



Saint of the Month: Heaven's Heroes



Blessed Irene Stefani
October 31

Goal: To provide a lesson for children about a saint—or someone on the path to sainthood - who exemplifies a deep relationship with God and the ability to share it with others.

Materials Needed: This lesson plan, accompanying story, and any necessary materials for follow-up activities.

Objectives:

1. To assist children in developing the understanding that all of God's people are called to a life of holiness.
2. To help children respond appropriately to the question: What is a saint?
One who:
 - is proclaimed by the Church, after their death, to have lived a life of holiness
 - teaches others about Jesus by their example
 - lives like Jesus
3. To introduce one of our Church's holy people, Blessed Irene Stefani, telling as much of the story that you feel will interest the children at your grade level
4. To learn that Sister Irene is Blessed because she lived in a way that respected the Gospel of Jesus
5. To learn that we are called by God to share the Gospel with our lives
6. To help the children develop listening skills

Procedure:

1. Prepare the children to listen to Sister Irene Stefani's story. (Have map posted or globe available)
2. Read, or have read, the attached story of Blessed Irene Stefani. Elaborate/abbreviate as necessary for time constraints or age level of listeners.
3. **Pray: *Blessed Irene, in your lifetime you were known as the angel of charity. Help us to follow your example of always thinking of others who are in need. Lead us to listen to the voice of God, our Father, as you did, so that we may be of service to others in this world. Amen.***
4. Use the follow-up questions (below)
5. Present follow-up activity below (optional). Any follow-up activity can be substituted.

Blessed Irene Stefani

Aurelia Mercede Stefani was born in August of 1891 in the small Italian village of Anfo. She was one of twelve children, five of whom did not survive infancy. As was the custom of the time, Mercede, as she was called at home, was baptized the very next day. Her father was an innkeeper who also played the organ at the parish church. Her mother was a homemaker who excelled in embroidery. Both were very committed Catholics and they raised their children to accept life's joys and sorrows both as being part of God's plan.

Mercede was an intelligent girl and a good student. When she was just thirteen, however, she was forced to withdraw from school to help care for her mother who had fallen ill. Her beloved mother died three years later and Mercede took on the a share of duties of homemaker and caring for her younger siblings with her sister, Emma, who also helped their father run the inn. Throughout these times, the family's faith never wavered. Mercede made

time for not only her own catechism classes, but also to reach out to teach children in her village who were unable to get to class—many because their own families were so poor that the children were at work during class time.

Soon, young Mercedes felt the call from God to be a missionary Sister, something her father resisted at first. With his blessing, she joined the Consolata Missionary Sisters in 1911 and became a professed member in 1914, just before the outbreak of World War I. She took Irene as her Religious name.

Sister Irene was sent to Kenya as a missionary and soon found herself assigned to be a Red Cross nurse in military hospitals. She cared for many Kenyans called “Carriers” who were forced to be porters for the soldiers, carrying their goods and belongings between battle sites. The work was grueling and many died from the severe treatment and hardships endured. While giving them comfort for their physical ailments, Sister would also give them spiritual comfort, telling them of the healing love of Jesus Christ. Her dedicated service led the local Kenyans to give her the name ‘Nyaatha’—which means Mother of Mercy. Sister Irene was also known to walk many miles with her bag of medicine to help anyone who was sick; she wore large combat boots to protect her feet. These would become known as her “Boots of Glory”.

At the end of the war, Sister Irene became a teacher, although she continued to tend to the local villagers’ health problems. Though feeling unwell herself, she answered one such call in October of 1930 to attend to a man stricken by the plague. She died nine days later, prompting some of the villagers to remark, “Love has killed her.”

Blessed Irene Stefani was beatified in Nyeri, Kenya on May, 23, 2014. Her Memorial is October 31.

Follow-up Questions: (add, omit, re-word as appropriate for your grade level)

1. Blessed Irene Stefani left her home and family to serve people she had never met when she was only twenty years old. Why did she do this? Do you think you could do the same? Why or why not?
2. Blessed Irene was known as the Mother of Mercy. Which Works of Mercy did she show to those around her?
3. In 1989, 270 people—many of them children—were hiding in a church seeking protection from the civil war in neighboring Mozambique. They had only the holy water in a small font to survive on and prayed to Sister Irene to multiply it and make it last. For three days, all had enough to drink, even enough to bathe a baby born during that period. Imagine being one of those children. How would you feel? For what would you pray?

Follow-up Activities:

Younger students:

1. Blessed Irene’s Memorial is on Halloween. Donate some of your Halloween candy to a local hospital or clinic for children who are unable to go trick-or-treating.

Older students:

1. When Sister Irene was beatified in Kenya, many people walked for miles to attend the Mass. Organize and host a walk-a-thon to benefit the missions to honor them. Send the proceeds to MCA.

All students:

1. Sister Irene was known as a person who would run to help the sick any time she was needed. She had many nicknames because of this like “Good mother who loves everyone”, “Secretary of the poor”, “Angel of charity”. Within your class, pair off with someone who you do not know very well and discuss what Works of Mercy each of you has performed recently. Create “Mercy Nicknames” for each other and donate to each other’s Mite box for each good act.
2. To honor the Memorial of Blessed Irene Stefani which falls on Halloween, this year, trick-or-treat for the Missionary Childhood Association! Take your Mite box with you and collect donations for children in the missions.
3. Sister Irene wore “Boots of Glory”. Give a dollar to MCA and wear your own boots to class.