

An assembly reflection: Inspired by Mission



This reflection was created to help schools celebrate the Extraordinary Month of Mission (Oct'19). It focuses on one of four EMM aims: to be inspired by the actions of saints and missionaries.

Today we're going to think about people who inspire us. They can be well known individuals or people you know personally? *You might like to use an example of someone you find inspirational.*

Is anyone brave enough to begin telling us about a person who inspires them?

If names are few, suggest some that students may know e.g. Stomzy, Malala Yousifazi, Marcus Rashford, Greta Thunberg. If possible, also add someone from within the school community.

There have been lots of studies conducted to find out what it is that teenagers find inspiring in others. I'm going to read out a list of these qualities now. Raise your hand if you find them inspiring too?

Inspiring individuals are: **courageous, hardworking, act with integrity, dedicated, accepting of others, respectful, loyal, compassionate, imperfect, resilient, passionate, selfless, encouraging of others.**

When we think about this list of qualities it's important to recognise that what motivates some of the most inspiring people we know is not money, beauty, and status – even though we are often led to believe these are the ultimate life goals. Our greatest inspirational heroes are motivated by a much greater mission - to show love to others and to make the world better.

There are hundreds of inspirational individuals, often overlooked, whose lives have been entirely motivated by this greater mission. They are saints and missionaries who over the years have helped countless people by sharing God's love with the world.

There are many reasons why we overlook these saints and missionaries. It could be because we don't really know any, so we can't identify with them. Or because when we think of them, we bring to mind images of people who seem overly pious, dutiful, dull and unadventurous - hardly inspiring!

Yet the individuals recognised by the Church as saints, are honoured in part because they possessed those qualities teenagers regard as inspiring. Let's see how many of those qualities you can identify now.

Select two volunteers. Ask them to work together (or to encourage engagement, have the students compete) to identify which adjectives apply to the people they will hear about next. They are to evidence their choices by holding up A4 sheets, each containing one of the adjectives listed above.

First let's hear about Marianne Cope who aged 14, left school to become her family's main breadwinner.

After 10 hard years working full time, and when her nine younger siblings were old enough to support themselves, Marianne finally left her factory job to fulfil her ambition of becoming a Religious Sister.

As Sister Marianne she returned to education, passed her exams and became a teacher, then Headteacher in a school for the poor. After many years of teaching she left to set up and run two Catholic hospitals.

At a time when many hospitals refused certain patients, Marianne ordered that hers treat anyone in need, regardless of their religion, race or class.

After this she was asked to move hundreds of miles away to help care for a colony of lepers. Little was known about leprosy at this time and people were terrified of catching the disease.

But Marianne selflessly agreed to help and spent the next 30 years living with and caring for the lepers and their families. Marianne died in 1918 and was made a saint in 2012.

Stop to check the suggestions of the volunteer students. Ask fellow students to grade the volunteer's performance and ask if any adjectives are lacking. Then continue with the next inspiring candidate.

Missionaries also need the qualities regarded as inspiring, for as their name indicates they devote their lives to the mission that Jesus set all his followers - to take his love to everyone, everywhere, most especially those who struggle and suffer.

Because of this, missionaries serve in areas most choose to avoid, places of poverty and conflict. This is what a 24-year-old teacher called Sean Devereux did when he travelled from England to war-torn Liberia to work with the Salesian missionaries.

Inspired by the example of Christ, Sean was not afraid to speak truth to power. On one occasion he was imprisoned after pleading for the release of a child-soldier. On another he was beaten after confronting a soldier who was stealing food from refugees.

During his time working in war zones, Sean refused to stay quiet about the injustices he saw. His speaking out angered those in power. Due to this, Sean was assassinated by a hired gunman. He was 28 years old.

Again, stop to check the suggestions of the volunteer students. Ask fellow students to grade the volunteer's performance and ask if any A4 adjectives are lacking.

Pope Francis wants us to remember with pride, saints and missionaries like Marianne and Sean, so that we might be inspired by their actions and motivated by the mission they shared.

There are many ways in which we are each called by God to fulfil this same mission. We may not serve in war zones or run hospitals in far flung places. But we do have to find our own way to go out and share God's love. Pope Francis offers some wise words about this. He says:

'Imitating the Saints does not mean copying their lifestyle and their way of living holiness... You have to discover who you are and develop your own way of being holy, whatever others may say or think... becoming more fully yourself, becoming what the Lord... wished to create.' *Christus Vivit*, 162

Today we began by thinking about people who inspire us, and we conclude with Pope Francis encouraging you to inspire others. You can make a difference by being who God created you to be and by fulfilling your mission - to share Christ's love in the world. A good place to start is by recognising within yourselves those inspiring adjectives we've considered today. Then developing them daily, through regular practise.

Let's ask for the grace to do that today as we say together, *The Lord's Prayer*, or *your school prayer*.

Fundraising is a brilliant way to involve everyone in raising money for Missio. Your support will enable missionaries to work alongside communities globally that are poor or in need, regardless of their background or belief. Below is a simple fundraising idea:

Inspirational Staff & Students: Appeal for members of your school community to challenge themselves, inspire others and raise funds for Missio. That could be performing a ticket entry gig, having their hair or beard shaved off, running a marathon, climbing a mountain, learning to swim or cycle.

Please share your fundraising events with us @missioUK adding the hashtag #missiontocare