



Leader's guide

Building God's kingdom on Earth

In the words of Fr. Benedict Mayaki, SJ, Pope Francis stresses the importance of working together to “help renew the human family, build a future of justice and peace, and ensure that no one is left behind.” The SVP is in the unique position of being able to contribute in a meaningful way to campaigns on this topic, given its frontline experience in supporting refugees and migrants.

Turning concern into action

The SVP's social justice work responds to the needs of people every day. Our Society has over 200 volunteer groups which support refugees and people seeking asylum, in addition to our St Vincent's centres in Leeds and Bradford, which provide frontline advice and support to migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum. From providing practical support and ESOL classes to advice and advocacy, and from leading on community events and initiatives to promoting inclusion and integration, we have decades of experience in this area.

Many of the people we support every day struggle to meet basic living standards. They face destitution and homelessness, and they often feel isolated. While our Society responds to immediate need and supports people facing challenges, we also understand the importance of challenging policies, systems, and the root causes of poverty and discrimination. By campaigning for the rights of people who face discrimination and unfairness, we put our faith and concern into action.

The Mini Vinnies call to action

This Lent, we are inviting you and your children to engage with our work with refugees and asylum seekers through our Forget-me-not campaign. You will find resources for a reconciliation service, both sacramental and non-sacramental,

along with our forget-me-not flower template so that you can take part in our campaign.

The service gives children an opportunity to thank God for their blessings, but also to look at the lives of others and how they may differ from their own. The examination of conscience, alongside Ajani's story, will allow children to listen to their heart and explore what they have heard and read, considering the questions related to their own judgement of others. It's a time to help them see that in God's eyes we are all valued, nobody is forgotten, and by standing up for injustices in this world, we are helping build God's Kingdom here on Earth encompassing love, peace and dignity.

Reconciliation service: Leader's guide

What you will need

- The Forget-me-not action pack (1 per child)
- Pen or pencil (1 per child)
- Laptop and projector for PowerPoint
- Quiet background music

SVP downloadable resources

- SVP blue forget-me-not petals (1 per child)
- SVP yellow flower centre (1 per group)

Room set-up

- Create a simple focal point in the room
- Space the children out around the focal point
- If the Sacrament of Reconciliation is taking place, have a quiet space where this can be celebrated in line with school/parish safeguarding guidelines

Gather:

To facilitate a quiet space for the children to settle, play some gentle background music and ensure your focal point is set up so that the children can gather round on chairs or on the floor to still their minds and hearts ready to enter into the Service of Reconciliation. Please make sure the booklets are prepared for each child and a pen or pencil is on hand too. Page 2 of the Sacramental Reconciliation Service booklet can be printed, cut in half and slipped into the middle of the booklet.

Opening Prayer & Reflection

Invite the children to close their eyes and listen carefully as you read the words of the opening prayer (which can be found in the booklet).

"Whenever we come together to be with God, a good place to start is to take a moment to be thankful for all that God has given us in our lives. These blessings might be people, things or experiences, so let's take a few minutes to thank the Lord for all those good things."

Invite the children to think about five blessings for which they are thankful and write or draw them on the hand on the front of the booklet.

"Today we are going to hear about the SVP, a special organisation whose members, like you, are very thankful for all the things they have, but who want to make sure that others are not forgotten and are treated with love and dignity."

Listen:

"Before we listen to a story from the SVP, let's take a moment to listen to God's word and think about how His words make a difference to our lives today."

You may decide to get one or two children to read the scripture, or invite them to listen to you as you read.

"A reading from the Gospel of Matthew (Chapter 10 vs 40 & 42).

Whoever accepts you also accepts me. And whoever accepts me also accepts the One who sent me.

Whoever helps one of these little ones because they are my followers will truly get his reward. He will get his reward even if he only gave my follower a cup of cold water.

The Word of the Lord".

"Thanks be to God."

Please take a few minutes to explain the meaning of the scripture with the children.

“Jesus said that when we accept other people, we accept him. What does the word accept mean? How did it make you feel?” (Give the children an example of your own to which they can relate).

When we accept each other, we are accepting God. If we want to be a real follower of Jesus, we have to give both our hands and take action. The kindness we show other people is like giving them a gift from God. And what a gift to receive!

As Jesus says, our actions or gifts don't have to be huge things.”

Ask the children about the example in the story – a cup of cold water.

“Can you think of some others ways you could be accepting of others?”

Respond:

“Now that we have listened to Jesus' message that we need to be accepting of others, we are now going to listen to a story about Ajani and how the SVP has helped to support his family.”

Read Ajani's story to the children and take a few minutes afterwards to draw or write in the circles in the booklet to retell the story. Discuss the questions in the booklet too to really find out what they are thinking.

This will then lead nicely into some quiet time that will allow the children to examine their own conscience and answer the questions provided on page 2 of the booklet. If the service is sacramental, it is this part upon which the children can draw when they go to confession.

SVP Case Study

“Ajani is seven years old. He came to England with his mummy and his two older sisters who are nine and 10. They had a very long and difficult journey from their home in Ethiopia, a country in Africa.

When they arrived in England, they were granted asylum, which means that the British government understood that it would be too dangerous for them to return to Ethiopia, where a war was being fought. This meant they were now refugees.

The family were given a flat to live in with some basic furniture, but they felt lonely and scared. They struggled to speak English and they had very little money. Going to the shops was frightening because people often stared at them, and while they could buy food, they could not read how to cook it, and it was mostly very different from the food that they were used to.

The St Vincent de Paul Society, which is known as the SVP, visited Ajani and his family at home, having been given their details by a local centre supporting refugees and asylum seekers. The SVP members took some food and clothes to the family, but while they were visiting, they saw that the children had nothing to play with. Talking was difficult because the family didn't speak English very well, but Ajani was able to express that he liked football; he mentioned the player Mo Salah, which gave the SVP members an idea.

On their next visit to the family, they bought a football and a football shirt with the name Mo Salah on the back. Ajani was thrilled. He put on the shirt with such excitement and then began kicking the ball around the flat. His mummy smiled to see her son so happy. His sisters also received presents.

Because of the SVP members' kindness, Ajani's family feel less lonely and scared. They helped with practical things like food, clothing and toiletries, and they are helping the family to learn English, but it is their friendship which makes the most difference. Ajani and his family now feel more confident, and Ajani is now making friends. Their future now looks brighter."

Forget-me-not activity:

If the Sacrament of Reconciliation is available, you could use the provided PowerPoint with some quiet music for the children to watch while others are with the priest.

For those using the non-sacramental booklets, the action stage can come directly after the Examination of Conscience.

Please read aloud the script from the non-sacramental booklet on page 3 to invite the children to take action by writing a prayer for those who have had to flee their homes and countries.

You might like to provide some help with prayer starters and sentence stems (see PowerPoint page which can be displayed).

Forget-me-not activity (continued):

Offer support where needed for wording their prayer. Bring the children back to the points you've covered to help with their prayer, including:

- Thanks for what we have
- Sorry for when we've not been accepting
- Ask God to help those who are forgotten

Differentiation: For those who finish early, they could be asked to think about one way they could be more kind and welcoming, and write that on the back of their petal.

Tell the children about what will now happen to the petals, using the script on page 3 of the non-sacramental booklet.

What to do once the flower has been created

Here you will find ideas for what to do and how to lead on from the action, depending on your circumstances.

- Take a photo of your finished flower (and a few close-ups of petals) and email to youngvincentians@svp.org.uk so we can add the digital image to our field of forget-me-nots
- There is an additional discussion session that could be further explored with the Mini Vinnies
- Currently, politicians are discussing making changes to the rights of refugees and asylum seekers in this country. We want our politicians to know that we are welcoming refugees into our communities and into our schools. You can write to your local politician (or MP) to let them know about what you have learned today and why this issue is important to you. You can also sign up to our social justice champions network. Please get in touch with us at Young Vincentians and we can help link you up
- Get in touch with your local SVP group and see if there are ways you can support the work happening in your local area or get in touch with us at Young Vincentians and we can help link you up

Closing Prayer

“As we come to the end of our service, we bring all our thoughts and feelings from today to our final prayer.” The closing prayer could be read by one of the children, or by the leader.

“Heavenly Father, please help all who are forced from their homes, especially those who are children. May we all come together and open our hearts to welcome with love and kindness these your children so that together we may build Your Kingdom here on Earth. Amen.”



“Make it a practice to judge persons and things in the most favourable light at all times and under all circumstances.” – St. Vincent de Paul