



## Faith Family Activities: FEBRUARY

### Overview and Rationale

<p><b>Celebration:</b> Valentine's Day</p>	<p>There are many myths and stories associated with the original Saint Valentine, considered to be a martyr in the early Church. Ultimately, Valentine's Day is meant to celebrate love. It is a popular celebration in our culture, in our schools and can be a good occasion to talk about the kind of love Jesus calls us to: love of God and love of neighbor. In schools, the holiday can be a time for students to see the good in one another, and to show their classmates kindness through the writing of cards or even brief messages of support.</p>
<p><b>Works of Mercy:</b> <b>Corporal:</b> shelter the homeless</p> <p><b>Spiritual:</b> comfort the sorrowful</p>	<p>The works of mercy this month tend to be more self-evident for students, but discussing them can be an occasion for students to grow in awareness and selflessness. Identifying relevant statistics for homelessness in your local community can be eye-opening for students, especially as they consider children and youth who are homeless. Nationally, 2.5 million children experience homelessness each year. The <a href="#">Poverty USA website</a> is a very valuable tool for learning and action. As students develop empathy for those in need, they grow in selflessness and are able to more readily identify those who need comforting for a variety of sorrows.</p>
<p><b>Beatitude:</b> Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.</p>	<p>This Beatitude can be illustrated for young people through a single line of the Lord's Prayer: "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." This prayer so often recited can sometimes become rote if we don't take the time to stop and think about the meaning behind the words. How do we show forgiveness in our relationships? Do we "forgive and forget" or do we tend to hold grudges? Do we expect to be forgiven when we hurt others? Are we able to ask for forgiveness?</p>
<p><b>Commandment:</b> Sixth</p>	<p>The sixth commandment calls us to be faithful in our relationships. In the Sacrament of Matrimony, husband and wife promise to be true to one another in good times and bad and to share their love forever. This promise ensures that they are always faithful to one another and the grace of the Sacrament helps them to remain true to this promise. The sixth commandment also reminds us that our bodies are created in God's image and should be treated with respect. In marriage, a man and woman are called to share their bodies with one another to become unified in love. This is an action that should be reserved for marriage. Until the commitment of marriage is made, couples find ways of showing their love in a variety of ways by spending time together and taking care of each other.</p>



## Activities:

- (1) “PALANCA” LETTERS:** It is a common practice on retreats with older students to receive “palanca” letters, which are notes of affirmation and encouragement from friends, teachers, mentors and parents. The word “palanca” is a Spanish word that means “lever.” Just as a lever enables a person to move something which is beyond normal strength, a “palanca” letter, when received as part of a retreat experience, helps the recipient see beyond themselves to things that they are capable of accomplishing with God’s grace and the love of the community. As part of a Faith Family meeting, students can pull names to write messages of encouragement, support or affirmation to one another. The writers of the “palanca” notes can be reminded that these letters often help the recipient notice or identify gifts and talents they possess. Once the notes/letters are collected, they can be distributed and read prayerfully in a subsequent gathering.
- (2) VALENTINES FOR LEGISLATORS:** After watching the [2-minute video](#) on the Poverty USA website, students can work in Faith Families to write letters or valentines to local elected officials asking them to remember those who don’t have adequate food, housing or work to support their basic needs. Students can inquire about laws and local agencies that provide support for those in need like homeless veterans and other groups disproportionately impacted by homelessness. Students should request a “valentine” back from their representatives to continue the dialogue beyond Valentine’s Day.
- (3) RECONCILIATION:** February is often the start of the Lenten season and an opportunity for students to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the great Sacrament of Healing focused on God’s loving mercy. Rather than organizing by class, this could be organized by Faith Families with a “starter” activity focused on the Beatitude: “Blessed are those who are merciful...” Faith families can create and perform short skits showing merciful actions or even role play the Sacrament of Reconciliation, so that younger students can share in the celebration and anticipate their own participation at the appropriate age. When older students receive the Sacrament, younger students can work on hand motions for the Our Father, particularly the lines that begin with “forgive us our trespasses.”
- (4) MARRIAGE INTERVIEWS:** Through your parish, local Knights of Columbus or similar organization identify some couples who have been married for three decades or more and invite them to come to school for a Faith Family activity. A prior Faith Family gathering can be used to generate questions for the couple and the eighth-grade leaders can facilitate the sharing, using the generated questions. Many schools host “Grandparents Day.” This Faith Family activity could be tied in with that



school-wide activity, or could at least serve as a good opportunity to survey the grandparents for their interest/willingness to be interviewed by Faith Families.

**SERVICE LEARNING:** As Faith Families, create Valentines for those who may be alone or feel unloved. They can be distributed to military personnel through an organization like [Operation We Are Here](#), to homeless people through a local soup kitchen or to elderly residents in a nearby nursing home.



Student Materials Needed for *Faith Family Activities*: **FEBRUARY**

Use these valentine templates to send to local officials.

