



WORKS OF MERCY – Guidelines for Group Leaders

I'll take care of you! "I was sick and you came to visit me"

PREPARE FOR THE MEETING

Sickness, disability, old age in our society

- Jesus' words point us toward those who are **confronted with the experience of pain**. They are perceived or seen as weak and unable to carry out their day in a normal way. They are sick, but also the elderly or the disabled suffer in a similar way.
- Our world sometimes **forgets the special value of time spent at the bedside of the sick**, because people are on the go, always in a hurry to get things done, to be productive, forgetting the dimension of freely giving of ourselves to care for others and take on their burdens.
- In many cases there is great suffering on the part of those who consider themselves weak or disabled. On the contrary, **every person needs recognition and support** for living their life as fully as possible. Everyone has abilities, life experiences and skills to be shared. So it is necessary not just to help those in need, but to **create a relationship of sharing and reciprocity**.

What gestures and attitudes should be promoted in teens?

- Staying close to those who suffer is an opportunity: **it increases our awareness of the value of every human being, in every moment of life**. Everyone has inner abilities and skills and is a gift for the entire community. It is precisely the sick, the weak and the disabled who can often give us important life lessons. This means **promoting the culture of encounter**, discovering that we are gifts to one another and initiating an experience of "giving and receiving" among one another.
- **Experiencing pain in the context of community** helps the person who is suffering to overcome times of discouragement and sadness, and increases the family spirit in the community. It is an important experience that can help teens deal positively with suffering and pain.
- To be able **to stand at the side of those who suffer** we must postpone our own needs and desires and **enter into complete harmony with the other person**. This process requires a certain maturity, which adolescents are still developing. Life events which are usually considered negative, like suffering and illness – whether our own or participating in the suffering of others - can become useful opportunities for helping teens to mature.

Some useful texts for exploring the topic:

- *Chiara Lubich* da: Like a rainbow - Nature and physical life, Rome 2000, pp. 74 - 77 ([pages 3-4](#))

BEFORE THE MEETING

Whom can we involve from the community? How?



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POSSIBLE STEPS TO REACH TOGETHER (SPECIFIC GOALS)

- Being able to recognize the hardships and understand the suffering of people who are sick or disabled
- Recognizing the gift and the uniqueness of each person
- Promoting a reciprocal relationship with those who are suffering or have a physical or mental impediment

MATERIAL SUITABLE FOR TEENS:

- PPT **A heart in action – corporal works**, (pages 5 -14)
- PPT **Hearts in Action Live**: Experiences of teens on "I was sick and you visited me" (episode 5 of the heart in action live) (pages 15 – 25, powerpoint with animations)
- Experience of Cecilia - Italy (page 26)
- *Chiara Lubich*, **Her relationship with Virgo in her illness**, a response at the Gen3 Congress, Castelgandolfo, January 6, 1999 (page 27)
- The parable of the Good Samaritan - Luke 10, 25-37

Proposed activities to help develop the meeting:

- **The Simple Interview / 21 March 2015** The eighteen year-old director of the video tells of the everyday life, gifts and the limitations of his brother, a special boy suffering from Down syndrome. With English subtitles (5:31) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0v8twxPsszY>
- **Putting yourself in the shoes of the others** is an activity in which we try to learn about the disability or the difficulties of people who are sick or elderly through simulation and getting involved in experiences (pages 28-29)
- **Cuerdas**, Spanish short film about the bond of friendship that began in an orphanage between two children, one of them disabled. Original language: Spanish (6:40) with English subtitles http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2jf90q_strns_webcam

EVALUATION

- Was team spirit and mutual exchange strengthened in this meeting? Did it increase the climate of trust and mutual love? Did we experience the presence of Jesus among us?
- Are we more aware that the attention and care of the sick and suffering is an important task? Are we aware that Jesus considers done to him any help we give to others?
- Did we put these words into practice in daily life and possibly with a specific action?
- Did we involve the community?

Look for the material on the [site for group leaders](#).

ILLNESS – from the writings of Chiara Lubich

TRAINING FOR THE GREAT TRIAL

“If the integrity of the body is compromised we have to remember that there is a life which is not conditioned by the state of our health, but by divine love which burns in our hearts and it is this divine life which gives value to our spiritual life even if we’re ill.

If we look at illness only from a human viewpoint, we would certainly consider sickness to be a great misfortune.

But if we look at it from a Christian perspective, we recognize that illnesses are trials that provide training for the great trial we will all undergo when we have to face our passage to the next life.

Just recently the Holy Father said that our illnesses are like spiritual exercises which God himself is preaching to us. ...

Through faith, also, we know that we participate in Christ’s sufferings through our illnesses. We become, therefore, another Christ crucified able to offer our suffering for what has most value – the eternal salvation of humanity.”¹

WHAT’S IMPORTANT IN GOD’S EYES

“As I am writing these lines, I can’t help calling to mind our men and women focolarini, or others in the Movement, who are bed-ridden or who are coping with a seemingly never-ending period of convalescence. I’m happy to say to them that whatever I can do, they too can do. This is because – and how often we’ve said this and forgotten it! - it’s not writing or speaking or getting things done, even in the apostolate, which has value, but rather the love we put into everything we do.

And this is possible for everyone. In a sense, what we actually do is not what’s important for God, but the love we put into it.”²

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS THOSE WHO ARE SICK

“This is the attitude we should adopt towards those who are sick. While we perhaps are at work, they, as living hosts, unite their suffering to the suffering of Christ, and continually offer their mass.

Therefore all of us in the Movement should appreciate the great value of illness and show very great respect for our brothers and sisters who are ill. ... From this point of

¹ C. Lubich, *Ogni vita chiede amore*, in *Una famiglia per rinnovare la società*, Roma 1993

² C. Lubich, *Diary*, 27 April 1971.

view, especially through some of its members, the Movement is committed to carrying out all the works of mercy that are considered necessary for Jesus who is suffering in our neighbors (for instance, taking care of the sick). In this way the Christian community will become visible also through this witness of mutual love which will make society repeat today what the pagans used to say about the first Christians: 'See how they love one another and are ready to die for each other'."

We have to look after those who are sick with the greatest care, seeking every means to make them well again."³

THE SPECIALLY CHOSEN ONES

"In our work and also in the triumphs brought about by this vigorous and flourishing Movement, at times we are tempted to see people who are suffering as if they were on the margins of the Movement. They become people we have to look after, to visit, and if possible to help them get better so that they may quickly resume their activities as if this were the most important thing for the Movement, our prime duty.

Instead the chosen ones are those among us who are suffering, who are bed-ridden, who are dying. They are at the centre of the hierarchy of love of the Movement. They are the ones who do most, who achieve the most (...)." ⁴

THE TRUE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT

"St Vincent de Paul says, 'Oh Savior, who filled the apostle (Paul) with your spirit and tenderness, grant that we too may repeat like him, 'Is there anyone who is sick that I am not sick with him?' To be Christians and to see others suffering without suffering with them, without being sick with them, means being without compassion; it means being Christian only in name.'" ⁵

³C. Lubich, *Talk for the Mariapolis*, 1964.

⁴C. Lubich, *Diary, Holy Thursday*, 14 April 1968.

⁵C. Lubich, *Diary*, 10 August 1971.



A HEART IN ACTION
Corporal
Works of Mercy



For...

**ALL
THOSE
WHO...**

...ARE SICK!



VISIT THE SICK





OUR HELP IS NEEDED



VISIT THE SICK



“ During World War II, when we would run to the air raid shelters with my first companions, we would read the Gospel. It said: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 19,19). And we would ask ourselves:
“Our neighbor ... Where is our neighbor?”. He/she was the person next to us.



Continue...



OUR HELP IS NEEDED



VISIT THE SICK

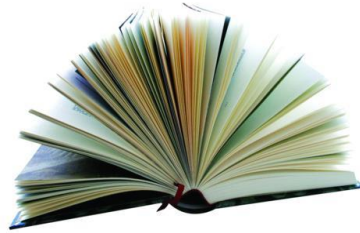
- ■ ■ Our neighbor was that elderly person who was barely able to drag herself each time to the air raid shelter. We needed to love her like ourselves which meant helping her each time and supporting her.

Our neighbor was there in that sick person who was closed in their house, unable to even get to the shelter and needing care. We needed to be close to him and get him medicine to help him. ”





WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?



Browse thru...

**GET TO
KNOW**

VISIT THE SICK



Doctors Without Borders(DWB) is the largest humanitarian medical organization in the world. It was created by doctors and journalists in France in 1971. It supplies medical assistance in 60 countries where survival is threatened by violence or catastrophes especially due to wars, epidemics, malnutrition or lack of sanitation or natural disasters. DWB work so that even in poor countries, patients can have high quality healthcare. In 1999 DWB received the Nobel Peace Prize. Today nearly 28 thousand doctors and nurses, and their colleagues, coming from all over the world, work together with local healthcare workers. Also experts in water and sewage systems, and all types of highly qualified professionals, work in international teams to supply healthcare in many areas of the world.
(www.medicisenzafrontiere.it)

In chapter 10, verses 25-37 in Luke's Gospel there's the parable of the Good Samaritan. It all begins from a question asked to Jesus: "who is my neighbor?"

What do you think is the meaning of Jesus' words?



AN HOUR OF HAPPINESS

LIVE

*Experiences from
around the world*

VISIT THE SICK



“How can we help our friends experience that the key to happiness is found in giving, in giving oneself to others?”

It is from this idea that we took off to launch our new action. It's title is:

‘An hour of happiness’.

It's a very simple idea: to make another person happy for at least one hour a month. We started with those who seemed to need loving the most and, **we witnessed the doors open wide wherever we offered our help!**



Continue...



An hour of happiness (cont.)



LIVE

Teens for Unity
Heidelberg

VISIT THE SICK

- ■ ■ It's like this; there we were in a park taking a few wheelchair-bound elderly people on an outing. In a hospital, where we played games with sick children or played sports with people with disabilities. They were all very happy, but as this action promises: we were even happier!

And what about the friends we invited to participate?

At first they were just curious, now that they have tried giving happiness, they agree with us: happiness given, once done, you experience it!"



INPUT

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

VISIT THE SICK



Let's give an hour of
happiness
to a relative, a
friend or
acquaintance
who due to illness
must stay in bed or
in the hospital.





**I VISITED
SOMEONE
WHO WAS
SICK...**

redazione.gen3@focolare.org

Hearts

in

Action

live





CHICAGO

**With the objective of visiting
the sick, we went to visit a
group of retired sisters**

I was sick...



**and sing
Christmas
carols in a rest
home for
people
suffering from
Alzheimer's.**

I was sick...

For each visit we prepared a rather lively show, to bring fun and joy to everyone.

I was sick...





We shared our talents! One played the cello, one played the violin one wrote a little drama which we then presented.

I was sick...



I was sick...

Each visit went far beyond simple entertainment. We got to know every resident in the two buildings.



I was sick...

**They told us lots of stories
about their life and
families.**



I was sick...

Before we went, we
thought this part would
be the most difficult
because of the age
difference,



instead that
moment was the
one we liked the
most!

I was sick...



**we have seen that the
works of mercy bring
double joy, joy on both
sides.**

*...and you came to
visit me*





"I was sick and you came to visit me"

Experience of Cecilia, Italy

I had heard that the hospital of my city had received a 13 year old girl because of an accident in which her parents had lost their lives. She had suffered many fractures and was immobilized in bed. I went to visit, and I was very happy to meet her, to talk with her and bring her some happiness in this difficult time. I made this discovery: giving (in this case, love) and receiving (in this case her happiness) was a very beautiful experience and I promised to visit her at least once a week along with the other gen 3. Yesterday, I went to see her again with another gen 3 and it was very beautiful. This experience now involves all the gen 3 of the my city who are going in groups to visit Cynthia and trying to love her concretely in every way.



Chiara Lubich, "Her relationship with the sick people"

Gen 3 Congress, Castelgandolfo, 6 January 1999

We learned that Virgo¹, especially during these last months, had a very special unity with you which brought her to heaven. Could you tell us something of this unity that she had with you when she was alive, when she was ill and now that she is in the Heavenly Mariapolis?

I didn't really see Virgo very often, just a few times, perhaps three or four times a year, not more than that. When she came to the meeting of the Coordinating Council, where she represented the Gen 3 girls, or when she came to our special annual meeting in order to tell me all about the reality of the Gen 3 girls. But we were very close because she loved Jesus forsaken. I loved him too, I tried to love Jesus forsaken, and she loved Jesus forsaken. When we love Jesus forsaken, he fills us with the Holy Spirit. When he was on the cross, his side was pierced and water and blood flowed out, and the Holy Spirit also flowed out. Whoever loves Jesus forsaken receives the Holy Spirit. So there was the Holy Spirit in me, we hope, and there was the Holy Spirit in her. But there is only one Holy Spirit, so we were very united even though we didn't see one another. So this was my unity with Virgo when she was still on earth.

When she was sick we helped one another very much to live her situation as best as we could. Of course, we understood the enormous gravity of her illness... we knew that it would bring her to heaven. I tried to say a few words to her, not many, so that she would make them like the motto of her life. You know that my last words to her were: "Look, Virgo, everything is love, everything is love, everything is love."

Because there are two ways of seeing things in this world: the human way, for example: I'm sick, my mother dies, I fail in school, my companions don't want me... these things are all true, but they are a purely human way of seeing things. Since God is the one who leads history, who is the master of history, who guides the history of all the universe, but also of each one of us, he allows us to suffer a little, but he does it out of love. He has his reasons which I will explain to you later. Therefore, God's love is beneath every event of our life. So there is the human vision – an illness, failing at school, being corrected by my mother, and so on; and then there is the supernatural vision. But everything is love, everything is love. If they are beautiful things, God wants them and he sends them to you; if they are sad things, including our mistakes, God allows them to happen, but for a greater good, for a greater good. Everything is love.

And so Virgo was so filled with this truth, with this greater truth, because it's divine and what is divine is much stronger than what is purely human, that she always said: "Everything is love, everything is love." So her illness was love, feeling the pain she must have felt was love, going through the things you have to go through when you're ill, like medical tests or something else – that too was love. She saw everything as love, and undoubtedly she left this world and arrived in heaven saying: "Jesus, thank you for your love." This is the relationship we had when she was sick.

What is our relationship now that she is in heaven? Well, we love one another, we love one another, as when she was here on earth. I didn't see her very often, as I said before, but we were very united.

Now, when we go to heaven, lots of things disappear, but not charity; love remains, it remains. We won't need faith anymore because we will see God. We won't need hope anymore because we have what we always hoped for. What remains? Love remains. So also in our focolare we always try to help Virgo by celebrating Masses, we always pray for Virgo, we pray for her always! And then we pray to her. Every time we pray together – the *consenserint* – "Give me the Holy Spirit because I have to give a talk to the Gen 3 – we ask this through the intercession of Virgo." We ask for help, help. We give and we receive. So we love one another. We have the same relationship we had when she was on earth. I would say that it's a little stronger because she is always there with me, and with you too, wherever you are. So little has changed in my relationship with Virgo. Now we won't see each other for a few years, for a few months, but then we'll see one another again and everything will fall into place.

¹ Virgo Folonari (1934 - 1998). She worked with great passion for thirty years from 1966, together with Chiara Lubich, in laying the foundation of the new generations and in particular of the Gen 3 Movement entrusted to her.



PUTTING OURSELVES IN THE OTHER PERSON'S SHOES

Objectives:

- To reflect on people's equality and yet their diverse abilities
- Try to "get acquainted with" the disability or difficulty of sick or elderly people through role-playing and getting involved in some real life experiences.

Duration:

60 minutes

Procedure:

All participants are blindfolded and guided by someone whom they cannot see, but whose voice they must follow. This person, the guiding voice, will have to constantly move during the role-play, giving instructions on how and where the participants have to move.

In this way, we can learn to understand to people with disabilities and experience a little of how they must feel in a world that for them can be full of obstacles.

The role-play can be followed by discussion with the help of the following questions:

- *What did you feel while you were being led by the voice?*
- *Did you trust the guide? If so, why? If not, why?*
- *How were you able to follow the guide?*
- *What do we feel now when we see a person with a disability, for example, someone who is blind?*
- *What are we going to do? What do some teens or people do? Where or from whom did they pick up this attitude?*

Here are some variations:

- Show a movie without sound and without any explanation of the story.
- Write down something that is being dictated to you, using only your non-dominant hand.
- Take a long time (1 hour) without talking and communicating only in writing or by gestures.
- Climb the stairs carrying a weight (a crate of full bottles)

Then you can reflect on the fact that people with disabilities can contribute a wide range of knowledge, skills and talents to everyone else.

Start a debate with the help of the following reflections and questions:

- *In your school, community or family, are there people with disabilities or who have some*

physical limitations? Are they accepted?

- *Are they allowed to show what they can do best?*
- *What can we do to make life in the community more enjoyable for everyone?*

Ideas for reflection:

In many cases, people feel sorry for those whom they consider to be “different.” But on the contrary, people with disabilities need recognition and support to live their life with the greatest possible fulfillment. Isn’t that what we all need? There are many cases of people with disabilities who have distinguished themselves in various activities and who have accomplished exceptional works for humanity.

If a visit to elderly or disabled people is organized, ask yourself what they can offer or teach us and vice versa. This will be an opportunity for both sides to discover that we were created to be a gift to each other.