

Facilitator Directions for the Mother Theresa Award

Materials needed: 3 x 5 cards, one for each participant

The Facilitator should read the Mother Theresa Award segment before session.

Blank paper for ballots

The Facilitator invites participants to come together for coffee/tea at her house. The agenda of the gathering is to discuss names of persons to receive the Mother Theresa Award for their efforts at positive systemic change.

When the group gathers, The Facilitator welcomes them by saying: “Most of us are familiar with serving in soup kitchens, collecting food for the poor, helping others pay utility bills and many other acts of charity. In addition to such acts of charity, Catholic Social Justice teaches us to work toward systemic change to eliminate the root causes of social injustice among us. Mother Theresa saw the need for systemic change in her life’s work for the education of girls. If family life was to improve, she believed women had to be educated. She dedicated her entire life to the education of women and the poor. She learned that long-lasting systemic change requires stamina, dedication, and willingness to dialogue. It can also mean risking one’s life in the service of a greater Truth.”

The Facilitator distributes a 3 x 5 card to each participant and continues: “Let’s take a few minutes to think of someone known to us locally who has made a positive contribution to our neighborhood, parish, school or city by trying to change an unjust system.”

If participants need a little description of such a person, The Facilitator could mention the following example. “There is an SSND in St. Louis who felt women needed support after they were released from prison. There were few structures in place to help them find housing, jobs, safe day care for their children, work on gaining self-esteem, etc. and change an unjust system. She has initiated a program that in addition to giving financial help, the staff works with women to build up their self-esteem and to foster a support system for them. They in turn work for reform of criminal justice by writing to their congressional officials, lobbying for change, and giving presentations to schools and churches. As they attempt to change the system they are changed in the process.”¹

The Facilitator continues: “I’d like you to write a name on your 3 x 5 card and give one reason you feel this person deserves the Mother Theresa Award. This can be a woman or man, student, of any faith that you believe has tried to change an unjust system by positive, non-violent means.”

¹ Jacqueline Toben, SSND, Director of Let’s Start, St. Louis.

After participants complete their cards, The Facilitator collects the cards. She then invites two people to come forward and alternately read the cards out loud. After the cards have been read The Facilitator says: "I'd like to remind you of some of the characteristics of Mother Theresa that might help us make a decision about who our recipient will be."

Aspects of Mother Theresa's life that could be mentioned include: reconciliation with those who opposed her ideas, (Being Church) determination to change an unjust system, (seeing woman as leader of congregation) clarity of communication, (see letters to Pope in Being Church), willing to risk losing her reputation. (Decrees in Being Church) and empowering others through education.

The Facilitator continues: "Are there characteristics of Mother Theresa that you find in any of those named for the award?"

The participants may find they need more time to do background on those recommended and might want to complete this task at another meeting. If they continue and are ready to select a person, The Facilitator asks: "Is there any person named that you have a difficult time seeing as a recipient of this award?" Discuss this with respect for the individual's comments as well as the person named. (For example, Ms. X was named and I know she wants to do ____ but she has not really started to implement her goals. I think we should honor someone who has actually carried out her/his plans for systemic change.)

After the discussion, The Facilitator distributes ballots asking participants to write down their top three nominees for the Mother Theresa Award. (#1, being their first priority).

The Facilitator asks for two people to collate the data and bring it to the group. When the name of the person is chosen, the group decides how to offer the honor to the individual. Could she/he be invited to join the group for coffee/tea and receive a written citation, The Mother Theresa Award, with flowers? or a statue? or some other way of acknowledging the person's contribution to the community?

A gift might include a copy of the Sturdy Roots CDs/DVD so that the person could learn more about Mother Theresa and the School Sisters of Notre Dame. In giving such an award the participants may find their own awareness of social justice enhanced as well as offering their gratitude to a neighbor, friend, parishioner, student whose contribution to justice may go unnoticed.

A concluding prayer could be the Blessing of Mother Theresa recited by the group for the person being honored. "My Dear _____, we commend you to the Holy Spirit, through the powerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and we entrust you forever to her blessed hands." SSND Rule of 1865.