

Unit 6: The Church Is Servant

Getting Started

Assign the students to read Unit 6, “The Church Is Servant” (pages 214–255). Then ask them to read the following article.

The Story

The Confessions of a Catholic Worker by Marion Maendel

It’s another suffocating Houston night. Air, warm and thick as smoke, cloaks the city and settles in folds between the buildings on Rose Street. I sit in my second-story room in Casa Juan Diego House of Hospitality, fan stirring the heat, and read my journal of two years ago.

Read the rest of the article at <http://www.godspy.com/issues/The-Harsh-and-Dreadful-Love-of-the-Poor.cfm>

Discussion

- Lead the students in a discussion of the following questions:
 1. What kind of attitude did the author of this article have when she began serving poor people at the Catholic Worker? (*She was idealistic, and felt superior to the people she served: “I had the classic ‘messiah complex,’ and felt ready to save the world.”*)
 2. What caused the author’s idealism to crumble? (*She discovered the humanity of the people she was serving; they refused to accept her “condescending donation of time and surplus kindness,” and the people she served could sometimes be “cruel and thankless and undeserving.”*)
 3. What did the author discover about herself after she lost her idealism? (*“I became weaker, not more elite. I was shocked to discover that I, too, was desperately needy, empty, poor.”*)
 4. What did the author learn to rely on to continue her work after she lost her idealism? (*She learned to rely on God as the source of her compassion: Christ “offers me the redemptive Love of God forever young, which gives of itself, and gives, and gives, and gives and gives . . . And in that ‘useless’ Poverty of Inefficient Love, and only in it, I can go on.”*)
 5. Why is the “condemned, spat-upon” Christ important to the author? (*She sees the suffering of Christ in the suffering of the people she serves, and she has learned that she must imitate Christ’s self-emptying in order to serve people who suffer.*) Why do you think she finds hope by associated herself and the people she serves with the suffering of Christ? (*By emptying himself for the sake of love, Christ conquered suffering, sin, and death; by entering into the mystery of Christ’s suffering, she and the others at the Catholic Worker can hope to share in his victory.*)
 6. What do you think is the most important thing this article has to teach about being a servant?
 7. After reading this article, what role do you think service to others should have in your life? Does the author’s way of serving others appeal to you, or do you think you would like to serve others in another way?

Being Church

Living the “poverty of inefficient love”

- Begin by asking the students what they think the author of the article meant when she talked about the “Poverty of Inefficient Love.”
- After the students have expressed their opinions, provide them with an example of “inefficient love” from the Gospel. Read to the students John 12:1–9, in which Mary anoints Jesus’ feet with costly perfume. Note that the gospels are full of examples of Jesus’ lavish generosity—for example, the multiplication of the loaves and fishes (Matthew 14:13–21 and parallels); abundant catches of fish (Luke 5:1–11 and John 21:1–8); the conversion of water into wine (John 2:1–11). In each of these miracles, Jesus gives people much more than what they strictly need. His actions reveal God’s desire for each of his children to receive abundant goodness (John 10:10). Like the woman who anointed Jesus’ feet with costly perfume, we are to respond to God’s generosity by generously lavishing love on those who embody the suffering Christ.
- Provide a modern-day example of this Gospel generosity by telling the students the following story about Dorothy Day (see page 253 of the student text for background on Dorothy Day): “One day a woman came into the Catholic Worker and gave Dorothy Day the diamond ring on her finger. Dorothy thanked the

woman for her generosity and put the ring in her pocket. Later, a homeless bag lady stopped by the Catholic Worker house. This woman was one of the more annoying regular visitors to the house. Dorothy took the ring out of her pocket and gave it to the woman. One of the other volunteers questioned Dorothy about what she did. Wouldn't it have been better to sell the ring and pay the woman's rent for a year? Dorothy replied that the woman had her dignity and could do whatever she liked with the ring. She could sell it, or enjoy its beauty on her finger as the woman who donated it had. After all, Dorothy said, God didn't create diamonds only for rich people to enjoy." Point out that like Marion Maendel in "The Confessions of a Catholic Worker," Dorothy was able to see the suffering Christ in the bag lady.

- Divide the students into small groups of about five people each. Provide each group with paper and a writing instrument for recording the group's ideas.
- Say to the students: "How is the suffering Christ present in our community? How can we respond to that suffering in a way that embodies the lavish generosity of God's kingdom?"
- Instruct the students to think about who most embodies the condemned, suffering Christ in their community. Who is marginalized, shunned, lonely, or without the basic resources necessary to live a decent life? Who has suffered from violence? Who is imprisoned? Who is considered "undeserving" of kindness? Being as specific as possible, the students should brainstorm several people or groups of people in the community, recording their ideas for later reference.
- Next, instruct the students to brainstorm ways of responding to the suffering of the people they have listed. Encourage them to think creatively, imitating the examples of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet, Jesus' miracles of generosity, and Dorothy Day's gift of the diamond ring. Instruct the students to write down a detailed description of their response.
- Have each group present its idea to the rest of the students. Discuss their ideas with the following questions: What do you think of this "inefficient" way of serving others? What does it say about the kingdom of God? What kind of feelings did you have as you brainstormed your ideas—for instance, were you resentful and reluctant, or joyful and excited? What effect do you think this type of giving would have on someone who is suffering? What effect do you think it would have on the giver?
- Close by pointing out that while such abundant generosity may not be possible or practical in every instance, such actions proclaim the good news that God gives of himself without limit and without regard to cost. If we are to live in the Kingdom of God, we must practice similar generosity in our own lives whenever possible, especially in response to the suffering of others.
- To extend this activity, encourage the students to carry out their ideas and report their experiences at the next session.

Additional Activities

- Use the Journal questions on pages 219, 221, 232, 239, 245, 246, and 252 of the student text as discussion questions at the beginning of the session.
- Have the students write letters of apology as described in the activity on page 238 of the student text.
- Have the students complete the family budget exercise described on page 230 of the student text.
- Hold a "free yard sale" as described in the activity on page 241 of the student text.
- Lead the students in the prayer service for those in need (page 228 of the Teacher's Wraparound Edition) or the Pope Pious XII prayer service (page 248 of the TWE).
- Have the students complete the justice bible search as described in the Enrichment activity on page 231 of the TWE.
- Have the students create the service organization display described in the "Extending the Lesson" activity on page 233 of the TWE.
- Have the students conduct a debate on the nature of work as described in the "Extending the Lesson" activity on page 239 of the TWE.
- Have students complete the "Survey on Rights and Responsibilities" as described in the "Extending the Lesson" activity on page 245 of the TWE.
- Have the students debate the nature of apologies as described in the Enrichment activity on page 250 of the TWE.
- Have students analyze a policy statement or mission statement in light of Catholic social teaching as described in the Enrichment activity on page 258 of the TWE.
- Have students do the Scripture reflection on war and peace as described in the Enrichment activity on page 263 of the TWE.

Additional Resources

- For Internet links related to this unit, see pages 230 and 249 of the student text.
- Videos related to this unit include *We Are Called: Catholic Social Teaching for Today* (Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, 2001, 22 minutes); *The Children's Crusade* (A&E, Vision Video, 44 minutes), about the Crusade of 1212 in which 20,000 children were killed; *Entertaining Angels*, the story of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement (Oblate Media, 1997, 111 minutes); and *Helping People Help Themselves* (USCCB, 1999, 15 minutes); *Glass House* (Teleketics, 12 minutes), an allegory showing how the middle class contributes to structural injustice; *The Needle's Eye* (Paulist, 27 minutes), the story of medical students committed to poor people in Africa.