

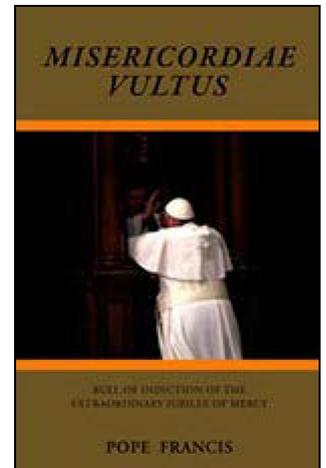
## Resources for Religious Education

Melanie Dooner

***Misericordiae Vultus*** by Pope Francis. (2015). Publisher: St Pauls Publications.  
ISBN: 9781921963896

*Misericordiae Vultus* is an encyclical worth adding to the reading list of any catechist or religious education teacher. A close reading of this particular encyclical and the accompanying documents in the Special Edition is inspiring and potentially quite moving.

The Church's first truth is the love of Christ. The Church makes herself a servant of this love and mediates it to all people: a love that forgives and expresses itself in the gift of one's self. Consequently, wherever the Church is present, the mercy of the Father must be evident. In our parishes, communities, associations and movements, in a word, wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy. (Article 12, p. 21)



Pope Francis' words hit at the very core of who we are and what we do as catechists and religious education teachers in Catholic schools and parishes. We are the Church present to the young people we work with. We are, according to *Misericordiae Vultus*, called to bring the mercy of God to the young people in our schools, the teachers on our staff, catechists in our teams and the families in our communities.

Split into six sections, *Misericordiae Vultus* contains:

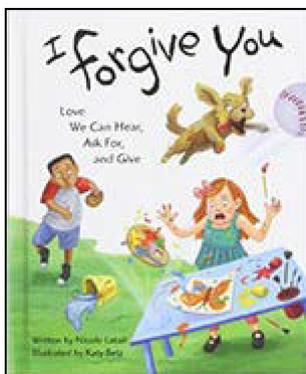
- ▶ The Announcement of the Jubilee of Mercy
- ▶ The Bull of Indiction – *Misericordiae Vultus*
- ▶ The letter from Pope Francis outlining the indulgence granted during the Jubilee of Mercy
- ▶ The Prayer of Pope Francis for the Jubilee Year of Mercy
- ▶ The Hymn for the Holy Year of Mercy
- ▶ An explanation of the Jubilee of Mercy logo and motto

### Some suggestions for using the documents

- ▶ Use parts of *The Announcement of the Jubilee of Mercy* in lectio divina with staff. Pope Francis explains his personal connection to the theme of mercy and explores the foundation Gospel story of *a sinful woman forgiven* in Luke 7:36-50.
- ▶ Use a range of articles with catechists, teaching staff, senior students or in school newsletters throughout the year, as a source of reflection and prayer. In particular:
  - ▶ Articles 1, 8 & 9 reflect on Jesus as revealing God's mercy through his life, actions and the parables he told.
  - ▶ Articles 10 & 12 challenge all aspects of the Church to be merciful to everyone they encounter. As both Catechist classes and Catholic schools are expressions of the Church in the world,

the words in this article challenge us to be agents of mercy for the students we teach and people we meet.

- ▶ Article 11 explores the counter-cultural nature of mercy in today's world. As such, the encyclical gives a starting point for discussing issues requiring mercy, such as the plight of refugees.
  - ▶ Article 14 deals with those going on pilgrimage this year and how they can encounter this Jubilee of Mercy in a profound way – important for all students attending *World Youth Day 2016* in Krakow, Poland.
  - ▶ Article 15 relates to all catechists, teachers and students as it puts outreach and social justice into the context of mercy. This context could be used to give a prayerful foundation for outreach throughout the coming year.
- ▶ Reflect on the challenging words and implications of the mercy to which Pope Francis is calling us, in the letter about the indulgence granted through the Jubilee.
  - ▶ Pray Pope Francis' prayer with students.
  - ▶ Learn and sing the hymn for the Year of Mercy.
  - ▶ Use just the lyrics as a base for students to create their own musical version.
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***I Forgive You – Love We Can Hear, Ask For, and Give*** by Nicole Lataif and Illustrated by Katy Betz. (2014). Publisher: Pauline Books & Media, USA. ISBN: 9780819837264

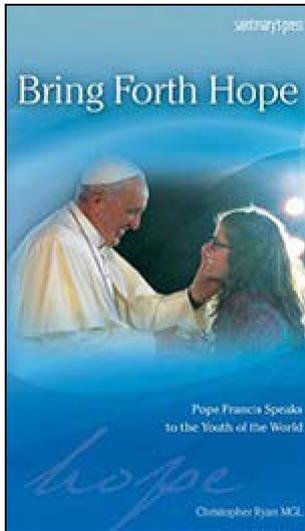
Though this book's themes of forgiveness and mercy are always relevant, *I Forgive You* is a timely book in light of this year's focus on mercy. It's an engaging book with funny pictures and lots of appropriate references for kids. Feeling like a lion when we're angry and like an elephant is sitting on our heart when we don't forgive, are images in both words and pictures that have the potential to really speak to students in Kindergarten to Year Two.

The themes in the book help children to deal with their own disappointment and anger, while being encouraged to ask for help from adults when a situation is beyond their control. While a couple of ideas are slightly more American than Australian, this is not overly noticeable.

Students could read this book as a whole class or individually. It could be used to help students deal with a specific incident or it could be used as a story for children when preparing for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. For students in older classes, it could be used as a starting point to help them write and illustrate their own examples of situations where they might need God's forgiveness or when they might need to forgive others.

Having read this book, students will hopefully come away knowing that they are loved and forgiven by God, regardless of what they do, and of the need for genuine forgiveness of others overtime.

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**Bring Forth Hope** by Christopher Ryan MGL. (2014). Publisher: St Mary's Press. ISBN: 9781599826295

As motivating as it is reflective, *Bring Forth Hope* is a prayerful resource for upper secondary students and young adult teachers. Each of the 52 weekly reflections provides a Scripture quote, a few inspiring words from Pope Francis given during one of his addresses to young people, a *Think About That* section that explores Pope Francis' words more fully and some practical suggestions to help the reader take action and make some practical changes in their life and in the world. Finally, each reflection includes a few words for personal prayer.

While the structure of the 52 weekly reflections remains the same, the content and themes vary. Each week addresses topics of importance to young people today, in this technological and often self-focused world. Some topics include:

- ▶ the importance of listening to the voice of God amidst the noise of daily living
- ▶ mercy and tenderness in the face of the suffering of another
- ▶ being "athletes" for Christ
- ▶ dealing with mistakes and failure, and overcoming the resulting fear
- ▶ the challenge to build a better world
- ▶ the promotion of true religious freedom for everyone
- ▶ being open to the call of God that directs our future; and living a fruitful life

*Bring Forth Hope* could be used:

- ▶ as a weekly prayer with senior students in catechist or religious education classes, as preparation for World Youth Day pilgrims, for staff prayer, for a prayer gathering of catechists, or for a small group of young adult teachers in their first years of teaching.
- ▶ by grouping the prayers into themes, the thematic prayers could then be used either during lessons, or on senior retreats or reflection days.
- ▶ as a springboard for students writing their own reflections. Senior students could use the Scripture passage, Pope Francis' quote and the *Think About That* section as inspiration for writing their own *Take Action* and *Say a Prayer* sections. This would make the reflections more personal and practical for their own life and their local communities.