

**YOUTH  
RETREAT  
RESOURCE  
MANUAL**

Practical tools, guidelines, principles and policies for youth retreat providers of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

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The Office of Youth & Young Adult Ministry created this manual as a service to those engaged in youth retreat ministry in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. The parishes and schools of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati are permitted to reproduce specific materials contained herein for the purposes of retreat planning and team development. Photocopying of the manual in its entirety is forbidden. Rights to reproduce these materials outside of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati are reserved. Permission can be obtained by contacting the Archdiocese of Cincinnati Office of Youth & Young Adult Ministry.

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# INTRODUCTION

## • Why This Manual?

Youth retreats have become a central feature of most youth ministry and campus ministry programs in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. The reason for this is simple: they are effective! There is perhaps no other single youth ministry program that yields more profound and long-lasting results. Consider these findings in the *National Study of Youth and Religion: Analysis of the Population of Catholic Teenagers and their Parents* (December 2004) “Young people who have participated in at least one retreat, rally, conference, mission trip, or extended service project report significant increases in: the closeness they feel to God, the degree of importance faith has in their daily lives, and how often they read the Bible alone.”

And the word is out: since they are so effective, more adult youthworkers are planning and implementing youth retreats than ever before. In many of our parishes, youth ministers regularly plan multiple retreats during a given year, addressing the unique needs of younger and older adolescents, leadership groups, youth with special needs, etc. Confirmation programs now normally feature one- or two-day retreats. Many parochial high schools have moved from one overnight retreat during a student's four-year career to at least one retreat per year for all students. Some high schools offer an array of retreat choices. Many elementary schools now include retreats or multi-day camp experiences for their students.

In short, retreat ministry has grown dramatically here in our archdiocese through the past decade or so. This is a wonderful development! More young people than ever before have the opportunity to experience a variety of retreats through their parishes, elementary and high schools. And more adults than ever are finding themselves in the role of retreat coordinators, responsible for conceiving, planning and implementing an array of retreat experiences for young people. It is to assist these adult leaders that this manual was written.

*This manual is intended to offer necessary guidance and practical assistance to the growing numbers of adult youthworkers who are responsible for making youth retreats happen in the parishes and schools of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.*

The manual is comprehensive: it attempts to provide detailed information about every dimension of youth retreat planning and leadership. It is strongly recommended that those responsible for developing and coordinating retreat programs take the time to read the entire manual, in order to ensure a comprehensive picture of all the essential pieces. The manual may also be used as a regular reference; the detailed table of contents will assist retreat leaders in finding relevant information quickly and easily. Parishes, schools and other institutions of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati are permitted to photocopy materials in the manual for use in any stage of retreat program development.

## • Youth Retreat Ministry: Emerging Critical Issues

The explosive development of youth retreat ministry has led to certain critical issues. This manual attempts to address these issues:

- **Critical Issue #1: Youth retreats need to contribute to a systematic process of faith formation within the comprehensive youth ministry of a parish or school.**  
Since many parishes and schools are currently offering multiple retreat experiences for their young people, it has become essential that adult retreat coordinators examine how these retreat experiences (a) connect with and build upon one another -- and other ministerial/catechetical experiences -- in a sequence that makes sound developmental sense; (b) in a parish - are integrated into the various catechetical and ministry goals of the broader youth ministry; (c) in a school - are integrated into the various catechetical and ministry goals of campus ministry and theology/religion department; (d) Meet the needs of young people as they mature socially, emotionally, morally and in faith.
- **Critical Issue #2: The need for a variety of retreat approaches, models and methods.**

Clearly, no single retreat model can meet the broad spectrum of developmental needs across the span of adolescence. Adult retreat coordinators therefore must possess the ability to adapt models that they have inherited *and* to design new models in order to meet the changing pastoral and catechetical needs of young people. New models necessitate new methods as variety becomes the order of the day.

- **Critical Issue #3: The need for trained and competent adult leadership.**  
If we have more and varied retreats, we will need adults who are broadly competent in youth retreat ministry to design and lead them. Since retreats typically involve faith sharing, self-disclosure, complex group dynamics, group and individual prayer, simulation activities, etc., they require a specialized set of skills that are unique from those of teachers, counselors or coaches: *ministry* skills. Thus, those adults who design and lead youth retreats require special training and preparation.
- **Critical Issue #4: The need for irreproachable standards of quality and ethics.**  
Those who develop and implement youth retreats need to minister out of the highest standards of quality and ethical behavior. Stories of poorly-led retreats typically mention all or some of the following: poorly chosen retreat models and methods; sleep deprivation or emotional manipulation; lapses in adult supervision or behavior; unclear or unrealistic expectations; or too few or poorly prepared chaperons. It is important to note that these are *adult* problems. It is vitally important that our youth retreats, because they so effectively touch the hearts of young people, are designed and led with the utmost care to protect and nurture those hearts. Our youth deserve no less.

This manual responds to these critical issues by establishing under a single cover a set of clear, imminently practical, comprehensive guidelines for youth retreat ministry in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

## • Contents of the Manual

The manual is organized around practical steps to develop retreats within the context of a comprehensive youth ministry in a parish or school. Following are a number of appendices containing further guidelines, principles, policies and practical tools.

### The Eight Steps of Effective Retreat Planning

The main section of the manual includes a comprehensive planning process that may be utilized in parish or school settings:

- Step One. Creating Your Master Plan
- Step Two. Choosing and Contracting with Facilities
- Step Three. Developing Your Retreat Team
- Step Four. Developing Your Retreat Design
- Step Five. Preparing for Prayer and Worship
- Step Six. Involving the Community: Families, Parish and School
- Step Seven. Making Practical Preparations
- Step Eight. Evaluation and Follow-up

## Appendices

This section includes:

- Guiding principles for designing retreats
- Sample retreats
- Sample retreat activities
- Sample letters and forms
- Retreat facilities guide
- Contracting with a retreat team leader
- Competencies for members of the retreat team
- The Archdiocese of Cincinnati Child Protection Decree
- Archdiocesan policies and guidelines
- An annotated bibliography.

### • Other Retreat Resources

In addition to this manual, the Office of Youth & Young Adult Ministry has many other resources to assist adult leaders in developing their youth retreats. Our trained professional staff, with decades of youth retreat experience to draw upon, is but a phone call away. Our youth ministry libraries contain an array of written resources on youth retreats -- with literally thousands of practical activities and ideas. Videos and music are also available. (Note: see the [annotated bibliography](#) in the appendices for a sampling of these resources).

The Office of Youth & Young Adult Ministry is dedicated to ensuring that adult retreat leaders have the resources and training they need to provide quality retreat experiences for young people. This manual is a major contribution to that effort. We are proud and happy to make it available to our parishes and schools.

# CHECKLIST FOR RETREAT PLANNING

Following is a reproducible checklist and overview of the manual to use as a convenient reference guide to mark your progress as you develop youth retreats in your parish or school:

## The Eight Steps of the Planning Process

- G **Step One. Creating Your Master Plan (p. 5 )**
  
- G **Step Two. Choosing and Contracting With Facilities (p. 15 )**
  
- G **Step Three. Developing Your Retreat Team (p. 17 )**
  
- G **Step Four. Developing Your Retreat Design (p. 25 )**
  
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- G **Step Seven. Making Practical Preparations (p. 55)**
  
- G **Step Eight. Evaluation and Follow-up (p. 61 )**

## STEP ONE. CREATING YOUR MASTER PLAN

Retreats provide the opportunity for youth to experience and celebrate their faith in a very direct way. Retreats are most effective when they are part of a comprehensive parish or school ministry to, with, by and for youth. This section presents a rationale for youth retreats, followed by some basic models and some suggestions for how retreats might be used within a full-year youth ministry or Catholic school campus ministry program.

### • Youth Retreats Within Comprehensive Youth Ministry in the Parish or School

**Retreats Within Comprehensive Youth Ministry.** In their landmark document [\*Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry\*](#) (NCCB, 1997), the U.S. Bishops call for a holistic approach to our church's mission with youth -- an approach that is often referred to as "Comprehensive Youth Ministry." Comprehensive youth ministry strives for these goals:

- 1. Youth ministry works to foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person.*
- 2. Youth ministry seeks to draw young people to responsible participation in the life, mission and work of the faith community.*
- 3. Ministry with adolescents empowers young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today.*

We are to accomplish these goals by means of all the resources at the disposal of the faith community: "The comprehensive framework for ministry with adolescents is designed to utilize each of the Church's ministries -- advocacy, catechesis, community life, evangelization, justice and service, leadership development, pastoral care, prayer and worship -- in an integrated approach to achieving the three goals of ministry with adolescents..." (Renewing the Vision, p. 20).

Retreats can be especially effective because they integrate many of these different ministries in a single program, for example, a typical overnight retreat may include:

- ice-breakers and social time (Social)
- input and sharing (Catechesis);
- prayer and sacraments (Spirituality)
- life reflection and opportunities to talk to trained pastoral guides (Guidance-Healing).
- trained peer ministers (Enablement)

*As effective as they can be*, retreats should be but one ingredient of a comprehensive youth ministry effort in a parish or school. As such, they need to be integrated into a broader scheme of service opportunities, ongoing systematic catechesis, leadership development, prayer and liturgy, etc.

**Scriptural Basis.** The importance of a "sacred time apart" is reflected in Scriptures. Jesus spent time in the desert to pray and reflect on his life and mission. Young people today are in great need of time to withdraw from their frenetic schedules in order to reflect on life questions, to learn to pray, to develop a sense of relationship with God and the faith community, and to establish their own sense of mission and discipleship. Retreats can provide these opportunities.

**Focus on Faith Formation and Spirituality.** Regularly scheduled opportunities for retreats and days of reflection should be part of every quality youth ministry and campus ministry. A well-prepared retreat provides the opportunity for young people to reflect upon and experience a new or deeper sense of faith.

Retreats can allow time to review and renew spiritual values and come to a re-awakened sense of personal and communal spirituality.

## • **Planning for Retreats Within the Comprehensive Youth Ministry of the Parish or School**

Retreats are most effective when they are part of an ongoing comprehensive youth ministry that includes social activities, religious education, opportunities for service, ministry to youth in their families, and involvement in the ministries of the faith community. An *annual* plan is best, both because it gives teens a range of options and because it can involve a variety of people doing a smaller number of tasks. In planning and preparing a plan for retreats within the context of Comprehensive Youth Ministry, it is helpful to consider the following basic questions:

### **WHO ... will attend and who will facilitate the retreats?**

- Are there retreats for younger adolescents? Older adolescents? Young Adults? Families?
- Are there retreats offered for your youth ministry/campus ministry volunteers?
- Are a variety of persons involved in planning, participating in and evaluating the retreats?
- Are other members of the parish or school staff included in a variety of roles?

### **WHEN ... are the retreats scheduled?**

- Have you checked the parish or school calendar for important dates and events?
- Have you checked high school calendars for homecomings, test periods, sports events, etc.?
- When are the best times for family events in your community?
- When are the most appropriate retreat times for particular groups such as seniors, early adolescents, Confirmation candidates, other different grade levels?
- Are there multiple opportunities for individuals to participate throughout the year?

### **WHY ... will these retreats be held?**

- How will these retreats fit into the total youth ministry picture?
- How do these retreats reflect the mission of the school?
- What current issues and events are having an impact on youth? How could a retreat be helpful in responding to those needs?
- Which developmental needs will the retreats try to address?
- How will these retreats build on the past retreat experiences of the participants?

### **WHAT ... will be the design and focus of the retreats?**

- What faith themes or other content areas need to be addressed?
- What retreat models are most appropriate for each group?
- Does the overall program provide for a variety of retreat experiences for each age group?
- What new designs will be tried or adapted this year?

### **WHERE ... will retreats be held?**

- Is there a benefit to conducting the retreat at school or church facilities?
- Is there a desire or need to conduct the retreat away from the school or parish?
- Have you consulted the “Retreat Facilities Guide” in **Appendix.E** to guide you in selecting the facility which would best accommodate your groups needs and budget?
- If you choose an off-site facility have you factored in the transportation needs into your plan?

## • **Formats and Styles of Retreats**

Retreats can be created in a variety of formats and styles. We know that youth have a variety of spiritual needs. In order to meet those needs, it is important to consider a variety of retreat formats and styles within an annual youth ministry or campus ministry plan. Here are descriptions of a number of common retreat styles and formats. Each is adaptable to various groups and purposes.

### **Typical Retreat Formats:**

- **Multi-day Retreat Away.** This is a common youth retreat format. Its main advantage is that participants are away from their normal routines and environment. Living together creates a sense of community that cannot be established in shorter format retreats on site. Overnight retreats cost more for lodging and transportation, and require more communication with parents. These are typically done Friday-Sunday in parishes; in school settings, during weekdays. Some schools are opting for retreats during summer vacation so as to reduce the impact of multi-day retreats on class schedules, studies, testing, etc.
- **Day/Afternoon/Evening of Reflection.** Short format retreats can be accomplished in an afternoon, evening, or full day either on site or at another location. The shorter time frame can be an advantage if scheduling is difficult, especially at very busy times of the year. However, it isn't possible to develop content or process as much within the shorter time frame; also there are likely to be more local distractions.
- **Night into Day Retreat.** A variation on the weekend retreat model is to stay only one night and continue until dinner time the next day (e.g. Friday night into Saturday; week night into a school holiday; Saturday into Sunday; Sunday night into Monday.). The shorter duration is easier to schedule while retaining the benefits of going away and community building. Disadvantages include transportation and lodging costs. Also, scheduling a retreat on a weekday can make it more difficult to find adult leaders.
- **Immersion Experiences.** Week-long or multiple-week experiences are a format often used for service learning or leadership training retreats. The length allows for greater depth and focus, but obviously requires significantly more preparation. Usually this format involves fund-raising and other preparation time ahead of the actual experience, therefore demanding greater commitment from participants. The intensity of this retreat format also tends to surface other issues in participants--necessitating a more experienced retreat team leader and/or team and plans for referral or follow-up.
- **Lock-in.** This is a popular retreat format. A lock-in is usually an all night retreat at a parish or school facility, often with no sleep involved. This format attracts youth because of its novelty and uses a time frame when most youth are available. Its disadvantage is that youth are sent home exhausted the next day, unable to be productive members of the family.

### **Typical Retreat Styles:**

- **Theme-Based Retreat.** Retreats are often formed around a particular theme that relates to a specific issue or need of the target group. This style is frequently used for recurring or annual retreats for the same or a similar group. (e.g. The theme for this year's senior retreat is "Discovering the Light Within," etc.). The theme can be an advantage for planning and focus, but can also limit creativity if a flexible attitude doesn't prevail. This retreat style is particularly effective when young people are involved in the planning or direction of the retreat.

- **Leader Training Retreat.** The focus of this style of retreat is skills-building in addition to personal reflection. Learning experiences are placed in a “retreat-like” format, whether on-site or at another location. This dual purpose can be confusing to participants who may not expect to “work” on a retreat. However, connecting leadership issues with faith development can provide a powerful and effective mix.
- **Intergenerational/Family Retreat.** Creating a retreat for multiple age groups can be tricky and requires attention to the variety of developmental needs within the group. At the same time, significant learning and sharing can occur in this style of retreat. There is a growing need for these types of retreats which allow participants to hear a variety of perspectives, spend time with one another, share stories and faith with parents and siblings, thus enhancing family life.
- **Conversion/Witness Retreat.** A number of popular retreat models such as Kairos, TEC (Teens Encounter Christ), SEARCH (Search for Christian Maturity), COR, etc. involve a retreat style based on witness talks and related activities. These retreats are focused more directly on bringing about a faith conversion in the participants. They are very intense experiences and are generally not recommended until at least the latter half of the Sophomore year or for those who have little desire to be there. In addition, offering this style retreat in Senior year does not allow adequate time to offer necessary follow-up experiences. Integral to the conversion retreat experience is the opportunity to assist the participants in their journey of faith beyond the weekend. It is important that there is adequate time (a year or more) to allow the participants to stabilize their commitment and move into a solidly-owned faith. This style of retreat requires a well-prepared team and retreat team leader. Also, these retreats can potentially develop patterns of manipulative behavior when the focus becomes emotions rather than faith.
- **Prayer/Reflection Directed Retreat.** This is a more traditional style of retreat focused more on individuals than a group. A directed retreat may involve some group presentations or sharing but often has the bulk of time allotted to personal prayer and reflection by the participants. This style assumes a more developed faith/prayer life of participants. Length can vary. These retreats can be held on-site or at another location.
- **Social/Recreational Event and Reflection.** Some retreats combine prayer and social or recreational events such as a trip to a theme park, a sports event, etc. with periods of time for reflection. This is a more limited style of retreat but it can be very effective with younger adolescents and those less experienced in leading retreats. The primary focus is the social activity, while reflection is secondary which limits the nature of its retreat-like dimensions.
- **Social Action/Service Learning.** Service activities, advocacy work, and other actions for justice and peace can be combined with time for reflection. Length can vary from an afternoon to more than a week depending on the nature of the activity. Participants are led through a process of service activity and guided reflection. Typically, models reflect the “Pastoral Circle” methodology; consequently, these retreats require a skilled and experienced leader or team.

## • Who Plans the Calendar?

Many parishes and schools have existing groups who might take on the responsibility of planning the annual calendar of retreats; for instance:

- High school campus ministry team
- Parish youth ministry core team
- Parish youth commission or board

It is important to note that members of such groups will not necessarily design or lead particular retreats. Rather, their task is to establish a retreat calendar by assessing needs, scheduling retreats and identifying specific purposes and objectives for each retreat. In a school setting, such a group may plan the retreat program for the next academic year during a late winter planning session. In parishes, youth ministry planning teams often establish a similar calendar of retreats in the spring or early summer for the following academic year. In any case, *someone* must take responsibility for long-range planning because retreats require so much advance preparation.

In the retreat planning process, there are two important, and very different, leadership roles:

- ***Retreat Coordinator*** –
  1. The person responsible for the overall development of an annual plan for youth retreats in a parish or school.
  2. Normally facilitates the group that develops the annual retreat plan, including purposes and objectives for each retreat.
  3. Ensures that retreats “fit” into the comprehensive youth ministry efforts of the parish or school.
  4. May or may not actually lead any given retreat.
  5. Due to their particular expertise, is responsible for team development.
- ***Retreat Team Leader*** –
  1. Ensures that Archdiocesan policies and good ethical/pastoral ministry practices are in effect throughout a retreat
  2. Convenes and leads team meetings during a retreat
  3. Is the principal spokesperson on retreat (i.e., making announcements, segues, etc.; also interfacing with facilities people)
  4. Manages the segments of the retreat so as to stay on schedule
  5. Negotiates and changes elements of the retreat model as necessary to stay on schedule and/or better meet the needs of participants
  6. Problem-solves, troubleshoots and manages conflict as necessary (e.g., discipline/rules infractions, facilities issues, team misunderstandings/conflict, etc.)
  7. Monitors quality control, intervening as warranted when elements of a retreat – talks, small groups, prayer services – don’t go as anticipated.

If your parish or school does not already have a group that can take on the responsibility for developing an annual retreat calendar, you will need to name a Retreat Coordinator and gather a Retreat Development Committee. Members should include persons who are familiar with youth retreats, with the faith community and with young people. Youth ministry or campus ministry volunteers, parents, high school teachers and counselors would form a good core. Also consider one or two recent high school graduates for their insights into both youth and young adult issues. A good Retreat Development Committee will also include a healthy representation of young people who have demonstrated leadership with their peers.

## • Assessing Needs and Target Groups

The first task of those responsible for developing the retreat calendar is to look at what current issues and

needs are affecting teens and their families. This process can be formal (surveys, questionnaires, etc.) or informal (discussion, newsprint process, etc.). The outcome of this process is to identify guiding themes for the year's retreats. For example, suppose there recently had been a number of violent incidents among youth in the community and those incidents had different effects on younger and older teens. Younger teens seemed to be more concerned about their personal safety, whereas the older teens seemed to be losing hope that anything might ever change. In listening to and responding to these emerging needs, the Retreat Development Committee might plan special retreats, or recommend adapting retreats already scheduled.

The conclusion: the annual *Sexuality Retreat for Sophomores* might place a special emphasis on healing for victims of physical and sexual abuse; the *Confirmation Retreat* might place a focus on the role of the Church as peacemaker; and a special *November Remember Evening of Reflection* for all teens and their families be held on All Souls Day when the parish will remember all those in the community who experienced violence in the past year.

### ● **Establishing an Overall Purpose for Each Retreat.**

The group that is responsible for establishing the annual retreat calendar should also establish a clear set of purpose(s) and objectives for each retreat to pass on to the retreat team leaders and retreat teams. Unless they know what each retreat is supposed to accomplish, how will they know how to best design the retreat, or evaluate if the retreat has been successful? Unfortunately, retreats are often conducted without clear purposes. Establishing a purpose for each retreat answers the basic question, “*Why have this retreat?*” Every retreat has the potential for a variety of outcomes. By stating your purpose(s) clearly you'll have a better chance of choosing objectives, content and activities which will help you accomplish it. You'll also have clear criteria for evaluation.

In developing a clear notion of each retreat's purpose(s), the following should be considered:

- What are the unique needs of the potential participants?
- How does this retreat fit into our overall plan for ministry/catechesis?
- What are some of the “givens” of the retreat, (i.e. the length of time available, the characteristics of the basic retreat model, the most likely facility, the strengths and personality of the retreat team leader, etc.)?

It's also important to consider what can be accomplished in a retreat setting. For instance, a single retreat cannot replace a number of community-building efforts over an extended period of time. However, a retreat *may well* break down some barriers between some of the cliques in the parish or school.

Sometimes a retreat will accomplish things you never anticipate. For example, the stated purpose of the [\*Training Christian Leaders\* \(TCL\)](#) program is to develop servant leadership skills in youth so that they can better contribute to their parishes and schools. However, TCL often results in better communication between the participants and their parents. This occurs because of the program's emphasis on good listening and communication skills. Yet it would be a mistake to set “better parent-teen communication” as the primary *purpose* of TCL, since that would limit the kinds of leadership skills to be presented. Establishing a clear purpose for a retreat enables you to review the outcomes and evaluate whether the retreat design is on target. If your results are consistently unpredictable, you may need to restate the retreat's purpose.

### ● **Naming Specific Objectives for Each Retreat**

Once you have identified a retreat's purpose(s), you can name specific objectives which you hope to accomplish. Again, these should be measurable outcomes which you can evaluate at the end of the retreat. Be sure to consider pre-retreat and post-retreat activities which will allow you to meet these objectives.

For example:

**EXAMPLE: Confirmation Retreat Purpose and Objectives**

**Purposes:** To conclude the formation process of the Confirmation candidates; also to build a greater sense of identity with the parish community prior to the actual celebration.

**Sample objectives (Set A):**

1. Participants will be able to identify several models of the church from within their own parish and school communities.
2. Participants will be able to name the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and connect these gifts with examples from their faith community.
3. Participants will be able to identify communication barriers between those from different high schools and will attempt to break down barriers through communication.

A *different* target group might necessitate *different* objectives for this retreat, even though the *purpose* stays the same. For instance:

**Sample objectives (Set B):**

1. Participants will conclude and evaluate in-home small groups.
2. Participants will be able to identify their own talents, gifts, and strengths in the context of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.
3. Participants will hear from the pastor how their gifts are valuable and needed by the faith community.

Both these sets of objectives would result in very different retreats in terms of format, content and activities. That's why knowing the unique need and context of the target group is just as important as knowing your overall purpose.

• **A Sample Annual Plan for Retreats.**

Following are sample annual plans that include a variety of retreats for a variety of age groups. Keep in mind that offering multiple retreats requires dividing tasks and creating specific job descriptions so that many more persons can become involved in the effort. Remember: true ministry duplicates itself, and good managers delegate! As the humorous parish and school names suggest, it would be impossible to offer *all* these retreats and opportunities for reflection; however, they are probably *all* needed:

# *St. Utopia Parish Sample Retreat Plan*

## **FALL RETREAT OPTIONS (August, September, October)**

**Homecoming Day of Reflection.** Designed to reach out to those seniors as they begin their last year in school. Focus on decision-making, friendship, Jesus as friend, and journaling. We'll emphasize the use of scripture with popular music.

**Sexuality Retreat for 9th and 10th Graders.** They're into relationships and dating. Time to focus on important questions, moral decision-making and Catholic values.

**Peer Ministry Training Weekend.** A special opportunity to train those who will serve as peer ministers throughout the year. This retreat is for key adults and youth.

**World Youth Day Afternoon of Reflection.** This event is for volunteers, parents and youth. It is scheduled to coincide with the annual celebration of World Youth Day in October--and finds a weekend when the local football teams aren't playing.

## **WINTER RETREAT OPTIONS (November, December, January)**

**Thanksgiving Food Drive and Lock-In.** A lively mix of social action and *social* interaction after the holiday when there's lots of energy to be spent. Open to all ages.

**Advent Faith-in-Action Retreat.** An alternative to Christmas shopping for those who want to prepare for the season. Focus on the incarnation.

**Advent Evening of Reflection.** A special event for early adolescents and their parents. Focus will be on "being present" to one another in the next year.

## **SPRING RETREAT OPTIONS (February, March, April)**

**Confirmation Retreat.** Designed specifically for these candidates. New twist this year will be involving the sponsors in a variety of roles.

**Ash Wednesday Family Reflection Night and Soup Supper.** A speaker or movie, discussion, Mass, and an add-your-own-can-of-soup supper. Open to all youth and their families.

**Next-Steps Retreats for Seniors.** An alternative offering to the Homecoming event in fall (for those involved in sports) but focused on journey, life maps, and relationship with God.

**Bridges Retreat.** This will be a collaborative effort with several neighboring parishes and the local Catholic high school to focus on understanding of cultural issues and communication.

## **SUMMER RETREAT OPTIONS (May, June, July)**

**Training Christian Leaders (TCL).** We will identify 4-6 freshmen and sophomores to attend this diocesan leadership training event.

**TACKLE.** We will invite 6 juniors and seniors to attend this service learning immersion experience sponsored by the diocese.

**Family Retreat/Camp Weeks or Weekends.** A team of parents is preparing a full week for family fun and formation at a local camping area.

**Theme Park Theme Days.** Several trips are planned to local theme parks. A special outdoor prayer service will begin the day. The coach bus we will take has a VCR so the return trip will feature a solid movie and some pertinent questions for discussion.

# *Heaven Help Us Catholic High School Sample Retreat Plan*

## **FALL RETREAT OPTIONS (September, October, November)**

**Peer Ministry Training Weekend.** A special opportunity to train those who will serve as peer ministers throughout the year. This retreat is for your campus ministry team, both adults and youth.

**Freshman Class Day of Reflection.** Who am I? An opportunity to explore their relationships with each other, with God, and with the school community.

**Sophomore Class Day of Reflection.** Building Community and Communication. Building communication skills as well as discovering models of christian community.

## **WINTER RETREAT OPTIONS (December, January, February)**

**Junior Day of Reflection.** Being Christian In A Not So Christian World. Exploring problems of world, community or school and how they can help.

**Next-Steps Retreats for Seniors.** An alternative offering to the Homecoming event in fall (for those involved in sports) but focused on journey, life maps, and relationship with God.

**Freshman Retreat.** A one-night retreat designed to build community as a class and as a school, in relationship with Christ.

## **SPRING RETREAT OPTIONS (March, April, May)**

**Junior Retreat.** A retreat that continues to build their Catholic identity and has as its focus a deeper sense of spirituality as well as a movement towards serving others.

**Senior Day of Reflection.** Morals, Values, and Principles. Developing a sense of Christian identity to carry with them into adulthood.

**Sophomore Retreat.** A conversion style retreat that assists the youth in focusing on their personal relationship with God.

## **SUMMER RETREAT OPTIONS (June, July, August)**

**Week-long Workcamp.** A variety of experiences for mission trips and workcamps are available through the Center for Ministry Development, Group and others.

**Training Christian Leaders (TCL).** We will identify 4-6 freshmen and sophomores to attend this diocesan leadership training event.

**TACKLE.** We will invite 4-6 juniors and seniors to attend this service learning experience sponsored by the Archdiocese.

(NOTE: Thanks to Chaminade-Julienne High School who provided much of the input for this page)



## **STEP TWO. CHOOSING AND CONTRACTING WITH FACILITIES**

Every retreat takes place *somewhere*. The location and setting of a retreat dramatically impact its design. Sometimes a retreat site is “given” and the retreat is designed to match the space. Other retreats may be designed first and then a retreat site selected. Regardless of when the site is determined, it will play a crucial role in the retreat experience. A natural setting may be perfect for a retreat that focuses on God in nature; an urban setting suits a retreat that focuses on social justice; a peaceful setting assists a retreat that focuses on prayer and quiet reflection. A parish hall may be ideal for a junior high lock-in, yet poorly suited to a retreat focusing on lots of reflection and quiet time. Retreat facilities should be selected with careful attention to a retreat’s purpose(s) and objectives. *Never secure a retreat facility without first inspecting it for suitability!*

### **• Checklist of Questions With Facilities**

Listed below are sets of questions that can help you determine if the retreat center or space matches your retreat purpose(s) and objectives.

#### **Questions about the Retreat Space**

- What are the sizes of the meeting rooms, sleeping areas, kitchen etc.? Are these areas suitable for young people?
- What is the number of tables and chairs available in the meeting rooms?
- What’s the capacity of the sleeping area? How are the areas separated for males and females? What’s the capacity if we have a coed group?
- How many showers and sinks are there in the sleeping area? Are they adequate for my group size or should I build extra time into the schedule?
- Is there a chapel, a room for a quiet space, and/or a room for liturgical prayer?
- Is there a fireplace (and firewood)? Other room amenities that I might take advantage of in planning?
- What is the lighting like in the meeting rooms? Will I be able to show AV’s during the day? Is there sufficient access to electrical outlets?
- Is there a place for recreation? Outdoor recreation? How is time for this space scheduled?
- Will the facility be difficult to supervise? Is it compact or spread out? Are there numerous exits and hiding places?

#### **Questions about Services and Features**

- Will I have access to any AV equipment (VCR, DVD, TV, LCD, tape recorders, screen, etc.)?
- Are linens and towels provided? Pillows? At what cost?
- Is there recreation equipment available? Does the facility provide guided walks, ropes courses, swimming, sledding, etc.
- Is there shopping nearby? Where is the nearest supermarket?
- Is meal service provided? What are their meal times? Is meal service optional? What about snacks? Is there a place to call for pizza and how late are they open? What’s the location of the nearest fast food restaurants?
- What kinds of refreshments/beverages are available? Do they have pop machines?

### **Questions about Location/Safety Concerns**

- What are the directions to your facility? Is there a map available? About how long will it take us to drive there? What is the emergency phone number people can use 24 hours a day?
- Where are first-aid supplies, fire extinguishers?
- What is the name and address of the nearest hospital? (This information should be included on your **health form/parent release**.) How distant? Directions?
- What is the setting of your facility? Is it residential? Rural? Are there any safety or other concerns that I should notify parents about?
- Is the facility handicapped-accessible?

### **Questions about Contract Issues**

- How are fees handled? Is a deposit required? Can the parish/school be billed, or should I have a check for the amount ready at the time of the retreat?
- Who is responsible for set-up, clean-up, waste management?
- What other expectations are there of groups using your facility?
- Who is my contact on-site during the retreat in case of emergencies?
- Are there other groups scheduled for the facility at the same time?
- Is proof of insurance required in writing ahead of time?

### **Questions to Evaluate the Facility after the Retreat**

- Were the facilities a good match for this retreat design? For these participants?
- Was the food service adequate for the participants?
- What difficulties did you encounter which you need to note for next time?
- What were the advantages of the facility?
- Were the staff members hospitable to youth? Was the center/space “teen-friendly?”
- Would you recommend this facility to others?
- How much lead time is needed for booking?

## **STEP THREE. DEVELOPING YOUR RETREAT TEAM AND COORDINATING ROLES AND TASKS**

It takes a team of people to staff a retreat. The number and roles of people needed will vary depending on the size and nature of the retreat, but one thing remains constant: the need for a well-prepared team. The best way to go about building a retreat team is to recruit a team of people based on the specific needs of the retreat.

### **• Recruit for Roles and Task**

Typically, the Retreat Coordinator recruits a Retreat Team Leader for a particular retreat. The Retreat Team Leader in turn recruits people for specific retreat roles and tasks. These individuals may perform tasks for one or more retreats based on their availability. There are several clear advantages to this approach:

- People can work in their area of strength, making it less likely they will fail or burn out.
- Specific retreat needs are met by those with the gifts to meet them.
- People are recruited for their real or potential ability to make a contribution -- it's not a popularity contest!
- Recruiting for roles and tasks ensures that a retreat team will acquire a variety of personalities and differing gifts.

This approach takes greater organizational skill since more people are involved and a system has to be in place to manage them. Retreat team leaders have to be good managers.

### **• Developing Job Descriptions**

In order to effectively recruit people you need to know beforehand what tasks you are recruiting them for. Writing job descriptions for the roles on the team will help you clarify what you are looking for and let the potential volunteers know exactly what is expected. Job descriptions also allow you to affirm the talents and gifts of particular persons, since you are recruiting them for specific reasons. For example, if you know that Joan is a good "detail" person, you can recruit her to be on the team *only* to handle registrations, forms and finances. In this way you affirm her gifts while offering a manageable job that won't overtax her time. Joan will likely say yes to your invitation to be part of the team!

Too often, recruiting volunteers is done out of an "any warm body will do" approach. The fact is, different tasks require different skills that *not* everyone possesses. Not everyone is good at facilitating discussions. Not everyone can cook for fifty people and be stress-free. Here are some sample job descriptions. Adapt them as needed or create your own.

#### **Retreat Team Leader Job Description\***

This person is responsible for managing all aspects of a particular retreat: publicity; facility; transportation; pre- and post- retreat activities; leading the retreat; and evaluation.

#### **TASKS:**

- Know all members of the team and know what their tasks are.
- Schedules and runs retreat team meetings.
- Delegates tasks and determines deadlines for completion.
- Follows up with retreat team members to ensure the tasks are being done.
- Develops permission forms/medical releases. Ensures that all paperwork is in prior to the retreat.
- Principal spokesperson on the retreat
- Problem-solve, troubleshoot, manage conflict (eg. discipline, team conflict, etc.)

**ABILITIES NEEDED:**

- Ability to manage and organize multiple tasks.
- Able to supervise others; possesses good people skills.
- Ability to work with and lead a team.
- Able to develop a time line and keep individuals on task.
- Knowledge of retreat principles and design.

(\*See Appendix G for a complete listing of competencies for this position)

**Retreat Transportation Coordinator Job Description**

This person is responsible for arranging transportation for participants, team, and supplies.

**TASKS:**

- Find out the distance and route to the facility. Determine travel time.
- Check with the facility for policies or recommendations for transportation. Note: *Some facilities may have limited parking or may not permit youth to bring cars.*
- Determine the method of transportation most suited to the retreat. Factors to be considered are the distance and time, number of participants, amount of gear, parking available at the facility, insurance and liability, cost.
- Determine if the team will need special travel arrangements. For example, some team members may need to arrive early to set up.
- Make arrangements for transportation: e.g. charter the bus, arrange for drivers, etc.
- Attend to details according to method chosen; e.g. make sure that supervision is provided on the bus, all drivers have maps and directions, etc.
- Make sure all are accounted for at departure.

**ABILITIES NEEDED:**

- Basic organizational skills; knowledge of transportation and legal issues
- Ability to gather information from a variety of sources
- Good phone skills.

**Retreat Finance Coordinator Job Description****TASKS:**

- Develop a budget for the retreat. Expenses such as facility, retreat team leader, food, supplies, gifts, food and lodging for team, publicity, music and clergy stipend should be included.
- Determine with youth minister and/or retreat coordinator whether the cost of the retreat will be covered entirely by fees of the participants. Determine other sources of income (parish budget, fund raisers, donations) if appropriate.
- Meet with retreat team to discuss budget.
- Pay all deposits.
- Keep track of all money received from fees, fundraisers, etc.
- Report on financial status regularly to the retreat team.
- Develop a contingency plan if funds are not raised or if retreat goes over budget.
- Keep track of expenditures. Pay all bills. Reimburse people as necessary.
- Prepare a final budget report.

**ABILITIES NEEDED:**

- Organizational skills and knowledge of financial matters.
- Ability to keep good financial records.
- Creativity in developing sources of funds.
- Ability to work with the team.

## **Retreat Meal Coordinator Job Description**

### **TASKS:**

- Determine which meals, snacks and beverages need to be provided based on length, time frame, and format of the retreat.
- Determine with the facility if food service is provided, optional or mandatory.
- Determine menus for the retreat. Plan for special dietary needs for some participants, such as vegetarian diet or food allergies.
- Arrange snacks and beverages for breaks.
- Make a grocery list of items needed. Buy or solicit donations of items.
- Make arrangements for food preparation, if necessary. Recruit cooks or develop a schedule to have participants work on meals.

### **ABILITIES NEEDED:**

- Knowledge of menu planning.
- Ability to coordinate and/or cook for larger groups of people.
- Knowledge of good shopping sites.
- Ability to work with team.

Following are the beginnings of several other job descriptions that can be used as starting points for developing your own:

### **Retreat Team Member Job Description\***

- Facilitate small group process in retreat.
  - Provide for icebreakers and community builders.
  - Function as a presenter in leading various sessions.
  - Retreat design.
  - Provide recreational components of retreat.
- (\*See Appendix G for a complete list of competencies for this position)

### **Spiritual Director/Prayer/Worship Leader (not necessarily ordained)**

- Provides for the sacramental life of the retreat community (i.e. Reconciliation, Eucharist).
- Leads planning and facilitation of worship experiences.
- Arranges for clergy.
- Develops or provides spiritual direction of the team.
- Provides spiritual counseling for individual participants.

### **Music/Song Leader(s)**

- Leads singing and music during different times of retreat.
- Provides musical leadership during worship and prayer times.
- Provides for community building experiences through music and song.
- Assists in planning worship and prayer.

### **General Support/Office**

- Assist Retreat Team Leader in gathering materials and other needed articles for the retreat.
- Assist Retreat Team Leader in various logistical jobs as needed.
- Assist Retreat Team Leader in registration and other office procedures.

## ● Building Your Team

Once you have determined what roles there are to fill, recruiting, screening, selecting, and training people becomes much easier. Remember, the “any warm body will do” approach can bring to your team people who are ineffective, who push their own agendas, or who are uncomfortable around teenagers. You can avoid these problems by recruiting people suited to particular roles and tasks. Here’s how:

### 1. Gather Names of Potential Volunteers

When developing your list of potential volunteers, first determine what general characteristics you are looking for in a retreat team volunteer. Some possibilities include: enjoyment of teenagers, a personal faith life, openness, a sense of humor, an understanding of team. Keep this list of desired characteristics in mind when putting together your pool.

Develop a pool of potential volunteers: those who are known quantities and those with unknown potential. Take each role and determine several names of people who would be suited to it. These are your known quantities. In addition, develop a list of people who are interested and available and determine where their abilities lie. These are your unknown potentials. Some places to look are:

#### In a parish

- time and talent surveys
- past youth ministry volunteers
- recommendations of parish staff or veteran youth ministry volunteers
- young adults or recently confirmed youth who can serve as peer ministers
- public school teachers who are members of the parish
- people who say "Give me a call if you could use some help"
- people who have done the task you are looking for in another organization or event (*e.g. asking the person who runs the parish spaghetti dinner to help with food on the retreat*)
- local college campus ministries
- local high school campus ministry (youth and adults)
- youth ministry participants
- scouts
- high school religious education participants

#### In a school

- past volunteers (students or faculty)
- new faculty
- recommendations from faculty for students
- administration
- guidance counselors
- youth/youth ministers from feeder parishes
- coaches
- students
- alumni
- local college campus ministry

### 2. Screen Potential Volunteers

Screening is an important but often overlooked aspect of volunteer management. Not all those who are recruited will turn out to be suited to the ministry. Sadly, it is sometimes the case that people volunteer to put themselves in a position to abuse others. Therefore, we screen volunteers both to protect our young people from harm, and to protect ourselves from lawsuits.

We also screen volunteers to determine their gifts and talents, and how they may best be utilized. You can do so by finding out about a person's past experiences; previous volunteer roles and occupation; time availability; interests; other commitments, etc. Screening allows you to place volunteers appropriately, whether they are brand new to the ministry, or experienced in youth ministry and retreats. It can be done in an informal way. Sitting down and talking with the person can give you most of the information you need, provided you ask the right questions. Here are five things you should find out when you screen volunteers:

- *Motivation:* why do they want to help?
- *Past experience:* what have they done before that could help?
- *Current level of ability:* what training will they need in order to be confident in their role?
- *Availability:* what are their other commitments? available time?
- *Suitability:* do they have a criminal record or any other condition which would mitigate against their contact with youth?

Remember that screening volunteers is *not* optional. It's a necessary and important component of building effective retreat teams; furthermore, it is the only way to ensure that our young people will be safe from harm. *Important: all adults who work in significant roles with youth in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati must attend a training session on the Archdiocesan Child Protection Decree and be fingerprinted. (See Appendix H).*

### 3. Invite People to Join the Team

Invitations may be made by phone calls, personal letters, personal visits, or any of these in combination. You may wish to call people to set up a meeting. You may wish to send a letter with detailed information and follow up with a phone call. Personal and direct contact is most effective. People will be more likely to say yes if they know exactly what they are being asked to do and how much time it will take; if they have time to think about their answer; and if they are asked to do something that they like to do or would like to learn.

#### • Preparing Team Members for Their Roles

After screening, you should have a fairly clear idea of what individuals will need in order to be adequately prepared for their roles. Some may require complete orientation and training; others may need selective training; some experienced youthworkers may require very little. Generally, there are three reasons why people seek training or additional formation:

- **Confidence:** Everyone wants to feel confident in performing the role for which they've volunteered. Training builds confidence.
- **Credibility:** Members of a retreat team should be credible to each other, the participants, parents and other members of the community. Training provides a way to let others know that you've done what it takes to be good at what you have volunteered to do.
- **Competence:** Retreats are ministerial and catechetical programs. Anyone in a ministerial or catechetical leadership role *must* have the proper training to ensure that all will be in accord with our faith tradition and appropriate pastoral care. Beyond catechetical preparation, team members may require an array of pastoral ministry skills in the areas of facilitation, listening, prayer, community building, etc. (See descriptions of competencies in Appendix G)

## Methods of Orientation, Training and Formation

Five common methods of preparing volunteers are:

- **Orientation:** An initial introduction to the retreat, the expectations of the team and the expectations of the participants.
- **Apprenticeship:** A person who is new to a task works with an experienced person. Some tasks may be delegated to the apprentice. Experienced team members model skills and share information.
- **Observation:** A person is invited to visit a retreat to observe the experience in general, or to observe a specific role. Observation gives the person a chance to see exactly what he or she would be doing.
- **Skill Practice:** Opportunities are provided for a person to practice and receive feedback on talks, community building activities, small group facilitation, etc.
- **Workshops:** If a person needs broader and more concentrated preparation, workshops can be offered by the parish or school; also people can be directed to other workshops offered by the archdiocese, academic institutions or helping agencies.

### • Establishing Team Meetings

Retreat teams use meetings to do team-building; to understand the purpose, objectives and design of a retreat; to build retreat skills; and sometimes to develop the retreat design. Team meetings should have specific objectives and an agenda to ensure that progress is made and time is not wasted. Not all members need to be at all meetings; however, there should be at least one meeting where all members are present. The number and length of meetings will be determined by the work the team needs to accomplish. Factors to consider when establishing your team meetings are:

- Will the team be responsible for designing the retreat?
- How much training is needed?
- How well do the various members of the team know each other?

Team meeting agendas should include:

- Prayer/faith sharing
- Community building
- Overview of the retreat and its goals
- Retreat design (if team is developing a new model or adapting an old one)
- Establishing team norms for meetings, communication, collaboration, conflict management, etc.
- Understanding the role of each team member
- Training on issues such as: discipline, small group facilitation, pastoral care, emergency procedures, adolescent faith development/adolescent development, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Child Protection Decree
- Opportunity to hear and critique the various presentations

Depending on the experience of the team and the length of the meetings, this could require six or more meetings. Each team's needs will vary greatly, but here is a sample to get you started:

# Sample Retreat Team Meeting Agendas

## **1st Meeting: Meet, Greet and Get Organized**

- Prayer/sharing
- Community building
- Identify roles team members are interested in
- Overview of the retreat/purpose and objectives
- Brainstorm ideas for retreat design to be passed on to design group

## **2nd Meeting: Build Community and Train**

- Prayer/sharing
- Community building
- Training: team norms/expectations/small group facilitation/discipline
- Present final model of the retreat
- Assign responsibilities

## **3rd Meeting: Build Community and Train**

- Prayer/sharing
- Community building
- Training: Child Protection Decree/adolescent development/emergency procedures

## **4th Meeting: Review the Presentations**

- Prayer/sharing
- Review and critique the various presentations

## **5th Meeting: Final Details and Small Group**

- Prayer/sharing
- "Walk through" the retreat
- Review questions and dynamics for small group experiences

## **6th Meeting: Post-Retreat Evaluation**

Gathering the team after the event is important, especially for reviewing the design if the retreat will be repeated. Other reasons to meet include:

- Celebration and thanksgiving
- Team evaluation
- Evaluation of purpose and objectives
- Reviewing participants' evaluations



## STEP FOUR. DEVELOPING YOUR RETREAT DESIGN

A retreat is more than just its theme or sessions. Retreat teams should be aware that gathering, travel, arrival, departure and return also are part of the retreat experience and need to be included in the planning process. Team attitude, hospitality, food and snack options, the retreat setting, prayer experiences, the approach to discipline and a variety of other issues all contribute to the total retreat.

Retreat design requires a trained and experienced retreat coordinator. The retreat design step can be accomplished in one of two ways: (1) the retreat team develops the retreat design as part of their meetings (this would have the effect of increasing the number of meetings); or (2) the retreat team can delegate the design task to a sub-group after brainstorming ideas. The sub-group develops the design apart from the team, then submits it to the broader team at a subsequent team meeting for fine-tuning.

When developing the retreat design we should be less concerned with *giving* participants issues and ideas to consider and more concerned with *assisting* the participants to pray, play, share and reflect in a variety of ways.

### • Review the Retreat Purpose and Objectives

Whether you are designing the retreat individually or as a team, the first step is to review the purpose(s) and objectives. Changes in the seasons; emerging needs and situations; and developments in the group of potential participants all may cause you to refocus your stated objectives.

### • Assess the "Givens"

Usually some of the factors affecting the design of a retreat have already been determined. These may include the limitations of a certain facility or room, the pre-advertised time length, the number of personnel available to you, established times for meals or even the season of year the retreat has been scheduled. All of these factors help to shape the design. Our task is to assess these “givens” so that they can be considered when deciding upon the retreat design.

Sometimes you may not know in advance all the factors necessary to make the key decisions of retreat design. For example, seasonal changes may require certain activities to move indoors -- or outdoors, as the case may be. A good retreat design has options built in to accommodate unforeseen developments.

### • Check the Sources

The next task is to review retreat resource books and other sources for existing designs which may be effective in achieving the stated objectives. There's no sense in re-inventing the wheel if a great design is already available or can be adapted for your circumstances. This “cookbook” approach can save a good deal of time. However, do consider copyright laws. Be sure that any material that you use is rightfully available to you and that copies of participant materials are permissible. (See [Appendix J](#) for a list of resources.)

### • Determine the Retreat Format

The retreat format is the pattern of time for activities and process. The format will be determined by your purpose(s), objectives and the “givens.” Several sample formats are included here. These can be used as templates and modified for your design.

## • **Sample Retreats Formats**

The following sample formats may be adapted as necessary. *Important note: Team meetings are an integral part of each retreat. Teams usually meet immediately prior to the retreat experience for prayer and last minute preparations as well as periodically during the retreat for the purposes of debriefing the experiences and coordinating upcoming responsibilities.*

### **Sample One-Day Retreat 6 hours**

A.M.

9:00 Arrival and Welcome

9:15 Community building activities

Opening Prayer

10:00 Session #1

10:45 Break

11:00 Small group session

P.M.

12:00 Lunch and recreation

1:00 Session #2

3:00 Closing Prayer

Departure

**Optional:** On Sunday this program could begin or end with the parish liturgy.

### **Sample One-Day Retreat 10 hours**

A.M.

9:00 Arrival and Welcome

Opening Prayer

9:15 Community building activities

10:00 Session #1

P.M.

12:00 Lunch and recreation

1:00 Session #2

3:00 Break (snacks and games)

3:45 Session #3

5:45 Dinner

6:30 Wrap-up and Closing prayer service

7:00 Departure

**Optional:** On Saturday or Sunday, this program could begin or end with the parish liturgy, depending on the parish schedule.

## **Sample Lock-In Retreat All night**

P.M.

7:00 Arrival and get settled  
7:30 Welcome and Introductions  
Opening prayer  
8:00 Community building activities  
8:45 Break  
9:00 Session #1  
10:30 Food/games/recreation/videos  
12:30 Session #2

A.M.

2:00 Quiet time  
4:00 Wake-up games  
5:00 Session #3  
6:30 Breakfast and clean-up  
7:30 Closing prayer or liturgy  
8:30 Departure

## **Sample Overnight Retreat**

### **Evening**

7:00 Arrive and unpack  
7:30 Welcome/Introductions/Prayer  
7:45 Community building activities  
8:45 Break  
9:00 Session #1  
10:30 Break  
10:45 Evening prayer  
11:00 Snacks/games/dance  
12:00 Lights out

### **Morning**

7:45 Wake up/showers  
8:45 Breakfast  
9:30 Morning prayer  
10:00 Session #2

### **Afternoon**

12:00 Lunch and recreation  
1:30 Session #3  
3:30 Break: snacks and games  
4:00 Session #4  
6:00 Dinner  
6:45 Wrap-up  
Closing prayer or liturgy  
8:00 Departure

## Sample Two-Day Retreat

A.M.

9:30 Arrival, getting settled  
10:00 Welcome, introductions, prayer  
10:15 Community building  
11:15 Session #1

P.M.

12:45 Lunch and recreation  
2:45 Session #2  
4:30 Large group dynamic/music  
5:30 Dinner  
6:30 Session #3  
8:15 Reconciliation service  
9:30 Video and Snacks  
11:30 Evening prayer  
12:00 Bedtime

### Day Two

A.M.

8:00 Wake-up and showers  
9:00 Breakfast  
9:45 Morning prayer  
10:15 Morning energizers  
10:45 Session #4

P.M.

12:15 Lunch and recreation  
1:45 Session #5  
2:30 Wrap-up/pack-up  
3:30 Closing prayer service or liturgy

# Sample Weekend Retreat

## Friday

P.M.

- 7:00 Arrival and unpack
- 7:30 Welcome/Introductions/Prayer
- 7:45 Community building activities
- 8:45 Break
- 9:00 Session #1
- 10:30 Break
- 10:45 Evening prayer
- 11:00 Snacks/games
- 12:00 Bedtime

## Saturday

A.M.

- 7:45 Wake-up/Showers
- 8:45 Breakfast
- 9:30 Morning Prayer
- 10:00 Morning Energizers
- 10:30 Session #2

P.M.

- 12:30 Lunch and recreation
- 2:30 Session #3
- 4:00 Break
- 4:15 Music and singing
- 4:45 Session #4
- 6:15 Dinner and recreation
- 7:45 Session #5
- 8:45 Reconciliation service
- 10:30 Skits or dance or games/snacks
- 12:00 Bedtime

## Sunday

A.M.

- 7:45 Wake-up/showers
- 8:45 Breakfast
- 9:30 Morning prayer
- 10:00 Morning energizers
- 10:30 Session #6

P.M.

- 12:00 Lunch/pack-up
- 1:30 Session #7  
Prepare for liturgy
- 3:00 Liturgy
- 4:00 Departure

## • **Brainstorm Activities to Fit the Format**

The next task is to brainstorm activities, simulations, prayer experiences, talks, small groups, etc., that may accomplish your objectives. These may be gathered from books and resources or may be creatively developed by team members. Remember that there are usually many ways to achieve the same objective, so be sure to pay attention to the particular needs of this group and adapt accordingly.

**Caution:** Avoid the pressure to do an activity simply because “it’s way cool.” Don’t even consider it unless it fits the objectives you have named. . The same is true of AV material. Don’t show a video or play a taped song without fully integrating it into your design. Of course, videos brought for recreation time are different. Be mindful of copyright laws, as well as rating and content which may be inappropriate for a retreat setting.

## • **Design Principles: How To Develop and Sequence Retreat Sessions**

After brainstorming comes the design step that requires the most creativity -- and careful planning. An effective retreat is not a roughly assembled amalgamation of different pieces. Skilled retreat planners apply *design principles* to sequence the brainstormed ingredients in a way that makes good experiential and catechetical sense. Each retreat session needs to be carefully crafted, utilizing tested design principles. Likewise, the main sessions of a retreat should be properly sequenced into a retreat model so that all the pieces work together and build upon one another.

### **Some Design Considerations**

Retreat designers should take the following into consideration as they put together retreat sessions. (A comprehensive listing of design principles is included in [Appendix A.](#))

- **Sequencing:** Retreat models and their individual sessions should generally reflect the same movements present in Christian worship: *gather, listen, respond, send forth*. The **gathering** step usually includes icebreakers, warm-ups, introductions, and community-building exercises. The **listening step** takes place in many different ways through a given retreat: talks, scripture dramatizations, simulation activities, small group sharing and discussion, arts and crafts activities, etc. The **response** step can take place in a variety of ways as well: in prayer exercises, rituals and worship services; in activities that facilitate self-expression; in small group discussions and sharing sessions, etc. The **sending forth** step focuses on applying the new insights gained on the retreat to one's normal life. (For more on sequencing, see the section below on [Thomas Groome's "Shared Christian Praxis" Methodology](#)).
- **Timing:** Experienced retreat planners know that different time periods during a retreat day are better -- or ill-suited -- for certain retreat activities. Mornings are usually high energy times. Energy usually slumps after lunch. Evenings are generally choice times for quiet reflection, deeper conversation or profound prayer. Retreats have beginnings, middles and ends: beginnings are good for establishing expectations, setting the theme, and building community; middles are good for getting to the heart of a theme or topic; ends should focus on celebration, closure and next steps.
- **Variety:** Use activities that engage the whole person. People learn best by *doing*. Retreats should have a variety of elements that appeal to the head and the heart -- and all the senses! Junior high youth need much more variety and hands-on activity than do older youth.

- **Breaks, Stretches, Movement, Sleep:** A retreat should respect the physical needs of participants. Recreation, bathroom, snack and stretch breaks should be scheduled in -- and honored! They are just as important as the sessions to maintain a healthy balance of focused activity, recreation and rest. On multi-day, overnight retreats, care must be taken to ensure that the young people get adequate sleep. Scheduled activities should conclude at a reasonable hour, generally no later than 11:00 p.m., allowing adequate time at the end of an evening for young people to "decompress" from potentially intense evening sessions.

## • Thomas Groome's "Shared Christian Praxis" Methodology

Assuming a set of brainstormed retreat ingredients (e.g. activities, talks, prayer forms, dramatizations, audio-visuals, etc.), the question remains: how to put the ingredients together so that each session builds toward accomplishing the retreat's purpose(s) and objectives?

Youth retreats over the past fifty or more years have approached this task in different ways. A typical session of an early (pre-1960's) youth retreat consisted of a rather lengthy (up to an hour or more) talk -- sometimes called a *conference* -- to impart knowledge about spiritual or religious topics; followed by private reflection. A typical retreat model consisted of a number of these talks and reflection periods, along with worship services, reconciliation and a Mass.

In the 1960's, Cursillo retreats were brought to America from Spain. Soon after, youth Cursillos were designed. The sessions of a Cursillo-based retreat generally have a personal witness talk on a given theme, followed by a "table group" discussion or activity, or both. Christian Awakening, Kairos, and TEC retreats are examples of retreat models based on the Cursillo.

In 1981, Thomas Groome's *Christian Religious Education* revolutionized the process of religious education and retreats. In his approach, or methodology, the starting point isn't the presentation of a particular topic; rather, it is the *life experience* of the young person. Most well-designed contemporary youth retreats utilize some variation of Groome's "Shared Praxis" approach:

### **MOVEMENT ONE – EXPERIENCING LIFE**

Young people are invited to name and reflect on their life experience as it relates to a particular topic or theme. They are given an opportunity to express what they already know, feel, understand, believe about the topic -- and how they do or don't live it. In this step, young people are also assisted in wrestling with the meaning of their life experience: its consequences and implications. Whereas the first step focuses on the "What?" of their experiences, this step focuses on the "Why?" questions.

### **MOVEMENT TWO - MESSAGE**

In the second movement, young people are offered the story of the faith community: Scriptures, church teaching, the faith-life of Christian people present or past. The goal is to engage the young people in an active process of exploring the dimensions of our faith that are relevant to the topic or theme.

## MOVEMENT THREE - DISCOVERY

The third movement brings together in dialogue the individual's story and experience with that of the faith community. The Christian story may confront or challenge; likewise it may console and affirm. This is a dynamic interchange in which there are no clearly predictable outcomes, because there will be as many responses to our faith story as there are young people. It is critical at this point to allow young people the freedom to engage in the interchange; telling them what they should do, think or believe is counter-productive. With this freedom young people can be guided to see the *why* of the Christian story, and to appropriate the meaning of the story into their lives. In this step we try to help participants find their own story in THE STORY, to identify with the Christian story and to further integrate it into their lives.

## MOVEMENT FOUR - RESPONSE

This is the point of decision, of applying what has been explored and learned in the preceding steps. The fourth movement invites young people into making a lived faith response. A typical session will motivate some young people to action; some will need more time to reflect; others will be unaffected. At this point it is critical to invite a decision to live more faithfully as a Christian while at the same time respecting the right of young people to choose their own response, even if it is not the one that is hoped for.

These four movements provide retreat planners with a way of thinking about how the various ingredients of a retreat should fit together. They can be used not only to plan an individual session, but also to develop an entire retreat model.

### • Using “Shared Praxis” to Plan a Retreat Session

The following is a tried-and-true approach to designing retreat sessions:

- 1. Review:** the purpose and objectives of the retreat and your brainstormed retreat activities.
- 2. Prioritize:** identify those activities and methods that will best meet your objectives.
- 3. Draft a Design:** Rough out specific plan for each session that puts your retreat activities and methods into a sequence based on Groome's five steps.
- 4. Evaluate:** Use the design considerations above and the five steps of the "Shared Praxis" model to evaluate your design. Pay special attention to the time boundaries of your session: Does the design fit into your time frame? Will it accomplish what it sets out to accomplish?
- 5. Fine-tune:** Develop your design further (this step may involve going back to the drawing board, finding new ideas, adapting activities to suit, etc.).
- 6. Evaluate:** Evaluate your design relative to your purpose and objectives. Important: if the design doesn't work, it may be necessary to return to the initial list of brainstormed ideas, or research new ideas that will better accomplish your purpose and objectives.
- 7. Write a Script:** Once you're satisfied that the design is sound, return to the beginning and script each session, filling in the details.

Following is an example of a detailed script from an actual retreat:

### **Sample Retreat Session Script**

The following session is part of a two-day retreat model for high school juniors and seniors. The session focuses on sin, forgiveness and God's love. The session is scheduled for the evening of the first day. Movements of the design considerations and "Shared Praxis" methodology are noted in brackets for the purposes of this example.

- 8:45 Re-convene the group after a break. A team member gathers the group, settles and focuses them with the "rain forest" activity (participants are led in simulating the sounds of a rain storm with their hands). [Gathering ]
- 9:00 Talk on sin and forgiveness. A team member gives a 10-12 minute talk focusing on personal experience(s) of broken relationships and connecting those with our relationship to God. [Listening - Naming my life experience.]
- 9:15 Guided Reflection. A team member leads the group in a guided meditation on sin and forgiveness. [Listening - Reflecting on life experience.]
- 9:30 Dramatic Presentation of Jesus' interaction with sinners (e.g. Zaccheus, adulterous woman, woman at the well). A group of team members presents a dramatized scripture story. [Listening - Sharing the christian story and vision]
- 9:45 Personal Reflection & Optional Sharing. Participants may take quiet time for journaling or share with their prayer partner their reactions to the story, guided by reflection questions that connect the story with their life experience. Participants are given refrigerated stones and quote from Ezekiel ("I will change your heart of stone to a heart of flesh") to assist in their reflection. [Listening - Dialogue]
- 10:15 Opportunity for Sacrament of Reconciliation. [Response - Decision-making and making applications]
- 10:45 Closing prayer with ritual. "Cold stony hearts" ritual: participants bring their stones forward, drop them in water bowl (representing baptismal water), receive water blessing from team member. [Response & Sending Forth - Decision-making and making applications]
- 11:15 Conclude & make announcements. Set up snacks and refreshments for social time.

## • Prepare a Retreat Outline Script

As the retreat format takes shape a convenient way to organize the design is to create an Outline Script for the entire retreat. The script fills in the schedule with who, what, when and how information and clearly shows the unfolding retreat process. Here's an example:

### **Sample One-Day Retreat Outline Script** *Journey Time: A Day for Those New to High School*

- Purpose:** To assist first year high school students from the parish in reflecting on their relationship with God as they meet new friends in school.
- Objectives:** Explore fears, concerns, hopes, and challenges of being a freshman.  
Reflect on presence of God in the midst of new situations.
- 10:00 a.m.** **Arrival, Welcome, Opening Prayer**  
Team will greet participants at door of church hall and take them to "homeroom." Each homeroom will say a short prayer for the day and then move to community building.
- 10:15** **Community building activity(ies)**  
Icebreakers will be Named Bingo with partners responsible for introducing each other to the large group.
- 10:45** **Topic #1: *What I Really Learn in High School***  
This session will help participants reflect on the official and unofficial curriculum by exploring the categories of teachers, administration, hallways, cafeteria, clubs and sports, and "cliques". Presentation, small group work and then skits to illustrate.
- 12:30 p.m.** **Lunch and games**
- 1:30** **Topic #2: *Jesus Never Was a Freshman But If He Was...***  
This session will help participants examine the relationships that they are forming at school from a values perspective. Testimony from a current senior, small group discussion, personal reflection tool. (Team is developing this.)
- 3:30** **Closing Prayer, Followed by Social**  
Closing prayer will use a current song, scripture from Luke and blessing prayer. Social time will introduce parish member who works as a school counselor and is willing to meet with students at school as needed.
- 4:00** **Departure**

## • Consider Pre- and Post- Retreat Activities

Retreats are a part of a comprehensive youth ministry effort in the parish or school community. They do not take place in isolation. Therefore, it is essential to consider the times before and after the retreat as integral to the experience and to incorporate activities that would assist the goals of the retreat during these periods of time. Support for the participants following a retreat experience is **not optional**. This is a time when the youth need support and encouragement to live out the experiences and commitments from the retreat. Caring and committed adults must be available for this. It is also essential that the impact on the family be taken into consideration. Here are some ideas:

- **Creative Reminders.** Letters or notes to retreat participants can introduce them to the retreat focus as well as provide travel and schedule information.
- **Pre-Retreat Parent Sessions.** Gather parents as they drop their teens off. Provide coffee or refreshments and focus on their needs. Include prayer for participants.
- **Post-Retreat Parent Sessions.** Provide helpful insights into the retreat experience and share how parents and families can support their teen as he/she returns to the family.
- **Retreat Commissioning.** Involve the pastor/campus minister in blessing the participants before departure. Other community prayer options might also be effective.
- **Bus Time.** If it is an overnight retreat or at another site, consider using the bus time for some icebreakers to build community and detract from the boredom of the ride.
- **Publicity Design.** Involve potential participants in designing posters or other publicity for the event as a way of introducing the retreat purpose to them.
- **Letters of Remembrance.** Letters or notes *after* the retreat can remind participants of key events or be used to send pictures and/or address lists of those who attended.
- **Mass or Prayer Service.** Celebrate the experience in prayer several weeks later. Invite parents to attend and involve teens in the preparation and testimony.
- **Catechetical Sessions.** Use catechetical sessions or events afterwards to reinforce content or key insights of the retreat.
- **Small Faith Communities.** Consider developing small faith communities for your youth. This can be a great way to assist them in continuing their journey of faith.
- **Connection Events.** Use the motivation and energy gained on a retreat to launch new evangelization or social ministry efforts. Tap the potential.

## • Create a Retreat Time Line

The final task is to establish a time line for the retreat preparation and set it in motion. Keep in mind that some preparation steps might be done for more than one retreat in your annual plan. Make sure dates are realistic for people's schedules, but don't leave everything until the last minute. Here is an example of a long-range time line for an overnight retreat.

### SAMPLE RETREAT TIME LINE

<b>1 Year</b>	Tour facility if you are unfamiliar with its features; Book facility.
<b>6 Months</b>	Contract with Retreat Coordinator. (if hiring outside assistance).
<b>4 Months</b>	Contact potential team members; Begin long-range publicity.
<b>3 Months</b>	Finalize team members. Hold first team meeting; Begin short-term publicity; Publicize on community calendar.
<b>2 Months</b>	Send forms and permission slips. Hold team meetings for logistics, etc.
<b>1 Week</b>	Complete paperwork; Tend to details and gather supplies; Review transportation plans; Review emergency plans; Check security plan, etc.

## STEP FIVE. PREPARING FOR PRAYER & WORSHIP

### • Preparing for Prayer and Worship

A significant part of any retreat is the opportunity for prayer and worship. The building of community through other types of sharing and interaction can lead to very positive prayer experiences for youth. Participants pray and worship with peers who assist them in making the connection to their relationship with God. Prayer and worship on retreats isn't necessarily more creative. It is often more powerful because the young people are more receptive.

Preparing for prayer and worship has both short-range and long-range aspects. For example, some prayer services which are part of the retreat "content" may need to be prepared well in advance. Other prayer or liturgical experiences might be prepared with participants during the retreat itself. Such opportunities are very effective in building a sense of ownership for the prayer and a heightened sense of being the assembly that gathers to worship. Several articles and worksheets are included in this chapter to assist you in your preparations. The remainder of this section includes resources to assist you in preparing prayer and worship in retreat settings.

### • The Art of Preparing Prayer and Worship

*"Faith grows when it is well expressed in celebration. Good celebrations foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations may weaken and destroy it."*

--Music in Catholic Worship, #6

***Faith grows when it is well expressed in celebration...*** Can you remember a prayer service, Mass or liturgy which really affected you in a deeply spiritual way? The kind of moment that helped to define your faith? What was special about it? Can you name the *elements* which contributed to making *that* experience different from many others in your life?

***Poor celebrations may weaken and destroy (faith)...*** You can probably also remember other prayer services or Masses which did just the opposite. These moments were frustrating, disappointing or enraging. They left you feeling empty and perhaps even doubting your faith. What were the *elements* which made *that* experience such a difficult memory?

***Good celebrations foster and nourish faith...*** The most significant element of prayer is God. Good prayer celebrations leave room for God to speak to us! They assume that God's grace is at work in human lives--that's what we mean when we say we believe in the Incarnation. God is always active in human events and how we pay attention to God's presence is an act of prayer.

#### **Principle One: Pay Attention to the Context of Prayer**

All prayer events take place in a context of *human* experience. That context includes the people involved, the location, the occasion, the time, local and world events, as well as personal feelings and circumstances. The human context of a prayer shapes the event and how people respond. The difference in contexts is why the same planned prayer service will be different every time it is used. Paying attention to the mix of those elements, that context, is the first principle in *the art of preparing prayer*. Just as a good artist knows the effect of the medium which he/she is using, so too, a liturgical artist is aware of how the context will shape the prayer experience.

There are elements of the context over which you have less control. For example, teens who have just experienced the accidental death of a classmate will be in a much different mood for prayer than if they were gathering for prayer during finals week or right before a vacation. Teens attending a Mass with other family members will feel different than if they are with a group of peers. A youth who has just had a fight with a best friend or parent will approach the time for prayer differently than the teen who just “aced” a test.

There are other elements of the context over which you may have choice, but are still quite variable. For example, praying in the morning will provide a context of different psychological energy than that of praying in the evening. However, anyone who has planned prayer for the morning after an all night lock-in knows it's not quite the same experience as the morning prayer which opens a retreat. Choosing to hold a prayer service outdoors may add a very creative touch to the experience -- except if the grass is wet with dew or the mosquitoes are ravenous! Some things you can only learn through experience. The art of preparing prayer involves allowing for a *diversity* of attitudes and situations to be present when we gather to pray. The preparation needs to provide a setting for all those experiences to be touched by God's love and presence.

### **Principle Two: Prepare, Then Plan**

Since there are many elements which shape a prayer experience beyond its context, and because those elements are always different, our experience of prayer is always different. We can't know or predict all the elements which will affect a prayer we are planning -- which is why *planning* may be the wrong word to use. It's probably more accurate to say we are *preparing* prayer, which is a process that includes assessing the elements we are given and accounting for other variables which are part of the prayer context.

Preparing prayer and worship experiences is an art form because the persons who are preparing prayer have choices in mixing the right set of elements together, but also *allow for and expect* the spontaneity of the moment to create the experience. Like any artist, the prayer preparer takes basic elements ( i.e. words, music, actions and time) and shapes them into a pattern of relationship. The final element is the people gathered which creates the dynamic of reaction and involvement. Most importantly, the preparer *allows for and expects* that God's grace will also shape and create the experience.

Does this mean that prayer can't be planned? Not at all! But good prayer experiences don't just happen. They're the result of paying attention to the context and to each other and then setting solid plans into place based on that awareness. Prepare, then plan.

### **Principle Three: Know the Requirements of Liturgical Prayer**

All liturgies are prayer, but not all group prayers are liturgical. Liturgies involve ritual symbols and symbolic actions and are part of the regular celebrations that define faith communities. The Mass (Eucharistic liturgy) and other sacraments are forms of liturgical prayer. They have set rubrics (directions), patterns, prayers, readings and other elements which are required for their celebration and therefore, become part of the “context”. Persons who regularly prepare liturgies need additional training and formation in liturgical principles and practice. Preparing liturgies requires attention to the norms and guidelines established for their celebration.

Preparing liturgies for youth retreats can be problematic for persons not experienced in liturgical norms. The bottom line in this: Know Thy Stuff. If you are unfamiliar with liturgical preparation, seek assistance from someone who is competently trained. **No** liturgy is better than poor liturgy.

## • Guidelines for Preparing Prayer

Here are a few basic steps to help you focus on the way to *prepare* non-eucharistic liturgies and worship. Preparation doesn't always happen in exactly this sequence, but the individual steps need to occur. You may have to adapt them to fit your local circumstance.

### 1. Gather Resources

The person responsible for preparing prayer needs to make sure that the necessary planning resources are available. Sometimes this is simply a matter of meeting to prepare in the place where all these things are naturally kept. Other times, this means gathering the resources and bringing them to the place where planning will take place. Lectionary, books of poetry or reflection, CD's/ tapes, instruments, hymnals or song collections, planning sheets, pens, etc. are some of the items needed.

### 2. Form a Team

It is sometimes easier to prepare prayer by yourself, but the resulting preparations won't be as inclusive as a team approach. A team effort allows more than one person's point of view, style of prayer, and awareness of elements to shape the prayer. Another positive aspect of a team approach is that more persons will feel a sense of *investment* in the prayer.

- **Choose A Planning Leader.** The Planning Leader's role is to lead the group through the next steps of preparing the prayer. If it's not clear who the planning leader is, then the group should choose one of its members to take this responsibility. (This does not have to be the person who will be "up front" as presider during the prayer time.) Even though there is a Planning Leader, *everyone* involved in preparing the prayer should take responsibility for keeping notes of the overall plan and their own tasks.
- **Choosing a Presider.** The Presider is the "up front" leader during prayer time. At a Mass, this person is a priest. In other types of prayer, any competent member of the community can serve in this role. The presider is the person who visibly leads the prayer, directs the action, and sometimes prays on behalf of the group. Have the group choose someone to serve in this role.

### 3. List the "Givens"

There are always certain elements for prayer which are given -- things that you must work with and cannot change. Make a list of which elements are set and which ones have some flexibility. These elements might include the place or time for prayer; how much time you will have; certain groups or persons who will be present; or the focus of the event itself. To ignore the givens or try to *change* them through prayer is risky and usually leads to disaster. To state the issue more positively, accepting the givens is a way of understanding that God is present in *every* moment and, therefore, *every* moment is an opportunity for prayer.

### 4. Assess the Context of This Prayer

The first job of your team is to talk about the **context** of this prayer. Some of these elements are included in the "givens" you named above, but other elements will also shape this opportunity for prayer. Below is a list of questions to ask. Have one member of the group take simple notes so that you can go back and refer to them in later preparation stages.

- **Who** will be present for this prayer? What is their energy level likely to be? How mixed of a group will it be? What predominant reason is there for *this* group to be together? How well do they know each other? Have they ever been together before?
- **What** is the occasion for this prayer? Are there other local or world events which have occurred in the recent past or are about to happen which will influence the mood or thinking of those gathered? What does this group need to say to each other? To God?
- **Where** will the prayer be held? What are the physical limitations of the space? What makes it a good place to pray? Is the light and comfort level good for prayer? How will this space become a place where the group can become more aware of themselves and their relationships with God?
- **When** will the prayer be held? What season of the liturgical year or secular calendar is being celebrated? What will the group be doing right before or after this prayer? Is this prayer part of a larger event? If the prayer is set to happen some time in the future, are there other events which might affect the outcome?

### 5. Share the Story and Make Connections to Real Life

It is within the above described context that we hear the Word of God. Sometimes that Word comes to us in the scriptures. Sometimes we have to listen to each other to understand how God is active in our world. Jesus told stories. In order to pray well, we need to listen to the scripture stories as well as contemporary stories of how God continues to be active in our lives.

- **Scriptures.** What passages from the scriptures come to mind as you assess the context of the prayer? Is there a particular story or passage which relates to this gathered group?
- **Current “Stories”.** What are the contemporary stories which help us to understand how God loves us? What are the personal faith stories which need to be told?

### 6. Decide Upon A Focus for Your Prayer Preparation

Prayer helps us to realize that every moment is an opportunity to become more aware of how God is present in our lives. Your team needs to discuss how this prayer moment can incorporate the ordinary and real events of daily life into prayer. Summarize those ideas into several words or a short phrase that can be used to focus the rest of your planning and preparation.

### 7. Brainstorm and Choose Prayer Ingredients

The focus statement gives you a good idea of what the prayer needs to accomplish. Now the team needs to suggest specific ingredients--religious songs, contemporary songs, poems, composed prayers, actions, or gestures. **Don't be too concerned about a theme!** If you've paid attention to the context, the right ideas will emerge naturally. More importantly, you must focus on the *function* of the various elements instead of whether they precisely match a theme. Below is a list of ingredients to consider:

- **Words and Readings:** Consider the following: readings or prayers assigned in the sacramentary or Lectionary for that particular day; scriptural passages that reflect on the ideas you raised; poems or personal reflections; quotes or readings from other writers; composed prayers for the whole group or the presider to pray; moments for spontaneous prayer or intercessions; times of silence; and composed or spontaneous litanies.

- **Music and Song:** Consider songs for the whole group to sing and music or songs for reflection/listening during other parts of the prayer time. Choose from music written for prayer and liturgy, or current songs which are appropriate for this prayer time.
- **Actions and Gestures:** Consider actions, movement or gestures which will be part of prayer time. This can be as simple as the Sign of the Cross, or gathering in a circle and joining hands, or as artistic as dance or mime. The way we sit, stand, kneel, and move is part of the prayer. How will the whole group be involved? How will our bodies (not just our minds and mouths) pray?
- **Environment and Set-up:** Consider the physical space where the prayer will be held. Think about how pieces of art, pottery, pictures, incense, decorations, light, seating, plants and other items might help those gathered to pray. Determine how the praying community will be greeted as they enter the worship space.

## 8. Review the Assembly's Role

Before you finalize your plans, review the ways that the whole group, not just the leaders, will be involved in the prayer. How will the people gathered be able to pray through words, singing or actions? Remember that your team is not responsible for the prayer--only the preparation. The prayer is the responsibility of *everyone gathered* so don't leave them out! Make sure your preparations allow for people to *pray together*, not be *prayed at!* Most importantly, make sure to leave room for God to speak to you, so that it can be *your* prayer as well.

## 9. Organize and Prepare the Movements of Prayer

Now you're ready to organize your choices into a pattern for prayer. A regular format helps people to become more comfortable with prayer and to pray with more confidence. It's hard to get fully involved in prayer if you don't know what's coming next. A recommended format for prayer is: **GATHER, LISTEN, RESPOND, SEND FORTH.**

- **GATHER.** The first part of prayer needs to help the community to gather and become aware of their relationship to God and each other. As the group comes together to pray, what actions, gestures, music, proclamations, litanies or other preparations will help this to occur?
- **LISTEN.** The next movement of the prayer gives those now gathered a chance to hear scriptures or current stories which allow us to reflect on how God is active in our lives. Readings, drama, videos, personal stories, witness reflections, music, psalms, gestures, litanies and silence are some elements which might be included.
- **RESPOND.** The third movement of prayer reminds us that it's not enough to just hear the Word of God, we must become it. How will we respond to our awareness of God's unconditional love? Spontaneous and composed prayers, intercessory prayer, the Lord's Prayer, psalms, music, actions or gestures are options.
- **SEND FORTH.** The final movement of prayer sends us forth with a renewed sense of our mission to live the Gospel everyday. Prayer helps us to focus on the big picture but also the simple ways that each of us needs to be a disciple to those around us. Spontaneous and composed prayers, music, actions, blessings, commissioning, and exchanging a sign of peace are some of the ways this can occur.

Once you have your prayer organized, the team can begin to prepare the specifics, set up, and set a time to evaluate. A **Planning Worksheet** is included in this section to assist you.

## 10. Make Final Preparations and Assign Responsibilities

Some additional preparation would include:

- Creating a **Worship Aid**--a program with songs and prayers for the assembly. (See end of this section for **copyright information**.)
- Writing out a **Prayer Script**.
- Walking through the sequence with everyone involved.
- Setting up the physical environment for the prayer.
- Practicing readings, music cues, dramatic presentations, etc.
- Getting ready to greet those who will pray.

## 11. Evaluate the Prayer Experience

Evaluation is the last important step because it helps you to know how to be better prepared the next time. Before you finish your planning meeting, decide upon a time when you will gather to evaluate this prayer service. Prayer evaluation should always ask the question, “**Did our preparations help the people to pray?**”. Describe evidence of how your preparations were successful. Determine what you learned which might help in the future. Avoid listing the things that went wrong or not as planned. Sometimes different elements don’t go as well as planned, but nevertheless assist prayer.

## PRAYER PREPARATION WORKSHEET

Occasion/Season/Feast: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/Day/Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Planning Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

Presider: \_\_\_\_\_

Other "Givens" to Note: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### ● DISCUSS THE CONTEXT OF THE PRAYER

Who: \_\_\_\_\_

What: \_\_\_\_\_

Where: \_\_\_\_\_

When: \_\_\_\_\_

### ● SHARE THE STORY: Notes and ideas for Scriptures and current stories

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### ● BRAINSTORM ELEMENTS AND IDEAS FOR PRAYER

Words/Readings: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Music & Songs: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Actions/Gestures: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Environment/Set-Up: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## PRAYER PREPARATION WORKSHEET

**GATHER.** The first part of prayer needs to help the community gather and become aware of their relationship to God and each other. As the group comes together to pray what actions, gestures, music, singing, proclamations, litanies or other preparations will help this to occur?

**LISTEN.** The next movement of the prayer gives those now gathered a chance to hear the scriptures or current stories which allow us to reflect on how God is active in our lives. Readings, drama, videos, personal stories, witness reflections, music, songs, psalms, gestures, litanies and silence are some elements which might be included.

**RESPOND.** The third movement of prayer reminds us that it's not enough to just hear the word of God, we must keep it. How will we respond to our awareness of how God continues to love us unconditionally? Spontaneous and composed prayers, intercessory prayer, the Lord's Prayer, psalms, music, actions or gestures are options.

**SEND FORTH.** The final movement of prayer sends us forth with a renewed sense of our mission to live the Gospel each and everyday. Prayer helps us to focus on the big picture but also the simple ways that each of us needs to be a disciple to those around us. Spontaneous and composed prayers, music, actions and gestures, blessings, commissionings, exchanging a sign of peace are some of the ways this can occur.

## ● PREPARING FOR EUCHARISTIC LITURGY (MASS)

Here are a few basic steps to help you focus on *preparing* Eucharistic liturgies. Preparation doesn't always happen in exactly this sequence, but the individual steps need to occur. You may have to adapt them to fit your local circumstances.

### 1. Gather Resources

The person responsible for preparing liturgy needs to make sure that the necessary planning resources are in place. Gather any resources such as the Lectionary (Book of Readings), the Sacramentary (Book of Prayers and Rituals), Bibles, hymnals and other music resources, CD's/tapes and CD/tape player, instruments, planning sheets, pens, etc. It is also a good idea to begin to gather other necessities for the environment such as vessels, candles, altar cloths, etc.

### 2. Form A Liturgy Preparation Team

Liturgies are almost always prepared by a team of persons because the process involves multiple elements. It is good to have more than one person's point of view, style of prayer, and awareness of elements involved in shaping the liturgy. A team approach to preparing for liturgy tends to create a greater *investment* in the liturgy.

- **Choose A Planning Leader.** The Planning Leader's role is to lead the group through the next steps of the preparation process. If it's not clear who the planning leader is, then the group should choose one of its members to take this responsibility. This person will function like a director prior to and during the Eucharist. It is best if the Planning Leader is not the priest, since the role of presider is a separate responsibility (see below). Even though there is a Planning Leader, *everyone* involved in preparing the liturgy should take responsibility for keeping notes of the overall plan and their own tasks.
- **Involve the Priest/Presider.** The Presider is the "up front" leader during liturgy. At a Eucharistic Liturgy, this person is a priest. If possible, the priest/presider should be involved in the whole preparation process. However, most of the time this isn't possible, especially when the priest has been invited to preside with a special group for a particular occasion (i.e. Sunday Mass when away on retreat, camp out, etc.) It is the Planning Leader's responsibility to review plans with the presider if the preparation team has had to meet separately. Planning is not complete until the presider has given input and agreement to preparation plans made. That is why it's always better when the presider has been involved from the beginning so that individual preferences can be addressed.

### 3. List the "Givens"

There are always certain elements for liturgy which are "given"--things that you must work with and cannot change. Make a list of which elements are pre-determined. These might include the place or time for liturgy, certain groups or persons who will be present, or an event which precedes or follows it. To ignore the givens is risky. Accepting the givens is a way of understanding that God is present in *every* moment of life and, therefore, in *every* liturgy.

#### 4. Assess the Context of This Liturgy

The next job of your team is to talk about the **context** of this liturgy. Below is a list of questions to ask. Have one member of the group take simple notes so that you can go back and refer to them in later preparation stages.

- **Who** will be present for this liturgy? What is their energy level likely to be? How diverse is the group? What predominant reason is there for *this* group to be together? How well do they know each other? Have they ever been together before?
- **What** is the occasion for this liturgy? Are there other local or world events which have occurred in the recent past or are about to happen which will influence the mood or thinking of those gathered? What does this group need to say to each other? To God?
- **Where** will the liturgy be held? What are the physical limitations of the space? What makes it a good place to pray? Is the light and comfort level good for liturgy? How will this space become a place where the group can become more aware of themselves and their relationships with God?
- **When** will the liturgy be held? What season of the liturgical year or secular calendar is being celebrated? What will the group be doing right before or after this liturgy? Is this liturgy part of a larger event? If the liturgy is set to happen some time in the future, are there other events which might affect the outcome?

#### 5. Reflect On the Scriptures and Make Real Life Connections

After reviewing the context for this liturgy, read and reflect on the readings assigned for the day. Check homily sources for additional background information on the scriptural passages. Discuss examples of how these readings apply to current events and situations in work, home, school, and community. Make notes of key points or ideas. (These can be given to the homilist as well.) **Special note:** Always use the assigned readings unless the occasion or nature of the group strongly suggests otherwise. If you need to substitute, check the votive and ritual Masses in the back of the Lectionary for suggestions.

#### 6. Decide Upon A Focus For Your Liturgy Preparation

Several key ideas will begin to emerge as you discuss the scriptures. Summarize those ideas into several words or a short phrase that can be used to focus the rest of your planning and preparation. Remember, there is only one *theme* for every Mass--the Paschal Mystery. It is always the same, but the *focus* of our preparation will change to respond to the context and readings for the day.

#### 7. Plan For The Elements of Liturgy

If the preparation team is small, work through all sections together. If the team is large, divide into the following three work groups. Use the **Liturgy Preparation Worksheet** which is included at the end of this section.

## WORDS AND READINGS TASK GROUP

- † Determine how the readings will be proclaimed and who will lector.
- † Review the Sacramentary prayers and make any necessary suggestions.
- † Compose or plan for the intercessory prayers.
- † Make homily suggestions with respect to the praying community.
- † Plan or prepare for special blessings or commissions.

## MUSIC AND SONG TASK GROUP

- † Choose a singable set of Eucharistic acclamations with which the group is familiar.
- † Choose a psalm response to sing.
- † Select songs for the gathering and sending forth, paying special attention to the function of those liturgical moments.
- † Select other music or songs to accompany ritual actions (sprinkling rite, preparation of the altar and gifts, breaking of bread, communion procession, and blessings).
- † Consider the songs to be played or sung as a call to worship.
- † Provide worship aids or songsheets for the assembly. Secure necessary copyrights (see [end of this section for information](#)).

## ENVIRONMENT AND MINISTERS TASK GROUP

- \* Prepare or arrange the physical space where the liturgy will be held.
- \* Prepare the altar and ambo with appropriate cloths, candles, and Lectionary.
- \* Prepare bread, water and wine, communion vessels, purificators, Sacramentary, and check with the presider for the vestments needed.
- \* Make a plan for how the gifts will be presented and the altar table prepared.
- \* Make a plan for how communion will be distributed and assign Eucharistic ministers.
- \* Decorate the liturgical space with appropriate art, flowers, plants, cloths or cultural artifacts.
- \* Make a plan for greeting the assembly and distributing songbooks, or worship aids.

### 8. Review the Assembly's Role

Before you finalize your plans, review the ways that the whole assembly, not just the leaders, will be involved in the liturgy. How will the people gathered be able to pray through words, songs or actions? Remember that your team is not responsible for the liturgy--only the preparation. The liturgy is the responsibility of *everyone gathered*, so don't leave them out! Make sure your preparations allow for people to *pray together*, not be *prayed at!* Most importantly, make sure to leave room for God to speak to you, so that it can be *your* prayer as well.

### 9. Review Plan and Meet with Presider

If the team has been working in separate groups, the Liturgy Preparation Teams needs to walk through the total plan together.

- Complete the **Liturgy Preparation Worksheet** and review responsibilities.
- Meet with the Presider and review the liturgy plan. Copy worksheet if necessary.

## 10. Make Final Preparations

Some additional preparations would include:

- Creating a **Worship Aid**--a program with songs and prayers for the assembly. See **end of this section for copyright information.**
- Writing out a **Liturgy Script.**
- Walking through the sequence with everyone involved.
- Setting up the physical environment for the liturgy.
- Practicing readings, music cues, dramatic presentations, etc.
- Getting ready to greet those who will pray.

## 11. Evaluate the Liturgy

Planning for evaluation is the last step of preparing liturgy because it helps you to know how to be better prepared the next time. Before you finish your planning meeting, decide upon a time when you will gather to evaluate this liturgy. Liturgy evaluation should always ask the question **“Did our preparations help the people to pray?”** When evaluating do not list things that went wrong or not as planned. Sometimes different elements don’t go as well as planned, but the focus of liturgy was still achieved. Instead, describe evidence of how your preparations were successful. Determine what you learned which might help in future preparations.

# EUCCHARISTIC LITURGY PREPARATION WORKSHEET

**Occasion/Season/Feast:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date/Day/Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Planning Leader:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Presider:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Other "Givens" to Note:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## DISCUSS THE CONTEXT OF THE LITURGY

**Who:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Where:** \_\_\_\_\_

**When:** \_\_\_\_\_

## REFLECT ON THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Gospel first, then the First Reading, Psalm and Second Reading ( if Sunday or feast day). *Note: In the Lectionary, there is a connection between the First Reading and the Gospel.* Reflect on the historical context, literary styles, and then make connections to current events, issues and the faith community's response. Then create a short statement which will focus the rest of your preparation.

**Focus for Preparation:**

# EUCCHARISTIC LITURGY PREPARATION WORKSHEET

## GATHER

- \* Preparation Time for the Assembly: \_\_\_\_\_
- ✠ Call to Worship/Greeting: \_\_\_\_\_
- † Opening Song (or reversed with Greeting): \_\_\_\_\_
- ✠ Penitential/Sprinkling Rite: \_\_\_\_\_
- † Music during this Rite (opt.): \_\_\_\_\_
- † Glory to God (Song of Praise): \_\_\_\_\_
- ✠ Opening Prayer: \_\_\_\_\_

## LISTEN

- ✠ First Reading: \_\_\_\_\_
- † Psalm Response: \_\_\_\_\_
- ✠ Second Reading \_\_\_\_\_
- † Gospel Acclamation: \_\_\_\_\_
- ✠ Gospel: \_\_\_\_\_
- ✠ Homily/Reflection: \_\_\_\_\_
- ✠ Creed (Sundays and Feasts): \_\_\_\_\_
- ✠ Prayer Intercessions: \_\_\_\_\_
- † Music for Intercessions (opt.): \_\_\_\_\_

## RESPOND

- \* Preparation of Gifts/Table: \_\_\_\_\_
- † Music during Preparation: \_\_\_\_\_
- ✠ Preface Text: \_\_\_\_\_
- ✠ Eucharistic Prayer: \_\_\_\_\_
- † Preface Acclam. (Holy, Holy): \_\_\_\_\_
- † Memorial Acclamation: \_\_\_\_\_
- † Amen/Doxology: \_\_\_\_\_
- ✠ Lord's Prayer: \_\_\_\_\_
- ✠ Sign of Peace: \_\_\_\_\_
- † Lamb of God: \_\_\_\_\_
- \* Communion Distribution Plan: \_\_\_\_\_
- † Communion Songs: \_\_\_\_\_
- ✠ Prayer after Communion: \_\_\_\_\_

## SEND FORTH

- ✠ Final Blessings/Commissions: \_\_\_\_\_
- ✠ Dismissal: \_\_\_\_\_
- † Closing Song/s: \_\_\_\_\_

- ✠ = Words/Readings Task Group
- † = Music Task Group
- \* = Environment and Ministers Task Group

## • Copyright Information

If you are reproducing music to include in a program or worship aid for a retreat or prayer service, it is important to obtain copyright permission from the publisher. It is illegal to reproduce printed music without permission from the publisher. Check with your music director/campus minister to see if your parish/church or school already has a license which will allow you to reprint music. If not, most liturgical publishers will grant permission for a small fee. Several liturgical publishers are listed below. Please respect the artists who compose music for worship and depend on royalties and commissions for their livelihoods.

### MUSIC PUBLISHERS

#### G. I. A. PUBLICATIONS, INC.

7404 S. Mason Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60638  
1-800-442-1358  
708-496-3800  
708-496-3828 **Fax**

OREGON CATHOLIC PRESS (OCP) includes New Dawn Music, Epociti/NALR formerly of Phoenix,  
AZ

5536 N.E. Hassalo  
Portland, OR 97213  
1-800-LITURGY  
(1-800-548-8749)

#### WORLD LIBRARY PUBLICATIONS, INC.

3815 N. Willow Road  
P.O. Box 2701  
Schiller Park, IL 60176  
1-800-621-5197  
708-678-0621  
708-678-9300



## STEP SIX. INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY: FAMILIES, PARISH AND SCHOOL

*Youth ministry seeks to draw young people to responsible participation in the life, mission and work of the Catholic faith community (Renewing the Vision)*

Youth ministry should not happen in isolation. It should bring youth more fully into the parish or school community, not distance them from it. As a part of comprehensive youth ministry, retreats should not happen in isolation, either. All ministries in the community should be working together to spread the Gospel message. All departments in the school have a stake in the faith formation of the students.

### • **Importance of Involving Families, Parish and School Communities**

- **A Family Perspective:** All the research indicates that parents and families are the principle influence on the healthy development of young people. Creating an artificial community that is out of touch with the family can prove to be counter-productive to the young person's family relationships. On the other hand, working together with parents and family for the betterment of the young person establishes a healthy partnership between all parties. Youth retreats should assist family life, not detract from it.
- **Informed and Involved Parents:** Not only is it necessary to inform parents about activities in which their teens are participating, it is also important to involve them in the retreat process. Parents are considered the primary religious educators of their children. By involving parents, we help them in their role and they help us in ours. Parents who understand the value of the retreat will encourage and support their teen's participation. It helps to have parents on your side.
- **Increase Visibility:** Involving the community gives the retreat and your ministry greater visibility. People know that the retreat is happening and what it is all about. People know that ministry to youth is happening, and they feel more confident that the next generation is being formed in the faith. They can share that information with others creating even greater visibility.
- **Gain Support:** When others are aware of the goals and the importance of the retreat, they can offer their support in a variety of ways. This support can be a teacher not scheduling a test for the day after a retreat or offering to become a part of the retreat team, etc. Support is more likely to be forthcoming when the purpose of the retreat is known and understood.
- **Avoid Scheduling Conflicts:** You don't want to schedule a weekend retreat for prom weekend or plan to use the church hall for a day of reflection the same time the Altar Society have always held their Christmas bazaar (even if you did schedule the space first.) Some of this information may be available in written form, but there is a wealth of information that people have in their heads that isn't on paper. By informing and involving the community, others may be willing to work with you in avoiding conflicts.

### • **Ideas for Involving Parents, Family Members and Sponsors**

- Inform parents about all aspects of the retreat: purpose, time, place, theme, how it fits into the overall program, etc.
- Ask parents' support in developing a positive attitude in youth who will be participating, especially for required retreats.
- Ask parents, sponsors, and family members to write "love" letters to the participants. These letters

could tell teens how special they are, how much they are loved, what gifts they have, what makes their parents proud. Keep the letters as a surprise and then distribute them to the youth on the retreat at an appropriate time. Be careful not to overuse this exercise with the same group. Also be certain that all participants receive letters and that they are positive in content.

- Encourage parents to talk about the retreat experience with the participants after the retreat is over.
- Give parents specific ideas for follow up with their son or daughter who participated.
- Ask parents to participate in good-bye or welcome back rituals.

### • **Ideas for Involving the Pastor and Staff**

- Make parish staff members aware of the retreat (theme, schedule, goals) so they can serve as ambassadors to the rest of the community.
- Ask staff members to write a letter of support to the participants to be shared at the retreat.
- Ask the pastor to preside at liturgy, ask the musicians to play, etc.
- Ask other staff members to contribute their skills and expertise.
- Ask staff members to be involved in activities that might be fun, creative, or energizing (e.g. ask the pastor to cook his famous chili for a meal, or come out for an afternoon just to watch and listen)

### • **Ideas for Involving the Parish Community**

- Announce the retreat through the bulletin, Mass announcements, etc.
- Ask for prayers during the retreat; this can range from a general request or asking specific people to pray, to arranging prayer partners for all the participants.
- Include the retreat in the parish prayers of the faithful.
- Have the participants join the parish in a regularly scheduled Mass and/or worship service to end the retreat. Make the community aware of the presence of the participants and have them welcomed back.
- Ask committee or council members to write a letter of support to the group.
- Have a representative of the community give a brief send off to the group.
- Have council or committee members greet the participants when they return to the parish.
- Include highlights about the retreat in the bulletin or newsletter. If possible include quotes from the youth about the experience. Display photographs in the vestibule or hall.

### • **Ideas for Involving the School Community**

- Inform staff and students about the retreat well in advance, including those who won't be directly involved. Post a list of retreatants to secure input from the staff about a student's participation relative to academic, disciplinary, or psychological reasons.
- Check schedules to avoid conflicts; inform others of your retreat dates and ask them to avoid scheduling major events on those days.
- Ask teachers and coaches to consider those who will be on retreat when assigning homework, planning special classroom activities, or scheduling practices.
- Work with teachers to incorporate the retreat material within their course curriculum.
- Have youth share their retreat experience in class.
- Prior to the retreat have previous participants talk to those who have not participated. (e.g. If the sophomore sexuality retreat is mandatory, have juniors talk to the sophomores.)
- Include participants in school prayers/liturgies.
- Ask faculty and staff members to be a part of the retreat team.
- Have send off or welcome back gatherings.
- Include highlights about the retreat in the bulletin or newsletter. If possible include quotes from the youth about the experience. Display photographs in a prominent location.

## STEP SEVEN. MAKING PRACTICAL PREPARATIONS

Preparing for a retreat involves more than planning with the team, contracting a facility, and calling the bus company. Preparations involve thinking through the various aspects of a retreat and planning ahead so that from start to finish things go as smoothly as possible. The Boy Scout motto holds true for retreats: Be Prepared!

### • Preparing Participants

Retreat participants need to know what to expect of the experience (in a general way) and what is expected of them. Providing this information to teens before the retreat event demonstrates your respect for them as individuals and allows them to make a personal choice to attend.

- Explain to youth who have never participated what a retreat is.
- Send a letter of invitation or flyer to all potential participants that includes the focus/purpose of the retreat; a list of what to bring and what not to bring; and information about the time to depart/return or begin/end. You could also include positive comments from youth who have attended previous retreats.
- Send a **Code of Behavior** to participants listing possible consequences for inappropriate behaviors. (For example, youth need to know that they will be sent home for alcohol/drug use, or that parents will be asked to pay for property damage, or other consequences have been determined by policy.)

### • Preparing Parents

Parents have the right, the responsibility and the desire to know what their teens are participating in before granting their permission. It is mandatory to have the parents' written consent for any teen to attend a retreat. Not only is this a sound retreat philosophy, but involving parents in this basic way will also increase parental support of the youth ministry.

- Inform parents about what a retreat is and why it is important for their teen to participate. Give them an overview of the purpose and the objectives of this particular retreat. Help them to see how this event fits into the comprehensive youth ministry program in the parish or school.
- Inform parents about the behavior expectations for the participants, including possible consequences. Parents need to know that their teen's inappropriate behavior may lead to dismissal from the retreat.
- Send parents the appropriate forms (permission, medical, and hold harmless statements) to read and sign.
- Make sure that parents receive the same information that the participants receive. This can be accomplished by sending copies of what was sent to teens or by sending a letter summarizing the information. This letter may also request the support and prayers of the parents.

## ● **Preparing A Budget**

Preparing the budget well in advance provides you with a realistic picture of expenses and enables you to identify an accurate per person cost. Budgets require a realistic projection of income and expenses, balancing the two. Estimate as realistically as possible all expenses and income.

### **1. List Sources of Income**

- anticipated participant fees
- grants/gifts
- youth ministry or school budget
- fundraisers

### **2. List Expenses**

- transportation
- stipend for retreat team leader or retreat coordinator (if applicable), clergy, guest presenters
- facility rental
- food and snacks
- supplies
- AV rental
- gifts and acknowledgments
- administrative costs such as postage, printing, phone, paper
- team training and other team expenses
- scholarships for youth who cannot afford the fees

### **3. Determine the Retreat Fee**

Once you add up all income and expenses you can determine the actual participant fee. If income is less than expenses, explore ways to cut costs (carpool instead of taking a bus, ask people to donate snacks) or raise income (holding a fundraiser, soliciting donations). If income is greater than expenses, you may choose to reduce fees or use the money to benefit the retreat (e.g. better supplies, increased stipends, T-shirts for the participants, bus instead of carpool).

## ● **Preparing Publicity**

### **Long-Range Publicity**

The long range publicity plan raises general awareness of the retreat; helps youth, parents and staff understand how retreats fit into the overall plan for youth ministry; and gives youth the opportunity to adjust their family and work schedules for the retreat dates. Here are a few simple suggestions to try:

- Put retreat dates on the parish or school calendar
- Include retreat dates on yearly schedules
- Include retreat information in school or parish newsletters, annual bulletins, etc.
- Provide periodic reminders (verbal or written) if the date is announced long before the retreat. (For example, if a retreat is announced in September, but won't occur until March, you will need to remind youth again in December or January about the date.)

## Short-Term Publicity

The short-term publicity plan is more intensive and designed to get youth to actually sign up for the retreat. Short-term publicity is focused on helping teens to arrange their schedules and get their money and forms together. It needs to be sent or posted several months in advance but soon enough to require immediate action. Techniques include:

- Church bulletin announcements
- Weekend Mass announcements
- School PA announcements
- Posters
- Special flyers
- Newsletters
- School newspaper
- Direct phone calls to potential participants
- Bulletin boards at church or school
- E-mail
- Postcards, Reminder letters

## • Preparing for Adolescent Behavior

Preparation for adolescent behavior needs to be directed toward teens and adults. You can be prepared for most situations if you take into consideration typical adolescent behaviors and how they apply to the retreat setting. There are six steps to consider:

### • Send a Code of Behavior to Participants and Parents

Send a Code of Behavior identifying clear expectations to all participants and parents prior to the retreat. The code should include consequences for behaviors such as use of alcohol/drugs, vandalism, fighting, etc. that could be major disruptions to the retreat. Teens should understand-- *before* they come on the retreat-- that they will be sent home or will not be allowed to participate if they cause such a disruption. Also, parents should not be caught off guard if they receive a phone call insisting that they retrieve their child.

### • Review Expectations with the Facility

Prior to, or as you arrive at the facility, meet with facility staff to review/clarify expectations about behavior, access to facilities, schedules, etc. Facilities usually have their own rules about smoking areas, off limits areas, clean up responsibilities, designated quiet times or areas, meal times, etc. Knowing these well and meeting with facility staff can go a long way to ensuring that the retreat will be a positive experience.

### • Review the Code of Behavior On-Site

Review the code of behavior with the participants and team soon after they arrive at the facility. Include any rules of the facility at this time. In this way you can avoid the “I didn’t know” excuses such as “I didn’t know we couldn’t go into the woods” or “I didn’t know girls couldn’t go to the boys dorm.” A staff member of the facility may wish to welcome the group and review facility expectations with your group. Make sure that the team understands the expectations and are willing to enforce them. The team should understand the role they play in *preventing* discipline problems by being with the youth and stopping unacceptable behavior. Team members may even help establish the code of behavior. The code can be creatively presented to the participants.

- **Establish Emergency and Discipline Procedures with the Team**

Clarify the team's plan for handling problem behaviors or emergency situations. Also clarify which persons on the team are responsible for which situations. Team members should know which problems they are expected to respond to directly and which problems or situations should be directed to someone else. For example, team members should respond directly to minor problems like talking during presentations, inappropriate language, excessive noise, etc. On the other hand, serious infractions such as use of controlled substances, physical fighting, etc. should be directed to the retreat team leader. Review the established consequences for certain behaviors. Planning for these types of situations will prevent poor decisions.

- **Take a Positive Approach**

All this planning for difficulties may seem overly negative. The reason for establishing rules is so that everyone can have a positive experience--including you. There is nothing wrong with sharing that desire with teens. In fact, it demonstrates your vulnerability and usually receives a reasonable response. Youth need to hear--even if they won't agree--the reasons behind certain rules or restrictions. Otherwise they may take issue with certain rules and develop a negative attitude which could affect their own and others retreat experience. Wording the expectations in a positive rather than a negative way is also helpful.

## **Retreat Be-Attitudes**

**Blessed are those who are in their own bed  
at the lights out hour.**

**Blessed are those who do not leave the retreat facility during the  
retreat.**

**Blessed are those who are punctual  
for they shall meet their maker on time.**

**Blessed are those who refrain from foreign substances  
for they shall enjoy the whole weekend.**

**Blessed are the peacemakers  
for they are the friends of all.**

**Blessed are those who report any injuries  
for they shall be healed quickly.**

**Happy those who nurture their neighbor's self-esteem  
for they shall find support.**

**Happy those who participate fully in the retreat  
for their rewards are endless.**

**Blessed those who follow these Be-Attitudes  
for they shall find happiness on this retreat.**

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## • Preparing for Tough Situations

Youth retreats can create situations which call for a compassionate pastoral response to real or potential infractions of the rules. For example, if a participant broke a minor restriction (not drugs, alcohol, firearms, sexual activity) and he/she is required to participate, would you hold to the letter of the law, or would you be more pastoral and make allowances? Each situation is different and you can only expect to use your best judgment in handling each circumstance. Here are some other considerations. **Difficult situations will arise - count on it!** Our responses can establish precedents for future responses. A single exception can easily become the new rule.

**Carefully consider all sides to each situation.** Look at it from the point of view of the youth involved as well as your own. Explore what issues are at the heart of the matter. Parents and youth are not always forthcoming with all the details. They may come on strong assuming that you will not compromise. Some teens may be pushing your limits to see what they can get away with, while others may have a real need for an exception. Consider the good of the retreat community, the good of the individuals, as well as the setting of precedents involved when making a decision.

**Explore the alternatives.** Offer options whenever possible, e.g. if the teen cannot make the designated retreat, check with other parishes and let the teen know what other retreats they could go on.

**Make an informed, prayerful decision.** It can be helpful to consult with fellow team members before deciding. After the decision, be prepared to explain your point of view.

## • Preparing for Emergencies

Advance preparation can keep emergency situations from turning into panic situations. Our primary concern is to ensure the safety and health of all participants. Even accidents can be learning experiences for young people as they feel the caring presence of the community in a difficult moment. Here are some things to prepare in advance:

- Read through the medical forms and note any special medical information (e.g. diabetic, asthmatic, allergies, and special medications). Share this information with team members as appropriate, especially the small group leaders of individuals noted.
- Know the emergency phone numbers for the area of the retreat facility. Know how to get an outside line. Know where the phone is located and how to use it.
- Know where the hospital is located and the quickest way there.
- Designate who will be transporting youth to emergency rooms if necessary.
- Ask in advance if the facility has a first-aid kit. Know where it is located. Bring your own if there isn't one available.
- Have exit plans in case of fire. Know where fire extinguishers are kept. Have shelter plans in case of a tornado.
- Bring a battery-operated radio for weather reports.

The last steps of preparing for a retreat involve attending to registration details, and organizing materials and supplies. There is nothing worse than pulling out session plans and realizing that you have forgotten key materials.

## • **Four Helpful Hints**

### ❖ **Develop Your Own Set of Retreat Checklists**

Experienced retreat leaders have simple checklists that they update to make sure that essential materials are included when they prepare to lead a retreat. Take the lists which are included in [Appendix D](#) and personalize them for your use.

### ❖ **Create and Maintain A Set of “Retreat Kits”**

Another way to stay organized is to store basic materials in boxes/containers. (The big Rubbermaid storage containers work well.) Create one kit with all medical supplies, another with Mass/Prayer supplies, and another with basic Retreat Session supplies. Don't forget to keep a list with the contents so that you can replenish the supplies quickly.

### ❖ **Organize by Sessions of the Retreat Schedule**

Develop lists of necessary materials by walking through the schedule. Even if you have ready-made kits, it's important to check each session for materials needed. You may have added a new activity or dropped an old one which call for different supplies.

### ❖ **Name a Designated Detail Person**

Some people are just naturally good at keeping track of details. Consider naming an older teen or an adult volunteer as a designated detail person whose job is to maintain your retreat kits or to review lists and supplies before an event. The tension of attending to last minute details makes us all prone to forget things. Having someone in charge of details can make the experience less tense and more meaningful for you as well.

## **STEP EIGHT. EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP**

Evaluation is an integral step of the retreat, though it is often overlooked in the midst of concluding sessions, packing and traveling home, or post-retreat fatigue! Evaluation provides evidence that the retreat's purpose and objectives have been achieved and suggest necessary changes. Evaluation allows the retreat team leader, team, and participants to reflect on insights and personal growth which occurred during or as a result of the retreat.

### **• Evaluation**

#### **Participant Evaluation**

Written and oral evaluations by retreat participants are a necessary source of retreat design. Though many answers from youth tend to be predictable (e.g. "Not enough free time", "Better food", etc.), it is important to ask the questions for several reasons. First, evaluation leads participants to reflect on the experience itself and, therefore, becomes part of the learning process. Secondly, consistent critical comments regarding a particular session, activity or issue usually indicate the need for revision or adaptation. Isolated negative comments should be acknowledged, but a pattern of negative comments on some aspect of the retreat should be investigated and reviewed.

Written feedback from participants is essential. It offers everyone a chance to reflect on questions in a personal and confidential manner. Evaluative discussions can be beneficial, allowing youth to overhear each other's insights, personal highlights or recommendations. A sample "Retreat Participant Evaluation Form" is included in this section.

#### **Retreat Team Evaluation**

Members of a retreat team should gather for evaluation after the retreat has concluded. This allows for some personal reflection time in which individuals can bring thoughts, ideas, and learnings back to the group. Team members evaluate the experience not only as observers of the retreat content and design, but also as participants in the unfolding retreat process.

Written feedback from team members is helpful in providing a record of team reactions and observations. Team members also need the opportunity to overhear each other's insights, highlights and recommendations. A sample "Retreat Team Member Evaluation" form is included in this section.

#### **Evaluation by the Retreat Team Leader**

The retreat leader needs to assess the retreat's effectiveness in meeting its purpose(s) and objectives. If the retreat designers set a clear purpose, then the evaluation tries to determine if the retreat accomplished what was intended. Through evaluation you may discover that the retreat design was effective in accomplishing *unintended* purposes. Evaluation also allows you to assess the effectiveness of specific sessions and retreat activities. If the retreat design is to be repeated, evaluation allows you to modify your design. Sometimes an activity is good but needs to be used at a different point in the schedule. Other times a session may be appropriate for the design but simply didn't work with a particular group.

## • Follow-Up

**Create a Report for Committees and Boards.** Evaluation of a retreat provides an opportunity to review the effectiveness of youth retreats in developing the faith of adolescents. Direct comments and quotes from participants and team can make a very powerful presentation. If the parish or school has partially or fully funded the retreat, a final report can help to repeat or increase future funding.

**Identify Peer Leaders.** Evaluation of a retreat experience can help identify potential peer leaders who have emerged during retreat sessions. During informal sharing and breaks on the retreat, as well as during session times, natural peer leaders tend to surface. Make a point of affirming these young people and then follow up with invitations for them to become involved in other ministry opportunities.

**Acknowledge and Thank Team and Staff.** Evaluation is also a good time to acknowledge the efforts of the team. Most retreats depend on volunteer efforts and it is important to publicly note their gifts of time and talent. This acknowledgment also helps young people to realize the support which the members of the parish or school community have given to them. Acknowledging contributions of time and talent is a way of naming the importance of community life-- especially as youth have just experienced it.

**Develop Follow-up Experiences.** The retreat does not end when the participants leave the retreat. It is essential that follow-up activities are designed to continue to support and nurture the youth and the families. See page 32 for post-retreat ideas.

## SAMPLE RETREAT TEAM MEMBER EVALUATION

Thank you for sharing your time and talents on this retreat. We would appreciate your evaluation of this retreat experience. Your comments will help us when we plan future retreats.

1. In what ways were the purposes and objectives of this retreat met? Not met? (Be specific)
  
2. In terms of the purposes and objectives of this retreat, identify the three most successful areas of the retreat experience. Identify the three things you would have changed and why.
  
3. What was helpful to you in the planning process and training for this retreat?  
What would you have done differently?
  
4. In your area of responsibility as a presenter, small group leader, or chaperon, how did you feel about your performance in that role? Do you have any suggestions for improvement in these areas?
  
5. In what ways did the team interact well with the participants?  
In what ways could the team have improved in interacting with participants?
  
6. What did you learn about yourself and your relationship with God/Jesus on this retreat?
  
7. Please rate the presenters/facilitators and their topics. 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent)  
If you rate a topic 3 or lower, please comment.

	<u>Title/Presenter:</u>	<u>Comments:</u>	<u>What would you change?</u>
Friday Night:			
Saturday Morning:			
Saturday Afternoon:			
Saturday Evening:			
Sunday Morning:			
Sunday Afternoon:			

8. What do you think the retreatants gained from this experience?

**Please use the reverse side for further comments.**

## SAMPLE RETREAT PARTICIPANT EVALUATION

We would appreciate your honest thoughts and comments about your retreat experience. Thank you for taking the time to do this evaluation. It will help us when we plan retreats in the future.

1. What was most rewarding on this retreat?
  
2. What would you have changed?
  
3. What did you learn?
  
4. Please evaluate the following areas of the retreat you found rewarding and briefly state why.  
Use a scale of 1-5 where 1=poor and 5=excellent

- \_\_\_ Games and icebreakers
- \_\_\_ Prayer times
- \_\_\_ Topic Presentations
- \_\_\_ Small Groups \_\_\_\_\_ name of small group leader
- \_\_\_ Celebration of Reconciliation
- \_\_\_ Celebration of the Eucharist
- \_\_\_ Recreation and free time
- \_\_\_ Meals
- \_\_\_ Sleep Time
- \_\_\_ Facility

Please rate the talks on the retreat. 1 -(poor) to 5 - (excellent)  
If you rate a topic 3 or lower, please comment.

Comments:

- |                            |   |   |   |   |   |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Friday Night Session       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Saturday Morning Session   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Saturday Afternoon Session | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Saturday Evening Session   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Sunday Morning Session)    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please use the reverse side for further comments.