each scene in the text balloons. What are the characters saying? What are they thinking? What emotions do they have? What are their facial expressions and body language?



5. Now you can stage the scene and as actors, present it. "Freeze" some passages: no one should move so as to give the photographer time to take some photos.
6. Choose the best still shots to be included in the Power Point. Add the text balloons with the words and thoughts of the characters. Add the title and any additional graphic and sound effects.
7. Everyone reviews the final product together. Are you satisfied? Now you can present your photo-story to others and think about how to circulate it.
8. Also find a concrete project that would relieve the suffering of those in prison in order to practice this work of mercy, "I was in prison and you visited me." By showing or publicizing your story you can also get others to join with you in this project!

A LITTLE MAN WITH A BIG PROBLEM



OBJECTIVE:

To learn and internalize the Gospel passage of Luke 19,1-10. To relive the feelings and mood of Zacchaeus in this biblical account and transfer it to our daily life experience. To ask ourselves about the possibilities for someone in jail who wants to start a new life.

DURATION:

About 30 Minutes

MATERIALS:

Markers or tempera paints; paper; post-it notes; a large poster board

STEP BY STEP:

By means of a story you can present the figure of Zacchaeus (without disclosing the name), as he was before his encounter with Jesus: his work, his misdeeds and his attitude towards those he exploited. Here is a possible story (you may want to record it and let the whole group listen to it):

"Business is good, so I can reinvest in land and houses. And then there is the property I can take back from those who have not paid their debts (I can foreclose on them) but demand the interest they owe on it. My job is very unpopular – I can be called a "usurer" which means a person who lends at a very high interest rate. All of us who do these things are considered villains. People spit on the ground when they see me. But who cares! They're no better than me! Another's misfortune is my good fortune. Life may be dark for those who suffocate under their debts, but it's light for me and my bank account. When I get home, I toss the money aside... and it falls with hardly any noise, like the tears of the people from whom I have taken it. True: I am dishonest. So? Is my fellow man so good and honorable? I am not interested in a society in which you "have to be good."

Isn't it fair to reason like that? I have my money – in fact, I can bury myself in gold! I have a very beautiful house, even though I don't get many visitors. I'm a loner, and even if I were a sociable type of person, I would have to be content with my life as it is because no one wants to socialize with a loan shark. I worked (stole?) hard to get this house, a place that where I have everything I want, but like everyone else, I live very much outside the house and can't even enjoy it. I leave early in the morning when my kids are still asleep.

And yet I feel like something is missing! I don't feel happy. I miss human affection. In fact, I'm afraid of people and their judgements about me! But, above all, a voice inside my heart tells me: 'Don't search for meaning, it serves no purpose, there is nothing more to expect from life.' My mind is full of contradictory thoughts. Why must I be a giant in power, and a dwarf in my fears?"

After the presentation the teens can comment on this person's life and way of thinking:

- What do you think of this person?
- What should he do to become happy?
- Do you see a chance for him to change his life?

You can then reveal that the person lived about 2000 years ago in the time of Jesus. His name was Zacchaeus and one day something happened that changed his life. You can invite the youth to read the story. **Read the passage from the Gospel of Luke 19:1-10.**

After reading it (which can also be done individually) ask the teens to choose a word or phrase of the Bible story that particularly struck them or that they liked. Everyone can then write the phrase/word on a sheet with a special graphic. You can also decorate it with drawings or other means.

In small groups of 3 or 4 each one can show his decorated sheet to the group to say why he chose that word/phrase.

In the full session, you can ask the group for feedback on the activity:

- Is there anything that you understood or tried and want to share with the whole group?
- In what situations can people today have the same experience as Zacchaeus?
- What can Jesus teach us with this passage about the attitude we should have towards people in prison who have made mistakes and sinned?

After reading:

You can take a poster and make two columns: **MISTAKE - BEGIN AGAIN.**

Have them write on paper (or post-its) examples to put under the MISTAKE column for wrong choices that we or others have made in the family, at school or in the city. For every mistake, the group can reflect on what conditions would help to BEGIN AGAIN and repair the hardships and the evil caused by this mistake.