

**Touchstones Faith in Action**

**In-Reach / Out-Reach / Justice-Making**

**Forgiveness**

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**Resources & Activities**

**1.0: Introduction**

The following by Penelope Rose Miller captures the importance and complexity of forgiveness:

“Forgiveness ... / ... is an antidote / ... is a gift / ... is a way of life / ... is a way to say I love you / ... is letting go of needing to be right / ... is a way to say you matter to me more than the things you do that upset me / ... is a way to liberate / ... is a way to declutter / ... is a natural state of grace / ... is a way to honor your spirit / ... is not in cahoots with story lines or ego / ... is an opportunity to heal / ... is an invitation to promote love / ... is a ripple / ... is a radical act of self-love / ... is a way of life / ... creates bounty / ... clears your karma / ... is a lighthouse / ... beckons for you to follow in her footsteps / ... is a circular motion / ... frees up precious real estate / ... gives you a reason to wake up / ... is never lost / ... is alkaline / ... is available to everyone at any time / ... is a way of life / ... is a remedy / ... is a song I sing my child / ... is a gift I give / ... has no cost / ... feels incredible / ... is my teacher / ... gives vitality / ... is not always easy / ... is the righteous choice / ... falls stumbles yet bounces back / ... knows no bounds / ... has many facets / ... is a gem I place in my heart to keep it open / ... is warm / ... is not staying hooked to drama or judgments / ... is messy / ... is pure / ... is a way of life.” (adapted)

One activity suggested below involves creating a Forgiveness Garden with recommendations for some of the flowers that could be included. The inclusion of wild violets is based upon the following story.

“One day when Stanley Mooneyham was walking along a trail in East Africa with some friends, he became aware of a delightful odor that filled the air. He looked up in the trees and around at the bushes in an effort to discover where it was coming from. Then his friends told him to look down at the small blue flower growing along the path. Each time they crushed the tiny blossoms under their feet, more of their sweet perfume was released into the air. Then his friends said, ‘We call it the forgiveness flower.’ To Mooneyham, what made the flower so special was the fact that it did not wait to be asked for forgiveness; it simply gave it, effortlessly, almost at the same time it was being crushed. The story is reminiscent of the eloquent words of Mark Twain: “Forgiveness is the fragrance the violet releases as the foot crushes it.”

Source: <http://blog.exoticflowers.com/blog-0/flowers-for-forgiveness>

Related to a Forgiveness Garden, consider this story about seeds by Megan McKenna. It makes the point that many things that we desire, like world peace, are not easy to obtain.

*Seeds of Forgiveness, World Peace, and so Much More*

There was a woman who wanted peace in the world and peace in her heart and all sorts of good things, but she was very frustrated. The world seemed to be falling apart. She would read the newspapers and get depressed. One day she decided to go shopping, and she went into a mall and picked a store at random. She walked in and was surprised to see Jesus behind the counter. She knew it was Jesus because he looked just like the pictures she’d seen on holy cards and devotional pictures. She looked again and again at him, and finally she got up enough nerve and asked, “Excuse me, are you Jesus?”

“I am.”

“Do you work here?”

“No,” Jesus said, “I own the store.”

“Oh, what do you sell in here?”

“Oh, just about anything!”

“Anything?”

“Yeah, anything you want. What do you want?”

She said, “I don’t know.”

“Well,” Jesus said, “feel free, walk up and down the aisles, make a list, see what it is that you want, and then come back and we’ll see what we can do for you.”

She did just that, walked up and down the aisles. There was peace on earth, no more war, no hunger or poverty, peace in families, no more drugs, harmony, clean air, careful use of resources, [forgiveness, and so much more]. She wrote furiously. By the time she got back to the counter, she had a long list.

Jesus took the list, skimmed through it, looked up and smiled, “No problem.” And then he bent down behind the counter and picked out all sorts of things, stood up, and laid out the packets.

She asked, “What are these?”

Jesus replied, “Seed packets. This is a catalog store.”

She said, “You mean I don’t get the finished product?”

“No, this is a place of dreams. You come and see what it looks like, and I give you the seeds. You plant the seeds. You go home and nurture them and help them to grow and someone else reaps the benefits.”

“Oh,” she said. And she left the store without buying anything.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/13648>

There are a number of Forgiveness Days in the calendar as noted under observances below. We are suggesting that another candidate for a Forgiveness Day is the first day of Spring with its symbolism of rebirth and new beginnings. As noted below, the ancient Romans used a lunar calendar and started the New Year on March 15th, which is close to the first day of Spring. As an aside, the Roman goddess Clementia was the goddess of forgiveness.

Please also note below under resources the Forgiveness Project and its Forgiveness Toolbox, which focuses on the following steps: 1. Going Beyond Understanding; 2. Building Bridges;

3. Empathy; 4. Curiosity & Courage; 5. Accepting Responsibility; 6. Resisting Conformity; and 7. Beyond Resentment.

**2.0: Observances, Resources & Organizations**

**2.1: Observances**

**2.1.1:** *Forgiveness Sunday*: In Christian religions, the first Sunday before Lent is called Forgiveness Sunday, which happened on February 23, 2020

**2.1.2:** *Shrovetide*: Shrove Tuesday also known as Mardi Gras, happened on February 25, 2020, the last day of festivities before the beginning of Lent on February 26, 2020. According to Bulgarian folk tradition the Christian festival of Shrovetide was the border between winter and spring when nature was revived. Importantly, the word shrove is a form of the English word shrive, which means to obtain absolution for one's sins by way of Confession and doing penance. Shrove Tuesday was named after the custom of Christians to be “shriven” (i.e., forgiven) before the start of Lent.

**2.1.3:** *Ides of March*: March 15, 2020. Every month in the Roman calendar had an Ides, a word that meant to divide. Originally, it coincided with the full moon based on the lunar calendar created by King Romulus around 753 BCE, but the later solar calendar of the Romans introduced in 45 BCE did not align with the lunar calendar. In March, May, July, and October, the Ides fell on the 15th day. In every other month, the Ides fell on the 13th day. During the late Roman Republic, circa 146-31 BCE, a new year’s festival was held on the ides of March. The Ides of March was also special for the ancient Romans because it was the deadline for settling debts for the year. As above, in 45 BCE, Caesar introduced the Julian calendar, which was based on a solar year.

**2.1.4:** *First Day of Spring*, March 19, 2020

**2.1.5:** *Forgiveness Day*, June 26, 2020

**2.1.6:** *Global Forgiveness Day* 2020, July 7, 2020

**2.1.7:** *International Forgiveness Day* 2020, August 2, 2020 (first Sunday in August)

**2.1.8:** *Paryushana:* Jain Festival of Forgiveness, August 16-23, 2020

**2.1.9:** *Yom Kippur:* The Jewish celebration of Yom Kippur is a day of atonement or forgiving, September 27-28, 2020. (“Judaism teaches that because humans have been given free will, they are responsible for their own actions. If they commit an action which is wrong, then they must seek forgiveness. Forgiveness can only be granted by/accepted from the victim. Jews place great emphasis on teshuva , or repentance.”)

**2.1.10:** *National Forgiveness Day* 2020, October 31, 2020 (last Saturday in October)

**2.2: Resources**

**2.2.1:** *Garden of Forgiveness*

*The Garden of Forgiveness Beirut* was originally conceived by Alexandra Asseily in 1997 as a place of calm reflection, sheltered from the bustle of the city and expressing themes of understanding, forgiveness and unity. Construction of the Beirut Garden of Forgiveness started in September 2003, but it was halted in 2006 because of bombing. The Garden is part of the Healing the Wounds of History initiative in Lebanon. The web site features several videos.

Link: <https://healingwoundsofhistory.com/garden-of-forgiveness/>

**2.2.2:** *Flowers that Symbolize Forgiveness*

Flowers that symbolize forgiveness include a white tulip, a purple hyacinth, which is also called the forgiveness flower, and a yellow daffodil, all perennials growing from bulbs, as well as a yellow rose.

In Oriental folklore, the Japanese emperor gives pink hydrangeas to express sorrow for mistreating the girl he loves. Hydrangeas, especially pink and blue varietals, have since been associated with heartfelt apologies.

As above in the introduction violets are also associated with forgivess.

**2.2.3:** *The Forgiveness Project*

Founded in 2004 by journalist, Marina Cantacuzino, *The Forgiveness Project* provides resources and experiences to help people examine and overcome their own unresolved grievances. It collects and shares stories from both victims/survivors and perpetrators of crime and conflict who have rebuilt their lives following hurt and trauma.

Link: <https://www.theforgivenessproject.com/>

Of special note is *The Forgiveness Toolbox* (<http://theforgivenesstoolbox.com/>) and the education resources for ages 14+ (<https://www.theforgivenessproject.com/education-resources>).

**2.3: Activities**

**2.3.1:** *View/Discuss the film* ***The Power of Forgiveness***

Show and discuss the 2007 film, *The Power of Forgiveness* (78 minutes) as a community event. Available at <http://journeyfilms.com/store/> for $14.95.

**2.3.2:** *Plant a Forgiveness Garden*

Many congregations have a memorial garden. Plan and plant a small Forgiveness Garden on the church property. This could be an engaging, multigenerational project.

**2.3.3:** *Forgiveness Workshop for the Community*

Using materials from the Forgiveness Toolbox above, conduct a workshop on forgiveness.