

# ACTION GUIDE

SUNDAY OF DIVINE MERCY: APRIL 19, 2020



## INTRODUCTION

Each year, on the Second Sunday of Easter, the Church celebrates the Sunday of Divine Mercy. Mankind's need for the message of Divine Mercy took on dire urgency in the 20th century, when civilization began again to lose the understanding of the sanctity and inherent dignity of every human life.

**Free downloads and additional electronic resources can be found at [respectlifeprogram.org/april](https://respectlifeprogram.org/april).**

In the 1930s, Jesus chose a humble Polish nun, St. Maria Faustina Kowalska, to receive private revelations concerning His Divine Mercy that were recorded in her Diary. St. Faustina's Diary records 14 occasions when Jesus requested that a Feast of Mercy be observed. On May 5, 2000, five days after the canonization of St. Faustina, the Vatican decreed

that the Second Sunday of Easter would henceforth be known as the Sunday of Divine Mercy.

Since the legalization of abortion in our country, millions of women, men, and families have been hurt by abortion. By the age of 45, as many as 1 in 3 women have had an abortion, and a similar number of men and family members have been involved. Many *inaccurately* believe that abortion is "the unforgivable sin." They need to hear that God forgives every sin of a repentant heart, even the sin of abortion.

The Sunday of Divine Mercy provides an important opportunity to share Christ's message of mercy, especially with those who have been wounded by abortion. Resources, including a sample timeline, homily helps, announcements, sample intercessions, activities, and more are provided in this action guide to help you spread the message of Divine Mercy with those most in need of healing. You are encouraged to adapt these resources as needed to fit your specific parish, school, or ministry. Free downloads and additional electronic resources can be found at [respectlifeprogram.org/april](https://respectlifeprogram.org/april).

### What is Project Rachel?

Project Rachel is the abortion healing ministry of the Catholic Church in the United States. It is a diocesan-based network of specially trained priests, religious, therapists, and laypersons who provide a team response of care for those suffering in the aftermath of abortion. In addition to referring for Sacramental Reconciliation, the ministry provides an integrated network of services, including pastoral counseling, spiritual direction, support groups, retreats, and referrals to licensed mental health professionals. For more information, contact your diocese or visit [usccb.org/abortionhealing](https://usccb.org/abortionhealing).





## SIMPLE STEPS

Here is a list of simple steps that you can use in your parish, school, or ministry to help prepare for and celebrate the Sunday of Divine Mercy. These steps offer ideas on how to use the provided resources. Each step may not apply to your specific circumstance, but most can be adapted to suit the needs of your specific community.

### 1. Share the message of mercy with those suffering after abortion.

Many dioceses offer help for those who are suffering spiritually, mentally, or emotionally after participation in abortion. Ask your diocesan Respect Life director whether your diocese has Project Rachel (or otherwise named abortion healing ministry), and if so, whether they can give you a flyer directing people how to seek that help. (A flyer with individual pull-off tabs featuring the contact information of the ministry is best.)

Hang copies of the flyer in various places around your parish, such as in the vestibule or on a bulletin board. Also, post copies of the flyer in restrooms, especially on the inside of the stall doors in both women’s and men’s restrooms. Hanging the flyer in discreet places like restrooms allows those interested to privately pull a tab from the flyer. Tear off two or three of the tabs before hanging the flyer to encourage people to take one of the tabs.

### 2. Highlight the Sunday of Divine Mercy in your bulletin or newsletter.

The Divine Mercy Novena begins on Good Friday, April 10. Print the sample announcement for the novena in your bulletin the weekend of Palm

Sunday, April 4–5. The weekend of the Sunday of Divine Mercy, April 18-19, use one of the sample announcements about healing after abortion.

Many of those suffering after abortion *inaccurately* believe that it is “the unforgivable sin.” Through our efforts and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, may they come to know that God forgives every sin of those who are sorry, including the sin of abortion.

### 3. Preach on God’s unending mercy the weekend of the Sunday of Divine Mercy.

Sample homily suggestions are provided to aid priests and deacons in preaching on God’s desire to forgive our sins and heal our hearts. “General Homily Considerations Regarding Healing after Abortion” are also available as an appendix.

### 4. Pray for healing during the Prayer of the Faithful.

Sample intercessions are provided for use in the Prayer of the Faithful the weekend of the Sunday of Divine Mercy (April 19). Where appropriate, schools could use these intercessions to observe this great Feast of Mercy by praying together at the beginning of class. Families could include these intercessions in their regular prayers in the morning, evening, or before or after a family meal.

### 5. Offer a Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing.

Contact your diocesan Respect Life director about the possibility of hosting a *Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing* at your parish or close to the celebration of the Sunday of Divine Mercy. Promote the prayer service to parishioners through bulletin and pulpit announcements at Sunday Mass. If your parish already holds a special event for the Sunday of Divine Mercy, you could integrate the prayer service as part of it. Action steps for hosting a prayer service are available at the end of this action guide.

*We would love to see how you and your family, parish, or school participate!*

Email us at [prolife@usccb.org](mailto:prolife@usccb.org) or tag us on Facebook (@peopleoflife) or Twitter (@usccbprolife).

## SAMPLE TIMELINE

We have provided a sample timeline to help you prepare for the celebration of the Sunday of Divine Mercy. While these steps apply most directly to a parish coordinator for Respect Life ministry, in whatever capacity you serve the Church, they can help you think about key planning steps. Adapt as needed for your local circumstances.



### DECEMBER

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

### JANUARY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

### MARCH

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

### APRIL

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

### Monday, December 2, 2019

Request a mid-January appointment with your pastor to discuss the observance of the Sunday of Divine Mercy.

### Mid-January, 2020

- ◆ Meet with your pastor, and share the significance of the Sunday of Divine Mercy for healing after abortion. Refer to this action guide's introduction on page 37 in advance if you need some ideas of what to say. Let him know what resources are available, such as homily notes and prayer intercessions. Ask him about hosting a *Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing* near the Feast of Divine Mercy. Ask permission for the bulletin submissions you have planned. Also request permission to hang a diocesan Project Rachel Ministry flyer with pull-off tabs containing the ministry's contact information around the parish leading up to, during, and shortly after the observance of the Sunday of Divine Mercy. Most importantly, *ask what you can do to help*. Lent, Holy Week, and Easter are often the busiest times of the year for priests.
- ◆ Following your conversation with your pastor, contact your parish office to open the lines of communication. Share the results of that conversation and what you are requesting for the observance of the Sunday of Divine Mercy. Ask about bulletin submission policies. Many parishes need content several weeks in advance to be able to include it in the weekly bulletin. Inquire about deadlines and share what content you hope to have featured. This will help your parish plan for the Sunday of Divine Mercy and allot the necessary space in the bulletin. Lent, Holy Week, and Easter often require additional bulletin space for schedules and announcements. Contact your parish while there may still be space available. Again, most importantly, *ask what you can do to help*.

### Early March, 2020

- ◆ Recruit any volunteers you may need to help in hosting a *Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing*. You may need lectors, musicians, or greeters. Be sure to learn and comply with all parish and diocesan volunteer policies.

- ◆ Ask local and diocesan prayer networks to pray for the fruitfulness of the prayer service, specifically that the event is well-attended and that those who are in need of God’s mercy will be encouraged to seek out help. In addition to seeking God’s grace, this will also help spread the word.

### **Monday, March 16, 2020**

Complete all bulletin submissions for the month of April. This includes the bulletin announcement for the Divine Mercy Novena, information on abortion healing for the Sunday of Divine Mercy, and advertisements for the *Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing*. Make copies of the prayers for the prayer service (available online). Begin advertising the event on bulletin boards, in newsletters, and on social media.

### **Tuesday, March 24, 2020**

Reconnect with appropriate parish staff regarding your bulletin submissions. Touch base with your pastor to offer further assistance and confirm any plans you may have made. This is the time to tie up any loose ends, verify that all content has been received by those who need it, confirm with your volunteers, and determine if there are any follow-up tasks to be completed. Having all these tasks completed prior to Holy Week will allow you to fully enter into this special liturgical season and celebrate Christ’s Resurrection at Easter!

### **Friday, April 3, 2020**

If you have obtained the necessary permission, hang the Project Rachel Ministry flyer in appropriate places around your parish. Tear off two or three of the tabs from each flyer before putting it up. (This makes it less intimidating for those who want to take a tab to do so.)

**Friday, April 10, 2020:** *Good Friday of the Lord’s Passion, beginning of the Divine Mercy Novena*

**Sunday, April 12, 2020:** *Easter Sunday, The Resurrection of the Lord*

### **Tuesday, April 14, 2020**

Touch base with volunteers and take care of any last-minute tasks.

### **Friday, April 17, 2020**

Check your Project Rachel Ministry flyers located around the parish. Do any need to be replaced? Perhaps most of the pull-tabs have already been removed. Make sure any flyers that need to be refreshed are ready in advance of the Sunday of Divine Mercy.

**Sunday, April 19, 2020:** *Sunday of Divine Mercy*

### **Monday, April 20, 2020**

Following the Sunday of Divine Mercy, check your Project Rachel flyers located around the parish. If any are running low on pull-off tabs, hang up replacement flyers in case someone who wanted a pull-off tab didn’t get a chance to take one yet.

## **BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **Divine Mercy Novena**

(Suggested Weekend: April 4–5, 2020)

The Divine Mercy Novena begins on Good Friday, April 10, and concludes Saturday, April 18. In private revelations to St. Faustina, Jesus asked that the Feast of Divine Mercy be preceded by a novena praying for nine intentions with the Divine Mercy Chaplet. The novena can be accessed online at [www.thedivinemercy.org/message/devotions/novena.php](http://www.thedivinemercy.org/message/devotions/novena.php).

### **Sunday of Divine Mercy**

(Suggested Weekend: April 18–19, 2020)

#### ◆ **Option 1**

This weekend we celebrate the Sunday of Divine Mercy. God’s greatest desire is to forgive us, pouring out His infinite mercy upon us so that we may be healed. Women and men alike who have been involved in an abortion may feel deep grief, guilt, anxiety, depression, broken relationships and a sense of alienation from God and Church. They may experience anniversary reactions to the date of the abortion or what would have been the baby’s due date. For anyone struggling with this, the Church cares. It is never too late to seek the Lord’s mercy and healing through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Consider confidential, compassionate help from our diocesan abortion healing ministry. It is open to those of any faith or no faith, offering hope and healing to women and men hurting from past abortions. Visit the “Find Help” map on [HopeAfterAbortion.org](http://HopeAfterAbortion.org) to find the diocesan ministry near you.

### ◆ Option 2

This weekend we celebrate the Sunday of Divine Mercy. God never ceases offering us His mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. If you or someone you know is suffering after abortion, confidential, compassionate help is available. Visit [HopeAfterAbortion.org](http://HopeAfterAbortion.org).

**Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing**  
(Include in bulletin beginning three weeks before the scheduled event.)

Please join us at [time] on [date] for a *Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing* to pray for all who have participated in abortion. Questions? Contact [name] at [email or phone number].

## PULPIT ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Divine Mercy Novena

(Suggested Weekend: April 4–5, 2020)

Please join us in praying the Divine Mercy Novena beginning this week on Good Friday. Private revelation holds that Jesus appeared to St. Faustina and asked that the Feast of Divine Mercy would be preceded by this novena. See the bulletin for more information.

**Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing**  
(Sunday before the event.)

Please join us at [time] on [date] for a *Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing* to pray for all who have been involved in abortion. See the bulletin for more information.

**or**

Please join us at [time] on [date] for a *Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing*. We will pray that all those who have been wounded by participation in abortion may find forgiveness and healing in God's tender mercy. See the bulletin for more information.



## ▶ INTERCESSIONS

These sample intercessions were written for use on the Sunday of Divine Mercy (April 19, 2020); however, many can be used throughout the year. These intentions are appropriate for inclusion in the Prayer of the Faithful at Sunday Mass, but can also be used elsewhere. For example, they could be printed in the weekly bulletin, featured in email newsletters, shared on social media platforms, or prayed during personal or family prayer times.

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May all who suffer from participating in abortion turn to the infinite mercy of our Savior and receive His healing, hope and peace;  
***We pray to the Lord:***

May all who suffer from participating in abortion turn to God's loving forgiveness;  
***We pray to the Lord:***

For all whose hearts ache from the sin of abortion: That God will soothe and heal them with the balm of his Divine Mercy;  
***We pray to the Lord:***

For men and women afraid to confess their participation in abortion: May the assurance of God's limitless mercy give them courage to seek forgiveness and healing;  
***We pray to the Lord:***

## HOMILY HELPS

These homily notes are provided to help priests and deacons bring the message of God's infinite mercy to their parishioners. Although heavily drawing from the readings of the Sunday of Divine Mercy on April 19, 2020, these notes can be used at any time—for example, during a *Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing*.

A passing reference to abortion allows those in the pews who suffer from their participation in abortion to know God's mercy is available to them. By the age of 45, as many as 1 in 3 women have had an abortion, and a similar number of men and family members have been involved. Many of those present in our parishes inaccurately believe that abortion is "the unforgivable sin." They need to hear that God desires to forgive every sin, including the sin of abortion.

Additionally, "*Homily Considerations Regarding Healing after Abortion*" can be found in Appendix B or online at [respectlifeprogram.org/april](http://respectlifeprogram.org/april).

Other ministry leaders can also use these reflections to help spread Christ's message of Divine Mercy, such as in a Bible study on the weekly Sunday readings, in a small group or a faith formation setting, or as part of any other appropriate ministry gathering.

### Sunday of Divine Mercy | April 19, 2020

**First Reading: Acts 2:42-47**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24**

**Second Reading: 1 Peter 1:3-9**

**Gospel Acclamation: John 20:29**

**Gospel: John 20:19-31**

Each year, on the Second Sunday of Easter—the last day of the Easter Octave—the Church celebrates the Sunday of Divine Mercy. On this day, we contemplate the fullness of the Paschal Mystery—Christ's Passion, death, and Resurrection. The basis of the whole Easter Mystery is the merciful love of God. From the beginning of creation, throughout Scripture, and most perfectly in the life, Passion, death and Resurrection of his Son, Jesus, God has been revealed as love itself. In His infinite love for us, God desires nothing more than to forgive our sins and offer us His mercy.

Our world's need for the message of Divine Mercy took on new urgency in the 20th century. It was during this time that the world witnessed the rise of Nazism and communism and experienced the horrors of the world at war. Civilization was losing the understanding of the sanctity and inherent dignity of every human life.

As these evil ideologies were taking shape, Jesus appeared to a humble Polish nun, whom we know as St.

Maria Faustina Kowalska. As Jesus continued to appear to St. Faustina, she recorded His messages to her in her *Diary*. On one such occasion, Jesus said to St. Faustina:

*My daughter, tell the whole world about My inconceivable mercy. I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On that day the very depths of My tender mercy are open. I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the Fount of My Mercy (Diary 699).*

Jesus appeared to the humble Faustina and asked that we celebrate the gift of His mercy today. Our celebration of this Easter Octave is a celebration of the mercy and forgiveness that are now available to all of us, by virtue of Christ's Resurrection. We must only run toward the outstretched arms of Christ.

In the First Reading, we are told that the early Church "*devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers*" (Acts 2:42). Already in these early days of the Church we see that the followers of Christ committed themselves to prayer and participation in the Sacraments. The way they lived out their relationships with Christ helped others to also encounter Him and receive salvation: "*And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved*" (First Reading, Acts 2:47).



In order to be saved, we must first admit that we are in need of saving. While God wants nothing more than to give us His mercy, in order to receive it, we have to admit that we are sinners in need of God's forgiveness. We must be willing to look at the ways we have failed to love God and our neighbor, so that God can raise us to the heights of His love through His great mercy.

For, as the psalmist writes, *"His mercy endures forever"* (Responsorial Psalm, Psalm 118:2). We may often feel that we are unworthy of God's love and mercy. We can fool ourselves into believing that God's mercy is for everyone else. We might believe the lies of the Evil One as he tries to convince us that our sins are too great, that our sins are unforgiveable. But God desires to take the greatest of sinners and transform them into the greatest saints. No sin is beyond His mercy. He makes *"all things new"* (Revelation 21:5).

Let us recall the words from the Second Reading that tell us God, *"in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you"* (1 Peter 1:3-4).

No matter how we have failed, the Resurrection of Christ is an assurance of *hope*. Christ's mercy is constantly available to us, if only we reach out in faith and confidence.

In the Gospel, we hear the story of Jesus' appearance to the disciples after His death. Jesus comes to them and exposes the wounds of His hands and His side—the wounds He endured for our salvation. And as the Resurrected Lord stood in their midst, the first words He spoke to them were, *"Peace be with you"* (John 20:19).

Many of these disciples had abandoned Jesus during His Passion. During Christ's moment of greatest need, they scattered, leaving Jesus alone in His sacrifice. Many might think what the disciples had done was unforgiveable. Yet Jesus appears to them and offers them His *peace*. And then He breathed on them and gave them the power to forgive sin, to extend His own mercy.

Now, Thomas was not present when Jesus appeared, and he refused to believe the disciples when they told him the Lord had appeared to them. Thomas needed to *see* to believe, and so Jesus returned and revealed himself eight days later, on the Octave of Easter. Jesus showed Thomas His hands and His side, saying, *"do not be unbelieving, but believe"* (Gospel, John 20:27).

How often have we doubted the Lord like Thomas? How often have we hidden in fear, unable to bear the shame of our mistakes and failures? What sins have we painfully buried in our hearts rather than exposing them to the healing light of God's mercy? Have we failed to confess and seek reconciliation for sins of adultery, violence, hatred, or participation in an abortion? Have we rejected the Church's teachings on contraception, sexuality, or marriage? Have we hardened our hearts, giving ourselves over to envy, greed, or dishonesty?

No sin is unforgiveable, and no sinner is beyond redemption. We have all failed and are in need of God's mercy. It is for this very reason that Christ suffered, died, and rose again. Christ came to offer us His infinite love and mercy, and we can receive it in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

When we enter the confessional and seek God's forgiveness, in a way, Christ breathes on us as He did the disciples, wiping away our sins and offering us His peace. We don't need to hide in fear or shame. Christ's mercy is freely given to a repentant heart. He will reveal to us the saving wounds of His hands and feet. He will take away our pain and replace it with His peace. And as we receive the gift of His Divine Mercy, may our hearts cry out with the joyful words of Thomas, *"My Lord and my God!"* (Gospel, John 20:28). May we *"not be unbelieving, but believe"* (Gospel, John 20:27).

St. John Paul II, who canonized St. Faustina, said in his 2001 homily for the Sunday of Divine Mercy, *"Divine Mercy! This is the Easter gift that the Church receives from the risen Christ and offers to humanity."* Today we celebrate that Easter gift of God's unending, merciful love for all his children. This is at the heart of the Gospel. Let us never fail to seek the mercy that God desires to freely give us. *Jesus, we trust in you.*

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## SAMPLE ACTIVITY

### Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing

This activity utilizes the *Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing* to join together in praying that all who have been wounded by participation in abortion may find forgiveness, peace, and healing in God's tender mercy. By the age of 45, as many as 1 in 3 women have had an abortion, and a similar number of men and family members have been involved. Too often, those who have been involved in abortion suffer alone in silence for years.

This prayer service can be combined with a regularly scheduled parish event, such as a regular Holy Hour, or planned as a supplemental activity. A priest or deacon will need to lead the prayer service.

#### Materials

- ◆ Copies of the *Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing* ([respectlifeprogram.org/april](http://respectlifeprogram.org/april)).

#### Directions

*(This action guide's sample timeline includes dates for most of the following.)*

1. Contact your pastor to ask if your parish can host a *Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing* sometime near the Sunday of Divine Mercy.
2. After the event has been approved and a date and time have been determined, begin advertising the prayer service. Include announcements in your bulletin and email newsletters and share on any relevant social media accounts.
3. Recruit volunteers to help you host the prayer service. You may want to have lectors, musicians to offer an opening hymn, and greeters to hand out programs. Ask the priest or deacon celebrating the prayer service if they have any requests to ask of the volunteers and if you can assist them in any way.
4. Make copies of the program. Extend individual, personal invitations to parishioners. A personal invitation is often the most effective way to encourage attendance.

5. Before the event begins, pray that the prayer service will open hearts to seek God's mercy. Pray for the healing of all those who have been wounded by abortion. Entrust the event to the Holy Spirit.
6. Consider making promotional materials for Project Rachel Ministry (or other name of your diocesan abortion healing ministry) available in discreet locations around the parish for those who may be seeking help after abortion. You might also consider putting the ministry's contact information on the back of the program.

#### One Step Further

Your parish may also want to celebrate this great Feast of Mercy and the conclusion of the Octave of Easter by hosting a Eucharistic Holy Hour for the Sunday of Divine Mercy. A template is available online and includes prayers, options of readings, and intercessions.

Download at [respectlifeprogram.org/april](http://respectlifeprogram.org/april).

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