

Saint Oscar Romero

Teacher Activities

Activity one: Set-up note-taking mind map

The purpose of this activity is to assist students in developing the skills of recording research in preparation for collating the information to create a piece of creative writing.

- Ask students to set-up an individual mind map titled 'St Oscar Romero' either on their device or in notebooks.
- After each activity have students record information they have learnt about St Oscar Romero into their mind map.

Activity two: Getting to know St Oscar Romero

- Ask students what they know (if anything) about El Salvador and about St Oscar Romero.
- Read the *Saint Oscar Romero Biography* on page 4 and 5.
- As students read the biography, ask them to write six questions using the question words: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
- Let students research the answers to their questions, using the internet.
- Together, share what students have found out. Check that students now understand something of the situation in which St Oscar Romero lived: majority living in poverty; rich and powerful elite maintaining the status quo; murders, disappearances and oppression. Draw out that St Oscar Romero stood up for human life and dignity despite the political attitudes of his time.
- Students record what they have learnt about St Oscar Romero into their mind map.

Activity three: Being counter-cultural in Scripture

Texts to use: Ex.23:6-7; Ps. 82:2-4; Prov.16:18-20; Amos 8:4-7; Micah 6:8; Matt. 5:2-10; Matt. 10:42; Matt.25:44-45; Lk.4:18-19; Lk.12:4-7; James 2:1-4.

- Allow students to pick a scripture text at random out of a hat. Challenge them to
 - a) rewrite it in their own words
 - b) give one example of how someone might act on that text if they were living in an unjust society where the rich and powerful were forcing people living in poverty to remain poor and killing those who resisted.
- Share some of the students' answers.
- Remind students of St Oscar Romero's life. Together identify which of these texts he lived out, and how.
- Students record what they have learnt about St Oscar Romero into their mind map.

Activity four: What did St Oscar Romero have to say?

Ask students to read over the quotes below and quietly reflect on the questions listed. After 10min of quiet reflection, generate a class discussion on student's key ideas generated from the questions.

- Which quotation appeals to you most, and why?
- How do you think St Oscar Romero would define 'sin'?
- Give examples of sin that need to be uprooted from today's society, political order or economy.
- Does Church teaching reflect a commitment to challenge the sinful environment of our world, even to the point of others'/your own discomfort?
- In your school or local community, is there an evident commitment to challenge injustice and defend the poorest and most vulnerable?
- Are you willing to change when your part in supporting injustice is pointed out?

"One must not love oneself so much as to avoid getting involved in the risks of life that history demands of us; and those that fend off danger will lose their lives."

*"When the church hears the cry of the oppressed it cannot but denounce the social structures that give rise to and perpetuate the misery from which the cry arises."
(8/6/76)*

"Defence of human rights, equality and freedom... is a matter of policy... rooted in the gospel."

"This is the mission entrusted to the church, a hard mission, to uproot sins from history, to uproot sins from the political order, to uproot sins from the economy, to uproot sins wherever they are." (15/1/78)

"Aspire not to have more, but to be more."

"The gospel is the great defender and proclaimer of all the great fundamental rights of the person: the fundamental right to... food and water, shelter, protection, medicine, education, work, rest, freedom, respect, dignity, fullness of life."

"Peace is not the product of terror or fear. Peace is not the silence of cemeteries. Peace is not the silent result of violent repression. Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all. Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity. It is right and it is duty."

"The violence we preach is not the violence of the sword, the violence of hatred. It is the violence of love, of brotherhood, the violence that wills to beat weapons into sickles for work."

"Let us not tire of preaching love; it is the force that will overcome the world."

"If we really want an effective end to violence we must remove the violence that lies at the root of all violence: structural violence, social injustice, exclusion of citizens from the management of the country, repression. All this is what constitutes the primal cause, from which the rest flows naturally."

Activity five: Class discussion

As a class discuss the following questions:

- Why do you think St Oscar Romero was chosen as a patron saint of Caritas Internationalis?
- How could the work of Caritas Australia be considered 'counter-cultural'?
- Students record their reflections on what they can learn from St Oscar Romero into their mind map.

Activity six: How can you be counter-cultural?

Using the [Think-Pair-Share model](#), have students consider what 'counter-cultural' actions they can take for the common good. For example: purchasing second-hand clothes or making their own clothes instead of fast fashion.

Activity seven: Consolidate learning activity

Consolidate learning on St Oscar Romero by completing *either* one of these activities.

St Oscar Romero Profile

Students use the information they have learnt to create a profile on St Oscar Romero highlighting key life events and his work. Students may include headings like; key life events, working for the common good, life in El Salvador, quotes, etc, and include pictures of St Oscar Romero.



Credit: Shutterstock



Credit: Shutterstock

St Oscar Romero Article

Using the information learnt about St Oscar Romero students write a newspaper report that highlights his life, promotes his counter-cultural ways and encourages others to be counter-cultural on major social issues of today. Present ideas attractively and creatively.

Saint Oscar Romero Biography

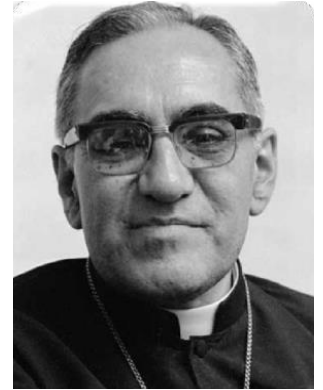
Early life

Oscar Romero was born into a large family on August 15, 1917 in El Salvador. Although they had more money than many of their neighbours, Oscar's family had neither electricity nor running water in their small home, and the children slept on the floor.

Oscar's parents could not afford to send him to school after the age of twelve, so he went to work as an apprentice carpenter. He quickly showed great skills, but Oscar was already determined to become a priest. He entered the seminary at the age of fourteen and was ordained a priest when he was 25 in 1942.

Recognising the power of radio to reach the people, he convinced five radio stations to broadcast his Sunday sermons to peasant farmers who believed they were unwelcome in the churches.

In 1970, he became Auxiliary Bishop in San Salvador. In 1974 he became Bishop of Santiago de Maria. At this time, Oscar Romero was described as a conservative, not wanting to break from tradition. He supported the hierarchy who encouraged conformity. He was uncomfortable with social action that challenged political leaders.



Growing awareness

During his two years as Bishop of Santiago de Maria, Romero was horrified to find that children were dying because their parents could not pay for simple medicines. He began using the resources of the diocese and his own personal resources to help the poor, but he knew that simple charity was not enough. He wrote in his diary that people who are poor should not just receive handouts from the Church or the government but participate in changing their lives for the future.

In 1977, Romero became Archbishop of San Salvador, the capital city. The situation in El Salvador was becoming worse and he couldn't remain silent any longer. The military were killing the Salvadorian people - especially those demanding justice such as teachers, nuns and priests - including Romero's good friend, Fr Rutilio Grande. Thousands of people began to go missing. Romero demanded that the President of El Salvador thoroughly investigate the killings, but he failed to do so.

Voice of the voiceless

In his actions and words, Oscar Romero demanded a peace that could only be found by ensuring people had access to basic needs and their rights upheld. He raised awareness globally about the people in his country who had been killed or "disappeared". When he visited the Vatican in 1979, Oscar Romero presented the Pope with seven detailed reports of murder, torture, and kidnapping throughout El Salvador.

In 1979, the number of people being killed rose to more than 3000 per month. Oscar Romero had nothing left to offer his people except faith and hope. He continued to use the radio broadcast of his Sunday sermons to tell people what was happening throughout the country, to talk about the role of the Church and to offer his listeners hope that they would not suffer and die in vain.

Martyrdom

On March 23, 1980, after reporting the previous week's deaths and disappearances, Oscar Romero began to speak directly to soldiers and policemen: *"I beg you, I implore you, I order you... in the name of God, stop the repression!"* The following evening, while saying Mass in the chapel of Divine Providence Hospital, Archbishop Oscar Romero was shot by a paid assassin.

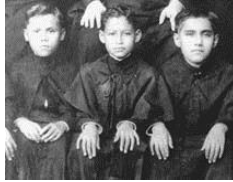
Only moments before his death, Romero spoke these prophetic words: *"Those who surrender to the service of the poor through love of Christ will live like the grain of wheat that dies... The harvest comes because of the grain that dies."* Like many great leaders who have fought for truth, Oscar Romero was killed and became a martyr, but his voice could not be silenced. He is a symbol of hope in a country that has suffered poverty, injustice and violence.

1917 -----> 1930 -----> 1937 ----->



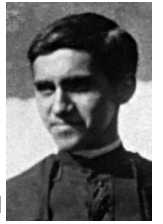
Oscar Ranulfo Romero is born into a family of ten on 15 August 1917 in Ciudad Barrios, El Salvador. His father is a postman and sometimes the young Romero helps his father post letters. Oscar learns to be a carpenter, making tables, chairs and doors.

He goes to junior seminary when he is 14 years old.



When his mother is ill and they need money for medicine, Oscar leaves the seminary for three months and **works in the gold mine** in Potosi. He earns about 8c a day.

Oscar goes to Rome to study theology and stays there during World War II. His father and brother die while he is in Rome.



1942 ---> 1944 -----> 1967 ---> 1970 ----->

He is ordained a priest on 4 April 1942. He returns home in 1944 and celebrates his first Mass in Ciudad Barrios with his remaining family.



For 20 years he is **Director of the San Miguel Diocese**. His mother lives there with him. She dies in 1961.



He becomes famous for his sermons.

He also does a lot of parish work like visiting prisons, organising catechism classes and working with the Catholic agency, Caritas, to provide food to the poor.

He is made a Monsignor and moves to San Salvador. There he meets Fr. Rutilio Grande who becomes a good friend.



He is made a Bishop on 21 June and invites El Salvador's president to the ceremony. People are angry that he seems to be supporting a government that is oppressing the people.



1974 ---> 1975 ---> 1977 ----->

A month after he becomes **Bishop of Santiago de Maria**, the army kill three people in the village of Tres Calles. He comforts the families and writes to President Molina to protest about the murders.

In 1975 he writes a memo **criticising some priests for being too political**. He also says that the way to solve El Salvador's problems is to work with the government.

In February 1977 he **becomes Archbishop of San Salvador**. Some people in the Church and some rich people are happy because they think he will stop the priests from helping the poor.



On 12 March 1977, **Fr. Rutilio Grande and two people he is travelling with are shot and killed**. Romero cancels all Masses the following Sunday except for one in front of the cathedral for 100,000 people. He refuses to attend any official government events until the murder is solved.

1980 -----> 2009 ----->

Despite receiving death threats, **Mons. Romero denounces the government and the army** for their repressive policies: *"In the name of God, and in the name of this suffering people whose cries rise to heaven more loudly*



each day, I beg you, I implore you, I order you... in the name of God, stop the repression!" (23.03.80)



On 24 March 1980 a shot kills Romero as he says Mass. Thousands attend to his funeral. The army fires into the crowd. Thirty people die and hundreds are injured. An investigation in 1992 finds that ex-mayor, General Roberto D'Aubuisson, ordered Romero's death.

2009 ----->

Romero lives on in his people. On 15 March 2009 Mauricio Funes is elected president of El Salvador.

He announces that his government will be inspired by Romero and the "option for the poor" (considering the poorest and most vulnerable first).



2015 ---> 2018 ----->

Pope Francis declares Romero a martyr - someone who has been killed out of hatred of the faith. This marked the beginning of his journey to becoming a Saint. Romero was beatified later this year.

March 2018, **Pope Francis approved a miracle** needed for Romero to be canonized a Saint. A 34-year-old pregnant Salvadoran woman was cured from terminal illness. Her family and Church community prayed to Oscar Romero seeking his intercession.



14th October 2018, Oscar Romero was canonised a Saint by Pope Francis.