Mission Together

Five Fact Assembly: Venerable Mary Ward

LEADER'S NOTES: NOT TO BE READ OUT LOUD

As Christians, we all have a mission: to share God's love with the whole world. No one is too young or too small to take part. Through *Mission Together,* children everywhere pray for and share with one another in a unique exchange of love and friendship. By praying for one another and sharing what we have, we belong to God's worldwide family.

This assembly focuses on Venerable Mary Ward; a courageous missionary and educator with an extraordinary story! N.B. Venerable, is the title given to a candidate for sainthood.

SLIDE TWO

Today our assembly focuses on an incredibly brave and faithful lady called Mary Ward.

As you can see on the screen, Mary's official title is *Venerable* Mary Ward. Venerable is a title given by the Pope to someone who is on their way to becoming a saint.

Becoming a saint isn't easy. A person must have lived a holy life, and holiness requires courage and resilience, as well as great faith and love. Let's find out why Mary is on her path to becoming a saint.

SLIDE THREE

FACT ONE: Mary lived at a time when it was against the law to go to Mass!

Mary was born in Yorkshire, England, in 1585, at a time when it was against the law for Catholics to go to Mass or receive any of the sacraments. There were serious punishments if Catholics broke the law. For example, Mary's grandma was put in prison for 14 years for attending secret Masses. Priests were even put to death if they were caught sharing the sacraments with people.

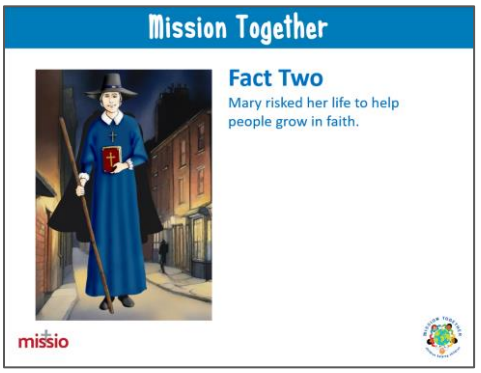
Despite all the challenges, Mary was baptised Catholic, made her first confession and first holy communion, and continued to grow in faith by praying and reading the Bible every day.

SLIDE FOUR

Question: **What can help us to grow in faith?**

Possible answers: *Talking and listening to God in prayer. Reading and listening to the Bible, especially the Gospel as the Gospels tell us all about Jesus. By going to Church and, if we can, by receiving Holy Communion.*

SLIDE FIVE



FACT TWO: Mary risked her life to help people grow in faith.

During her childhood Mary's love for Jesus grew very strong, and so, as a teenager, she decided that she was going to become a nun. A nun is a woman who makes a special vow to dedicate her life to God through prayer and service. Becoming a nun wasn't possible in England, so Mary had to move to France where she lived inside a convent. A convent is a building where nuns live together as sisters.

In Mary's day, nuns were not allowed to leave their convent at all, not even to visit family and friends. Through prayer and reflection Mary came to understand that this wasn't the life God wanted for her, so she left the convent and returned to England to serve and support other Catholics who were struggling there.

Returning to England was very dangerous and Mary knew she had to be courageous. If she was caught helping Catholics to grow in faith, she could be imprisoned or put to death! Despite the risks, Mary bravely chose to follow the mission that Jesus gave to all Christians, that is to share the message of God's love and mercy with everyone, even enemies.

As a missionary in such dangerous times, Mary often had to travel in disguise to share the good news of Jesus far and wide. For strength and guidance she prayed daily. One day in prayer Mary heard God ask her to start a new group of nuns. These nuns wouldn't stay in a convent, they would be free to go out into the world and to bring God's love wherever there was need.

SLIDE SIX

Question: **How can courage help us to share our faith with others?**

Possible answers: *Courage helps us to say that we pray or go to church around people who may not do so, even around people who may find praying or going to church strange.*

Courage also helps us to do the right thing, e.g. being kind to, and sticking up for, someone who is being bullied. Being kind is one way we share and witness God's love in the world.

SLIDE SEVEN

FACT THREE: Mary made long and dangerous journeys to Rome on foot – three times!

To start her new order of nuns, Mary travelled to Belgium, a country north of France. There she gathered around her a group of young women who all wanted to share God's love in the world as Mary did.

One way they shared God's love was by establishing schools. Mary understood that God wanted all his children, rich and poor, boys and girls, to grow in wisdom. But in her day, girls were rarely sent to school. So, Mary and her nuns started girls' schools across Europe. The schools were a big success and many admired the nuns' faith and courage.

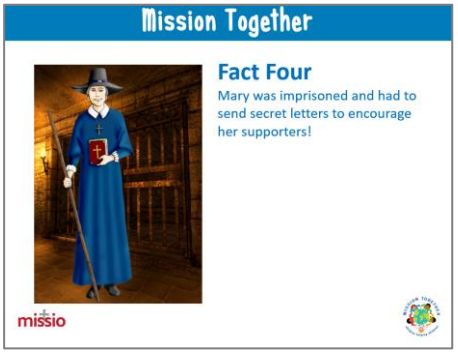
Sadly, some priests thought nuns should remain locked in convents. Mary was determined to persuade the Pope that God had called her nuns to help the poor, educate children, and share the message of Jesus in the world, so she walked over 1500 miles on foot, across great snowy mountains, to meet the Pope in Rome.

SLIDE EIGHT

***Question:* How can you share the love and message of Jesus with others?**

Possible answers: *By following the example of Jesus and being respectful, fair, forgiving, kind, and welcoming. By sharing some of the things we learn about Jesus with our family and friends. By leading prayers in school.*

SLIDE NINE



FACT FOUR: Mary was imprisoned and had to send secret letters to encourage her supporters.

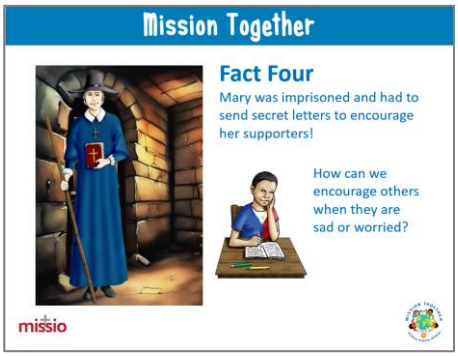
Mary made the long journey to Rome three times in her efforts to persuade the Pope that she was following God's will. Sadly, none of these efforts worked.

In fact, the Pope was so annoyed with Mary for refusing to shut her nuns in a convent that he closed Mary's schools,

ordered Mary's nuns to go home, and imprisoned Mary in a small, cold cell in Germany. There she was not allowed to speak or write to anyone.

In prison Mary became very ill, but through prayer and faith she believed that God would help. Following the example of Jesus, Mary forgave all those who had put her in prison and focused her attention on helping others. She decided to encourage her nuns by writing secret letters in lemon juice and having them smuggled out of prison!

SLIDE TEN



Question: **How can we encourage others when they are sad or worried?**

Possible answers: *By listening to them. By supporting them through our words and actions. By writing cards, letters, or even an encouraging poem. By praying for them, and letting them know we are keeping them in prayer.*

SLIDE ELEVEN

FACT FIVE: Mary's faith and trust in God has helped millions of children around the world!

Eventually the Pope released Mary from prison, but her health remained poor. Sometime after, Mary returned to England where she died surrounded by her nuns near her home city of York.

Following her death, these nuns continued to follow the plan God had made known to Mary. They formed new schools, helped those living in poverty, and they shared the message of Jesus with the world.

In time more women joined them, and today almost 400 years after Mary died, thousands of women continue to do the same.

Despite all the challenges she faced, Mary never lost faith in Jesus. She trusted that good would come from all her efforts to share God's love. Because of this, millions of children around the world have attended schools set up by Mary's nuns.

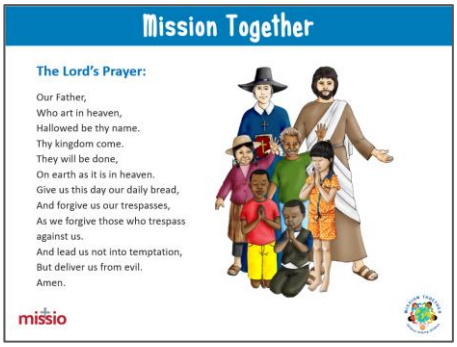
Mary Ward's foundation exists today worldwide under the names Congregation of Jesus, and Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Loreto Sisters). These sisters are in forty-two countries across five continents. There are now more than 200 schools in her name that have educated around 3 million children between them.

SLIDE TWELVE

Question: **How can we help children around the world?**

Possible answers: *By supporting Mission Together through praying for and sharing with those who need support. By seeing everyone as God's sons and daughters, and so as our sisters and brothers. By praying the Mission Rosary.*

SLIDE THIRTEEN



From being a young girl, prayer was very important to Mary. Prayer brough Mary closer to God and helped her to help others. The charity Mission Together asks children around the world to pray every day to help other children, especially those in need of support.

Let us finish our assembly today doing just this by saying the prayer Jesus taught us, a prayer that reminds us we all belong to God's family and that Mary would have said every day too.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
They will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil. Amen.

Fundraising is a brilliant way to involve everyone in raising money for Mission Together. There are more ways to fundraise than we can possibly count! Below are two ideas but you can find other ways to get involved throughout the year by visiting our webpage https://missiontogether.org.uk/fundraising-ideas/

Ideas for Spring term

Lent through a Lens: challenge pupils to capture images of springtime. Charge for entry and provide a prize for the winner(s). You could introduce different categories e.g. wildlife, nature, people. You could even have a category for grown up competitors!

Easter bonnet competition: charge pupils to enter a competition for the best Easter bonnet. Prizes for the most fabulous fashionista creations! Alternatively you could get everyone involved in egg painting or Easter cake designs, and sell them after for extra fundraising!