

To Know To Believe To Live – KBL2 Discipleship Official Handout

02.13.21 Version

Developed by Msgr. Michael Clay

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MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP The Spiritual Works of Mercy

I. Introduction:

- A. Missionary discipleship moves us outward into the world, local and beyond, to respond to others' needs as the presence of Christ.
- B. The spiritual works of mercy focus on the transcendent needs of our neighbor, needs that reside in the mind, heart, and soul, needs that are not tangible like feeding the hungry.

II. Instruct the Ignorant/Unaware:

A. Two Levels:

1. Foundational: Faith in Jesus Christ:

Belief that Jesus is

- a) the Son of God,
- b) He came to save us from a life without God, closing ourselves off from God's love,
- c) he knows each of us by our name,
- d) and loves us as his brother/sister eternally

2. Our Catholic Faith: Revelation of divine truths in Scripture and Tradition:

- a) Sacred Scripture
- b) Dogmas, doctrines, and traditions.
- c) Catechism has 2865 paragraphs of teaching
- d) Does not require us to be theological experts but open to learning ourselves and curious to know more

III. Counsel the Doubtful:

A. DOUBTFUL: A person who:

- 1. is uncertain, undecided, confused, or skeptical about what to think or believe;
- 2. may be unsettled/hesitant about decision to be made, wavering about what to do next, wary, and/or afraid.

B. COUNSEL: from Latin word "consilium"

- 1. to give advice, help make a plan, develop a strategy, resolve a problem, or help make a decision.
- 2. prefix "con" means "with;" implies that counsel is done by two parties together in a cooperative process, rather than as a one-sided affair in which an expert provides the answer.

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- C. As a spiritual work of mercy, it focuses on
1. spiritual matters,
 2. values, beliefs, meaning, personal relationships, vocational choices, and
 3. the guiding principles for discernment.
- D. Spiritual counsel is less interested in discerning happiness or personal benefits, important as they are.
- E. Spiritual counsel considers these questions: “What is God’s will in this?” “What is right and true?” “What is the ethical or moral thing to do?”
- F. The doubtful person accepts counsel from one who:
1. has a compassionate heart, excellent listening ear;
 2. is respectful, empathetic, honest, humble, gentle, open, and wise;
 3. provides an opportunity for discussion;
 4. gives personal attention and constructive feedback;
 5. and offers new perspectives, alternatives, and encouragement and a pledge of prayer to help the doubter come to his or her own decision.
- IV. Admonish (Warn) the Sinner:
- A. Speaking the truth in love as you have come to understand it.
1. Requires humility, compassion, patience
 2. Recognizes we all sin/fall/struggle
 3. Avoids self-righteousness and judgmentalism (i.e., I’m right/you’re wrong.)
 4. Meets people where they are as a starting point
 5. Points towards a better way
 6. Avoids remaining silent to wrong/injustice
- V. Discussion:
- A. These three spiritual works of mercy (instruct the ignorant/unaware, counsel the doubtful, and admonish (warn) the sinner) involve speaking/interacting with others to bring enlightenment/truth to them. What makes this challenging for you?
- B. What could you do to become better/more successful at speaking/interacting with others to bring them enlightenment/truth?
- VI. Bear Wrongs Patiently:
- A. While most spiritual works of mercy have an outward dimension, this one focuses on developing an interior disposition of patience when wrongs are committed against us. We use Jesus as our model in bearing sin and evil that comes to us from others.

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- B. This is quite countercultural in a world where impatience, anger, and revenge are deeply ingrained
- C. It is also instinctive to return pain for pain; hence developing this trait can be quite difficult.
- D. Some strategies for developing this virtue:
 - 1. Avoid reacting to your pain by taking a few moments to pause and recollect yourself so you may respond in a way that is more reflective of your deeper values.
 - 2. Take your suffering to the Lord in prayer and place your suffering in solidarity with Jesus, who experienced much suffering in his life, especially as he was crucified.
 - 3. Pray for the person who has hurt you.
 - 4. Speak to someone about your situation who can help you process what has happened.

VII. Forgive Offenses Willingly:

- A. Forgiveness is one of the most difficult but also one of the most liberating human experiences.
- B. Forgiveness unbinds:
 - 1. The one who has offended
 - 2. The one who has been offended
- C. What makes it possible to forgive is awareness of and gratitude for the forgiveness we have received from others and, most importantly, from the Lord.
- D. Reconciliation is a separate grace from forgiveness. Sometimes forgiveness does not bring about reconciliation. The invitation from the Lord is to be willing to at least forgive.
- E. Acts that lead to forgiveness:
 - 1. Pray for the person who has offended
 - 2. Remember that you also sin
 - 3. Remember that the Lord has forgiven you
 - 4. Remember how you felt when someone forgave you
 - 5. Seek out the person if the person does not seek out you

VIII. Comfort the Suffering:

- A. Suffering alone is one of the most difficult burdens to bear in life. While we can't alleviate the suffering, our comfort lets the suffering know they are not alone.
- B. Some ways to comfort:
 - 1. Call/visit the suffering person
 - 2. Contact the suffering person more than once, e.g., a week or month after your initial contact
 - 3. Send a card/letter of condolence to the suffering person
 - 4. Listen to the suffering person and avoid pious platitudes (e.g., she's in a better place, etc.)

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IX. Pray for the Living and the Dead:

- A. Praying for one another is an act of love that also strengthens our bonds with those we pray for.
- B. The living might include: those we know who are struggling, our family, our friends, our nation/world, the poor, those experiencing injustice, those whom we find difficult to love.
- C. The dead might include: our relatives and friends, those with no one to pray for them, the souls in purgatory.
- D. How to Pray for the Living & the Dead:
 - 1. Private, personal prayer
 - 2. In small groups
 - 3. During Prayers of the Faithful at Mass
 - 4. Offering a Mass Intention for either the living (e.g., illness) or the dead

X. Discussion:

- A. Which of these four spiritual works of mercy (bear wrongs patiently, forgive others, comfort the sorrowful, and pray for the living/dead) is most challenging for you? What makes it challenging?
- B. What could you do to become better/more successful at embracing one of these spiritual works of mercy?

XI. Prayer:

God of mercy: it is your will that we love and work and pray for those who are in need of bread and of shelter, of healing and of wholeness. Help us practice the spiritual works of mercy: sharing our knowledge of the faith with others, giving counsel to those in need of it, offering correction to those who have erred, being patient with those who wrong us and forgiving them, comforting the sorrowful, and praying for both the living and the dead. Give us the strength to respond to the spiritual needs of our sisters and brothers. Through Christ our Lord.

XII. Credits:

Pablo Cuadra. *The Seven Spiritual Works of Mercy*. schottcommunities.org

Michael Van Sloun. *Counsel the Doubtful*. August 8, 2016. <https://thecatholicspirit.com/special-sections/year-of-mercy/counsel-the-doubtful/>