

Radical Stories of Forgiveness

After the participants are seated, paraphrase these examples of forgiveness that are radical or out of the norm. Add some other recent examples from the news that are in the same vein. Also, ask the participants to share examples they are aware of. Say:

A **Connecticut minister** (write) performed the marriage of the man convicted of murdering his son in an apartment house shooting nine years before. The minister said, "At the trial, I heard him apologize. That deflated my anger. I decided I needed to forgive him if I was to move on with my own life." The two men had communicated while the killer served nine years in jail. After he was released, the minister performed his marriage.

Julie (write) left her house at 8:03 on a summer morning to get some milk for her baby brother's breakfast. At 8:07 she was struck by a car when the driver did not see the stop sign because he was wiping spilled coffee off his lap. The twelve-year-old died in her mother's arms at 8:25. The mother gathered herself and embraced the weeping driver, telling him that she forgave him. The driver and his family have since shared many meals with Julie's mother and father and five brothers and sisters. "Forgiveness is part of the healing process," Julie's mother says.

Fr. Lawrence Jenco (write) was kidnapped and imprisoned for many months while in Lebanon in the 1980s. During that time he was tortured and deprived. Once, he was wrapped in tape from head to foot. Finally he was released. A guard came to him and said, "Do you forgive me?" Father Jenco answered, "Do you forgive me? There were times I hated you and did not love you. Do you love me?" When Father Jenco returned home, he said, "When I was a prisoner I kept thinking about the words of Jesus as he hung on the cross: 'Father, forgive them, they know not what they do'" (Luke 23:34).

The **Gonsalvo family** (write) faced eight years of persecution from their next door neighbors, the Smiths. The crime? Mr. Gonsalvo is Puerto Rican, Mrs. Gonsalvo is African American. The neighbors called them names, littered their property, and harassed their children because they didn't want to live next to a mixed race couple. When Mrs. Smith suffered a heart attack, Mr. Gonsalvo revived her with CPR before the ambulance arrived. Then he held off looters who tried to steal from her apartment when she was taken to the ambulance. "It was the right thing to do," he said. "It was my way of expressing the absence of r in my heart."