

Parent Partnership Handbook

A Parent Guide for Leading Children in the Ways of Love

Works of Mercy and Social Justice

DR. PATRICIA M. MCCORMACK, IHM

As children, we learn how to transfer the abstract concept of love into practical and observable actions through the teaching and example of our parents. It is a parent's major responsibility.

This newsletter, one of a six-part series, presents the **WORKS OF MERCY** and the **PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING** as formulas for love.

Works of Mercy

Generations of Catholics can recite from memory the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy. These are basic charitable actions that aid another person in **physical** ways, such as *feeding the hungry* and *visiting the sick*, or in **spiritual** ways, such as *advising the doubtful*. When these works are demonstrated in behaviors, love becomes visible.

The **Corporal Works of Mercy** implore us to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, help those imprisoned, shelter the homeless, care for the sick, and bury the dead. The **Spiritual Works of Mercy** encourage us to counsel the sinner, share knowledge of God with others, advise the doubtful, comfort the sorrowful, bear wrongs patiently, forgive all injuries, and pray for the living and for the dead. Teach both the literal and the creative sense of each Work of Mercy.

Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

Justice, care for the poor, and reverence for human dignity are core elements of the Gospel of Jesus. Personal commitment to social justice is, therefore, an essential part of the Catholic faith. Love requires that verbal expressions transfer into personal action.

In 1995 the Bishops of the United States summarized Catholic Social Teaching into seven principles. Concrete practices include but are not limited to the following suggestions:

Life and Dignity of the Human Person: Demonstrate that people are precious and more important than things. Safeguard life at every stage. Be your personal best. Avoid every form of abuse, cheating, fighting, etc.

Call to Family, Community, and Participation: Participate in school, parish, and civic activities. Build community. Seek the common good. Create a safe

environment for all. Practice responsibility and accountability. Avoid name-calling, bullying, etc.

Rights and Responsibilities of the Human Person: Exercise your rights; fulfill your duties and responsibilities. Make restitution after violating rights/duties/responsibilities. Avoid behaviors that deny or interfere with another's rights.

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable: Protect the poor and vulnerable—those who struggle economically, academically, emotionally, or socially. Avoid cliques, elitism, or treating another person as inferior to you.

Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers: Support the right of people to receive fair wages, to organize unions, to own property and private business. Avoid an attitude of entitlement.

Solidarity of the Human Family: Understand that "neighbor" is everyone, everywhere. Respect all people regardless of race, gender, nation, sexual orientation, politics, or religion. Avoid expressing slurs or jokes at the expense of a person. Learn to pronounce personal names and typical greetings in the language of other cultures.

Care for God's Creation: Protect the planet. Exercise stewardship for the environment as well as respect and responsibility for buildings, grounds, equipment, etc. Avoid destruction or misuse of persons, places, or things.

Parent Practices that Mentor Social Justice

- Speak thoughtful remarks that are repeated often enough that they shape attitudes and actions, like "What did you do today that looked like love?"
- Use printed slogans (like "Do the loving thing") as house decorations on a wall, above a staircase, near a light switch, or on a mirror.
- Post a Work of Mercy or principle of Catholic Social Teaching. Make it the focus of conversation once a week at dinner.
- Perform a family social justice service project.
- Think of ways to teach sharing, empathy, forgiveness, compassion, repentance, etc. ▲



Dr. Pat McCormack is an international consultant and public speaker on issues of whole-person formation. Contact her at the IHM Office of Formative Support for Parents and Teachers, DrPatMcCormack@aol.com.