

MOVIE-BASED DISCUSSION GUIDE – LEADER’S GUIDE

ERA FILMS & KINEPOLIS GROUP

MOLOKAI: THE STORY OF FATHER DAMIEN A FILM BY PAUL COX

He relentlessly gave of himself and served the lepers who had been exiled to this barren island, even at the cost of his own life.

This discussion guide assists the learner in meeting the following religion curriculum standards for the Diocese of Honolulu:

Standard 1:

- Present an understanding of the human need for God based on revelation and faith.
 - Recognize that God’s creative love is reflected in our human need for truth and happiness.

Standard 5:

- Illustrate a basic understanding of Church.
 - Explain the names, images, and symbols used for “Church”.
 - Recognize that the Church is the vehicle through which God’s plan is revealed for all humanity.
 - Define the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation for humanity.
 - Explain the relationship of the Roman Catholic Church to other Christian churches and other faiths.

Standard 6:

- Demonstrate an appreciation for prayer as the primary way we come to know God and the community as the context for sharing faith within and beyond the self.
 - Define the concept of “Christian faithful”.
 - Explain the role of hierarchy in the life of the Church.
 - Explain the Christian involvement in the life, mission, and work of the Church, family, and community as a means of fulfillment of God’s plan of salvation.
 - Explore the meaning of death for the Christian believer.
 - Define the Eucharist as the most viable expression of Church as community.
 - Relate that the Church is a community of God’s people called to continual reform and renewal.

Standard 7:

- Exercise responsible stewardship for the gift of creation.
 - Define the Catholic understanding of human work.
 - Teach the Christian responsibility to share time, talent, and treasure.

Standard 8:

- Demonstrate the importance of sacraments, with an emphasis on the centrality of the Eucharist, in the life of Catholics.

- Describe the sacraments at the service of communion toward the salvation of others.

Standard 9:

- Examine the variety of Christian vocations as ways to respond to the baptismal call.
 - Describe the term ‘vocation’ and identify vocation as a call from God – not just a choice.

Standard 11:

- Apply Catholic principles to interpersonal relations.
 - Recognize the relationships between love of God, love of self, and love of others.
 - Articulate an understanding of human sexuality.
 - Define the human responsibility to bear witness to the truth.

Standard 12:

- Know, critique, and apply social justice principles to personal and societal situations.
 - Describe the communal character of the human being.
 - Define the Catholic understanding of authority, the common good, and the role they play in the life of the human being.
 - Explain the understanding of stewardship and the ownership of goods (private vs. public good).

Standard 13:

- Engage in service to the community.
 - Explain the responsibility of people to participate in society.
 - Articulate that service is an essential element of discipleship.

Standard 14:

- Develop a moral conscience informed by Church teachings.
 - Explain the position of the Church on the sources of morality and the morality of human acts.
 - Explain the Catholic understanding of justification, grace, and merit.

Part One: MISSION

Witness to Jesus and bring the compassionate love of Jesus and Mary to the world.

View film/dvd chapters 1, 2, and 3

The film opens with Damien laboring alongside native Hawaiians to construct thatched homes for their village. Breaking through the dense foliage, a young Hawaiian woman runs toward Damien and pleads with him to hide her from Department of Health officials. As the next few scenes unfold, we witness the health officials' callous, animal-like treatment of persons who were suspected of having contracted leprosy.

In his compassion for the people banished to [Kalawao, Moloka'i](#), [Bishop Maigret](#) asks his priests if any are willing to volunteer to minister to the people of Kalawao. Damien is the first to volunteer.

Upon his arrival at the settlement, Damien is overwhelmed by what he sees. The people with leprosy were thrust into a hopeless situation: The Catholic mission church was long abandoned and in a state of severe disrepair; the sick and dying were forced to live in poorly constructed huts that did little to shelter them from the elements; people languished on mats laid upon the dirt floor of the dying shed, suffering because they lacked proper medicine to help ease their enormous pain; there was little or no access medical care.

Condemned and isolated by society, the village lifestyle eroded into denigration.

Bishop Maigret, in an effort to protect Damien, had warned him not to touch people. Yet when Damien witnessed the suffering of the people, he nonetheless ministered to them with an extraordinary kindness rooted in his firm belief in God.

[Q] Why did Damien volunteer so readily to go to Kalawao?

- Some of his parishioners had already been sent to Molokai; he felt he knew the people, had established relationships with them
- He was aware of the mission of the [Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary](#) to contemplate, live, and proclaim the compassionate love of Jesus and Mary to the world.
- He felt great love for the people and felt that he was one of them

[Q] Why did Damien respond in this way?

- He is responding to the immediate needs in front of him the way Jesus responded to those in need.
- He feels the loneliness of the people, especially the very sick and dying

- He was imbued with compassionate love of Jesus and Mary for the people
- Because of his faith in God, he did not fear death

[Q] Damien embraced all people, even those with open sores. How did his response give witness to Jesus through his compassionate love of Jesus and Mary?

- Like Jesus, Damien believed that the spirit of God resided in all persons.
- Like Jesus, Damien had great compassion for the people with leprosy and wanted them to be saved.

PROJECT: Reflect on someone who may be alienated. How can you reach out in the spirit of Damien to that alienated person?

ESSAY: “Witness to Jesus” is the chosen motto for [Most Reverend Clarence \(Larry\) Silva](#), Bishop of Honolulu. What do you understand by this motto? How can you actively participate in witnessing to Jesus?

Part Two: MESSAGE

We Are Made in the Image and Likeness of God

View film/dvd chapters 4, 5, 6, 7

Upon his arrival in Kalawao, Moloka'i, Damien traveled throughout the village, showing great compassion for the persons suffering with the ravaging effects of leprosy. Damien witnessed the plight of the very ill, taking in the stench of their open sores and the heart-wrenching wailing for those suffering from sharp, excruciating pain from dead and decaying flesh.

In their profound loneliness, isolation, despair, and affliction, a moral code of conduct seemed useless, as exhibited in the activities that took place in the "mad house". Damien responded by preaching and living out Jesus' message of compassion and hope for all persons.

Bishop Maigret, in an effort to protect Damien, had warned him not to touch people. However, through his deep faith in God and nourished by the Eucharist, Damien found the courage to minister to the people of Kalawao with extraordinary kindness. Because he believed that all persons were made in the image and likeness of God, Damien reached out, made simple physical contact, and began to restore the dignity of each man, woman, and child. Slowly, the village of Kalawao began to develop into a community.

[Q] In Damien's homily, he addresses the congregation as "my fellow lepers". Why was it important for him to use inclusive language?

- It was a guarantee for stability for the community. They knew they could claim Damien as their own.
- It was a reflection of his respect for them.
- By being one with the community he reclaimed their dignity as a human person.
- It gave them a sense of community.
- He believed that all the patients were God's children and deserved to be treated with dignity and respect.

While assisting a resident to plant a wind break, Damien asks why more villagers do not plant. The man replies, "To plant, you must believe you will be strong enough to harvest." Damien responds, "Yeah, but you're planting..." The man replies, "I plant because you plant."

[Q] Through this exchange, it is clear that Damien planted not only physical but spiritual messages. What were the physical and spiritual messages Damien shared with the patients?

- That faith God and regular participation in the Eucharist creates a community of faith that offers hope, salvation, and eases loneliness.
- That they have to be responsible for their own well-being and the care of the community.
- That while Damien plants seeds of hope, the patients were invited to participate in that hope.

- By planting together, the harvest benefits not just one person but the whole community

[Q] Why did Damien fight so hard to overcome the obstacles he faced?

- He believed that being marginalized by the government was unacceptable – the patients were human beings made in the image and likeness of God.
- People were in desperate need of care, equitable treatment, and justice
- He believed that acting in solidarity with other government agencies, the patients would receive the care they deserved.

Activity: “Image and Likeness of God”

Create a collage that depicts images of persons shunned by society.

- Describe the persons you chose to include in your collage.
- In what way(s) are they shunned by society?
- Inspired by Damien, how might we respond differently to these persons?

Part Three: LEGACY

Faith in God and the courage to act.

This section may be used upon completion of the entire video. An alternate resource to the video is the following site: <http://www.allformary.org/AmericanSaints/leper.htm>

Post-video reflections and challenges

1. During the beatification homily, Pope John Paul II said, “Holiness is not perfection according to human criteria; it is not reserved for a small number of exceptional persons. It is for everyone; it is the Lord who brings us to holiness, when we are willing to collaborate in the salvation of the world for the glory of God, despite our sin and our sometimes rebellious temperament.” [Q] *Reflecting upon the words of Pope John Paul II, how might Damien be described as a holy man?*
2. Damien belonged to the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts whose charism is to proclaim the compassionate love of Jesus and Mary. [Q] *In what ways did Damien embody this charism?*
3. Damien paid attention to the needs of the people with leprosy in Kalawao. Although ministering at the local level, his efforts led to a global response. [Q] *What can you do at the local level that may have a global impact?*
4. Damien had a vision for spiritual and civil peace in Kalawao and the courage to act upon his vision. [Q] *What improvements was he able to accomplish in the daily spiritual and civil lives of the people? What vision for spiritual or civil peace do we hold for today? How can the Church fulfill its prophetic role in support of this vision?*

From AmericanCatholic.org

May 10

**Blessed Damien of Molokai
(1840-1889)**

When Joseph de Veuster was born in Tremelo, Belgium, in 1840, few people in Europe had any firsthand knowledge of leprosy (Hansen's disease). By the time he died at the age of 49, people all over the world knew about this disease because of him. They knew that human compassion could soften the ravages of this disease.

Forced to quit school at age 13 to work on the family farm, six years later Joseph entered the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, taking the name of a fourth-century physician and martyr. When his brother Pamphile, a priest in the same congregation, fell ill and was unable to go to the Hawaiian Islands as assigned, Damien quickly volunteered in his place. In May 1864, two months after arriving in his new mission, Damien was ordained a priest in Honolulu and assigned to the island of Hawaii.

In 1873, he went to the Hawaiian government's leper colony on the island of Molokai, set up seven years earlier. Part of a team of four chaplains taking that assignment for three months each year, Damien soon volunteered to remain permanently, caring for the people's physical, medical and spiritual needs. In time, he became their most effective advocate to obtain promised government support.

Soon the settlement had new houses and a new church, school and orphanage. Morale improved considerably. A few years later he succeeded in getting the Franciscan Sisters of Syracuse, led by Mother Marianne Kope, to help staff this colony in Kalaupapa.

Damien contracted Hansen's disease and died of its complications. As requested, he was buried in Kalaupapa, but in 1936 the Belgian government succeeded in having his body moved to Belgium. Part of Damien's body was returned to his beloved Hawaiian brothers and sisters after his beatification in 1995.

When Hawaii became a state in 1959, it selected Damien as one of its two representatives in the Statuary Hall at the U.S. Capitol.

Comment:

Some people thought Damien was a hero for going to Molokai and others thought he was crazy. When a Protestant clergyman wrote that Damien was guilty of immoral behavior, Robert Louis Stevenson vigorously defended him in an "Open Letter to Dr. Hyde."

VOCABULARY

Evangelize

Charism

condemnation

Denigration

[Hansen's disease \(leprosy\)](#)

Inclusive language

Vocation

[Catholic Social Teaching](#) terms:

- alienated
- marginalized
- solidarity