

Facilitator Directions for Mary

The FACILITATOR will need “The Vignettes of Mary” for each participant. These can be found at the end of these directions on p.3. Prior to the meeting invite group to bring a favorite image of Mary to the session. The Faciliator will also need copies of the Litany of Liberation as remembered by Sandra Spencer.

The FACILITATOR distributes copies of The Vignettes inviting group to read them silently. After sufficient time The FACILITATOR says: As you reflected on the vignettes is there an image or experience of Mary that has touched your life in the last five years?

Invite participants to share by saying: Could we hear some of your experiences of Mary? Let's try to focus on the immediate past rather than looking at childhood memories. Who is Mary in your life today?

After discussion The FACILITATOR continues: Some of you have brought images of Mary that have meaning for you. Would you like to share them with the group? Invite participants to show the group their image and share their memories.

If you are feeling somewhat out of touch with Mary in your life, would you like to share what has caused this? (Invite honesty perhaps by sharing your own struggle to reconcile Mary's presence in our church and the role of women in church leadership, etc.)

The FACILITATOR continues: If your reflections lead you to consider a new image of Mary, please share it with us. One 16 year old art student, who had witnessed domestic violence in her home, was sharing her dissatisfaction with the common European statues of Mary. She felt that these often depict Mary with head down and arms outstretched in what she considered a passive model for women. In a conversation with her SSND teacher she suddenly stood up and took a forward pose with clinched fists, head erect and said, “I'd like to create a statue of Mary standing like this and I would call her Our Lady of Determination!” (The FACILITATOR might want to take the pose suggested by the 16 yr. old.) Would anyone like to share a new image of Mary that touches you?

The FACILITATOR continues: Two favorite images from scripture that are special for School Sisters of Notre Dame are the Wedding Feast of Cana (John 2) and Mary standing near the cross of Jesus. (John 19)

Let's read each account from scripture and listen to a description of Mary from each event.

After reading each account, The FACILITATOR says: What personality traits do you hear in Mary? (Maturity, self-esteem, confidence in Jesus and herself, needs no external authority to initiate her action, concerned about a celebration/wedding, etc.)

After reading John 19:25-30, The FACILITATOR says: Have any of you lost a child? Could you tell us about it? (This is a sensitive time that requires compassionate listening rather than too many questions...) After sharing The FACILITATOR suggests: Let's take a few moments of silence and remember those whose lives have been shattered by the loss of a child...)

Looking at Mary standing near the cross, what touches you about her as a woman, wife, widow?

As thoughts are shared The FACILITATOR continues: Mary is a precious part of our faith. Let's conclude our time together by praying the Litany of Liberation honoring Mary in the experience of women from Central America. Invite participants to read individual parts interspersed with a deep silence. Conclude by reciting the Hail Mary together, in any language represented in the group.

The Vignettes of Mary

1. In the 1990s several School Sisters of Notre Dame were evacuated from Kabala, Sierra Leone. They were under gunfire and some prayed to Our Lady of Perpetual Help. They believe that she brought them to safety.
2. Our Lady of Czestochowa has been a strengthening presence to School Sisters of Notre Dame in Poland who felt her courage in supporting Solidarity and her protection in their attempts to resist communism.
3. Many School Sisters of Notre Dame working with women in the Americas have seen the power of Our Lady of Guadalupe in their efforts to support immigrants and work for systemic change. They see her as giving birth to self-esteem in an entire culture.
4. Some School Sisters of Notre Dame who have made pilgrimages to Lourdes or other shrines have felt the healing presence of Mary in these holy places.
5. At times School Sisters of Notre Dame have realized that Mary is meaningful to our Islamic sisters and brothers. The Koran speaks of the Annunciation and teaches the virgin birth. Mary was one of Mohammed's three favorite women. (His wife, his daughter, Fatima, and Mary)
6. Martin Luther wrote an inspiring commentary on the Magnificat and Episcopalians are rediscovering Mary and honoring her in their liturgy.

Do you see any similarities in these devotions to Mary?

Do you see any differences?

Do you think that Our Lady of Guadalupe ever speaks to Our Lady of Czestochowa?
What might she be saying?

Do you see Mary playing a role in world peace?

What else would you like to add?