

Youth Retreats

Youth retreats are a component of the Church's pastoral ministry to youth. Such retreats are part of a total ministry to youth and complement efforts to meet the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and relational needs of adolescents. The purpose of this time apart is to allow youth to reflect upon the movement of God in their lives, to provide a climate in which the young person might encounter Christ as alive among us, to experience community, and formulate their personal response to the call of discipleship received in baptism. [Acts 2:42] NAB, [CCC Prologue, Section IV: Above all – Charity]

Because the word retreat has many meanings within contemporary society, it is important to define its meaning within the pastoral setting. A youth retreat might be defined as a time when adolescents withdraw from their normal activities to reflect upon their lives and identify in Christ Jesus. This withdrawal, alone or with a community of youth, provides the participant with the opportunity to deepen his/her knowledge of self, God, and others; to experience community in Christ, and to explore the shape of his/her response to Christ lived out within daily life. [Mark 6:31]

References Scripture and Catechism of the Catholic Church

Acts 2:42 NAB "They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to prayers."

CCC Prologue, Section II: Handing on the Faith: Catechesis

4 Quite early on, the name Catechesis was given to the totality of the Church's efforts to make disciples, to help men believe that Jesus is the son of God.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR YOUTH RETREATS

Theological Principles

1. Retreats should assist youth in developing a personal relationship with God in three Persons.
2. Retreats should give youth an experience of Church as believers called to discipleship in Christ.
3. Retreats are a mode of experience through which the church exercises her pastoral ministry to youth by proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, by fostering the formation of Christian community, by providing opportunities for participants to reflect upon their life questions in the light of the Gospel and the traditions for the Church, and by challenging retreatant to a personal response of action.
4. The doctrinal content of youth retreats is theologically consistent with the official teaching of the Catholic Church.
5. Prayer, in its liturgical, communal, and private forms, is an essential aspect of the retreat experience opening participants to ongoing conversion and deepening of faith.
6. Retreats for youth provide enlivening liturgical experiences that are celebrated according to the liturgical norms of the diocese, are appropriate for the occasion and age of youth, and are celebrated with sufficient time to allow full participation by the assembly.

Developmental Principles

1. Retreats provide the opportunity for participants to integrate their experience and thereby deepen their sense of belonging and meaning.
2. Retreat environments are characterized by acceptance, growth, and freedom, avoiding emotional manipulation.
3. Retreatants should be given the opportunity to participate in diverse experiences leading to greater self-identity, expression and esteem.
4. The psychological well being of participants is safeguarded by maintaining a good balance of recreation, reflection, structured activity, rest, and diet.
5. Peer ministry is a valuable aspect of sharing the Christian experience with youth and allows them to exercise their baptismal call to give witness and lead others to Christ.
6. Retreat activities, presentations and processes should be developmentally appropriate.
7. Retreat experiences are only one aspect of a continuing personal formation process. Parish-based preparation and follow-up after the retreat, through the parish's youth ministry efforts, are essential elements in the process.

Content and Process Principles

1. Human experience is the starting point for adolescent catechesis. The personal story of youth must be joined to or seen in light of the Christ story.
2. Retreat designs and components are based upon the developmental stages of the participants in the areas of:
 - a. Psychological growth

- b. Moral growth
 - c. Faith growth
 - d. Intellectual growth
 - e. Social growth
3. The content of youth retreats is suitable for the age group and reflects appropriate faith themes recommended in the national paper on adolescent catechesis, “Maturing in Faith: The Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis (Washington DC: NFCYM, 1986).”
 4. Interactive processes and total group activities, such as small group sharing, games, and non-verbal exercises use the group dynamics appropriate for the activity, group, content, and goals of the retreat.
 5. Storytelling, faith sharing, and personal witnessing are respected as valuable elements in communicating the Gospel message.
 6. The process of catechetical proclamation involves a four-fold movement:
EXPERIENCE + MESSAGE + REFLECTION + ACTION
 7. The SEARCH Institute’s asset approach to giving young people what they need to succeed has identified concrete, positive experiences and qualities – developmental assets – which have a tremendous influence on young people’s lives. *These assets are grouped into eight categories. It would be beneficial in planning any retreat to incorporate these assets.
 - a. Support – Young people need to experience support, care, and love from their families and others. They need organizations and institutions that provide positive, supportive environments.
 - b. Empowerment – Young people need to be valued by their community and have opportunities to contribute to others. For this to occur, they must be safe and feel secure.
 - c. Boundaries and expectations – Young people need to know what is expected of them and whether activities and behaviors are “in bounds” or “out of bounds.”
 - d. Constructive use of time – Young people need constructive, enriching opportunities for growth through creative activities, youth programs, congregational involvement, and quality time at home.
 - e. Commitment to learning – Young people need to develop a lifelong commitment to education and learning.
 - f. Positive values – Young people need to develop strong values that guide their choices.
 - g. Social competencies – Young people need skills and competencies that equip them to make positive choices, to build relationships, and to succeed in life.
 - h. Positive identity – Young people need a strong sense of their own power, purpose, worth, and promise.
 8. Adherence to [Diocesan Safe Environment Program](#) and policies.

*Source: The Asset Approach: Giving Kids What They Need To Succeed. Copyright 1997 by SEARCH Institute, 700 S. Third Street, Suite 210, Minneapolis, MN 55415.

RECOMMENDED RETREAT COMPONENTS

Physical

- Adequate sleep
- Adequate recreation time
- Balanced diet
- Access to outdoors/nature, if possible

Spiritual

- Liturgical celebration
 - Priority on Eucharistic celebration for two-day retreats
 - Reconciliation service if in keeping with retreat design
- Prayer
 - Communal
 - Private
 - Reflection time
- Scripture

Psychological/Social/Catechetical

- Balance of private time and group time
- Reflection time on human experience
- Community building
- Opportunities for participation and involvement
- Creative activity/expression
- Input/presentation
- Discussion and sharing

Supportive Components (outside the retreat experience)

- Orientation or preparation of participants
- Follow-up process
- Evaluation by team and participants
- Team training and program design

RETREAT MODELS AND CHARACTERISTICS

A. CONVERSION MODEL

A “conversion model” retreat is one which focuses upon creating a climate through which participants might come to a personal faith commitment.

Characteristics: community building
 personal testimony
 storytelling
 personal encounter with Jesus
 witnessing

B. FAITH FORMATION MODEL

A “faith formation model” retreat is one which focuses upon deepening the participant’s experience of Jesus and fostering a life response of discipleship. It is built upon the assumption that participants have had some experience of encountering Christ in their lives.

Characteristics: theme based (i.e. prayer, social justice)
 explores shape of discipleship
 seeks to deepen affective, cognitive and behavioral responses

C. CONFIRMATION MODEL

A “confirmation model” focuses upon immediate or remote preparedness for reception of the sacrament of confirmation. Such retreats are limited to confirmation candidates and are parish-based.

Characteristics: combines elements from other models
 focus upon intensification of baptismal commitment
 limited in range of participants

D. LEADERSHIP FORMATION MODEL

A “leadership formation model” focuses upon formation for servant ministry. It combines elements of spiritual formation and practical leadership skills.

Characteristics: foster sense of peer ministry
 more task-oriented
 contains workshop processes
 faith sharing
 prayer
 skill building, goal setting, evaluation

E. INTERGENERATIONAL MODEL

The “intergenerational model” focuses upon the sharing of insights emerging from mixing participants across age lines.

RETREAT TEAM LEADERSHIP

Retreat Team Selection

It is recommended that a process for retreat team selection include:

- a. Being called to ministry
- b. Having the call confirmed by the community

Desirable qualities of a team member may include: prior retreat experience, openness to work as a team member, ability to share faith, enthusiasm, sensitivity, creativity, listening skills, musical ability. These qualities are not intended to be exhaustive or exclusive, but illustrative.

Retreat Team Training

What role will your team play in the development of the retreat? If your team will be involved from the start, a good training process is necessary. (If you already have a retreat written, and the team will fill the areas needed, you may choose to use a condensed version of this process.)

1. SETTING THE STAGE (introduction to retreat ministry)
 - a. Use icebreakers to build community with the team.
 - b. Share personal retreat experiences.
 - c. How will this retreat connect to what is already happening in the youth ministry program?
 - d. Outline the principles and components of a retreat.
2. GETTING THE SKILLS NECESSARY (How To's)
 - a. Small group facilitation
 - i. Types of discussion questions to use – listening skills
 - ii. “trouble-shooting” skills
 - iii. role playing techniques
 - b. Writing talks/ the need for personal sharings
 - c. Planning prayer and worship experiences
 - d. Planning ice breakers and community building activities
3. RETREAT PLANNING PROCESS
 - a. Provide the team with the planning process outline.
 - b. Give the team the parameters of the retreat. What pieces are already determined? (meal times, arrival and departure times, Eucharist, etc.)
 - c. Use newsprint to brainstorm ideas, propose a schedule or format, keep track of resources or suggestions, etc.

**NON-PARISH BASED GROUPS
AND
CLERGY FROM OUTSIDE OF OUR DIOCESE**

Non-parish based groups ministering to the young people of the Diocese of Dallas are required to register with the Diocesan Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries. Before bringing in an outside group (and/or individual) to facilitate a youth retreat, please check to see that the group (or individual) has been cleared to work with your young people.

All clergy from outside of our diocese must be on file with the Diocese of Dallas Chancellor's Office before being allowed to minister within Dallas. Your pastor knows the required protocol for bringing in ordained clergy from outside this diocese.

If the clergy, outside group or individual is not currently registered, the process can take up to six months, so please plan early.

SAMPLE RETREAT PARTICIPATION EVALUATION

Instructions: The following is an evaluation for this retreat. We would appreciate your honest thought and comments.

1. How was the retreat meaningful for you?

2. For you, what aspect(s) of the retreat was most meaningful? Check all that apply.

- building of community among participants
- small group discussions
- group recreation time
- prayer times
- reconciliation celebration
- Eucharistic celebration
- other

3. How relevant were the talks to you, considering where you are right now in your life? Please rate them, 1 being somewhat relevant to 5 being powerful.

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------|
| Friday night – (title) | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Saturday morning – (title) | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Saturday afternoon – (title) | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Saturday evening – (title) | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Sunday morning – (title) | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Sunday afternoon – (title) | 1 2 3 4 5 |

4. Additional comments:

SUPPORT & FOLLOW-UP SUGGESTIONS

Follow-up is an essential aspect of a retreat experience. It begins with the evaluation of the retreat in the participant's home setting.

Diocesan or Interparochial Retreat

1. Pastors and/or youth ministry coordinators of represented parishes should be notified of participants from their community.
2. Follow-up letter sent to each individual reminding them of key retreat themes, suggesting ways of witnessing within their parishes, and encouraging them to share their retreat experience with others.
3. Parent letter encouraging the family to support retreatants and invite him/her to share their retreat experience when they come home.
4. Faith companionship with one other participant after the retreat.
5. If there is a follow-up gathering, that it be limited in scope and be open to participants from all the year's retreats.
6. The most effective follow-up to retreat experiences is integration into the parish youth ministry and/or through the retreatant's participation in the life of the parish community.

Parish-Based Retreat

1. Follow-up letter sent to each individual reminding them of key retreat themes, suggesting ways of witnessing within their parishes, and encouraging them to share their retreat experience with others.
2. Parent letter encouraging the family to support the retreatant and invite him/her to share their retreat experience when they come home.
3. Faith companionship with one other participant after the retreat.
4. The most effective follow-up to retreat experiences is integration into the parish youth ministry and/or through the retreatant's participation in the life of the parish community.
5. Invite retreatants to become involved in peer ministry within the parish.
6. Pray for retreatants – remember them in the parish bulletin.

CRITERIA FOR REVIEW PROCESS

This **Criteria for Review** becomes operative when an inquiry or complaint arises and is brought to the attention of the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries.

Retreat programs or retreat movements are considered in violation of the diocesan norms when they meet one or more of the following criteria:*

1. The theological content of the program/presentation demonstrates inconsistent or inappropriate theology.
2. The possibilities of, or plans for, psychological/physical casualties are not considered when a program is presented.
3. The retreat promotes alienation from the parish community by regular, long-term follow-up sessions that are not parish based.
4. The program promotes formation of an elite group.
5. The program places an overemphasis on an intense experience with relative neglect of healthy psychological and theological growth, or impinges on individual freedom and privacy.

*Reference **Guiding Principles** section of these guidelines.

Complaint Procedure

The Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries investigates complaints and/or concerns regarding a particular retreat. A staff member works with the group/individual to achieve compliance.

If compliance is not met, the Diocesan Director notifies the person(s) in charge that they are in violation of diocesan norms, that they have been requested to make appropriate changes, and have failed to do so. They would then be barred from operation again within the diocese.

If the issue includes a violation of :

[The Diocesan Safe Environment Program](#) or
[The Charter for the Protection of Young People](#)

it is referred to the Diocesan Risk Manager and/or Chancellor's Office.

The person(s) in charge would have recourse through the Office of the Chancellor and due process as established by the Diocese of Dallas.

Concluding Comments

The importance of a “sacred time apart” is reflected in the Scriptures. The Old Testament prophets were often led to the desert solitude to prepare for their prophetic task. Jesus invited his disciples to come apart for a time, a time of both refreshment and renewal. Jesus himself gave the example of withdrawing for prayer and solitude before beginning his public ministry. Throughout the Gospels, we find reference to his going apart for prayer and then returning to continue his ministry of teaching and healing. The scriptural model is clear in its portrayal of retreat as a time of preparation for renewed ministry. It was a time of rest and revitalization that energized the retreatant to return and continue the given mission. Today’s youth retreats are not solely for the rest and sense of community experienced by the participants. It is empowering for youth to live discipleship and to enable them in more fully owning their identity in Christ. It is a time of strengthening for the continuing task of living as witnesses to Christ within their schools, parishes, and families, and retreats are most effective when participants freely choose to take part. [Num. 23:3-4, Ex. 19:17, 1 Sam 3:4, and Is 51:2]

Retreats are a vital part of any well rounded faith development program. They directly address the adolescent’s need for reflection time, a sense of belonging, and communal bonding. These benefits can prove counterproductive, if they are not complemented by programs, which continue this process after the retreat experience ends. Youth who participate in programs which provide intense bonding and sharing, or present an idealized vision of Christian life can become disillusioned, if they return to their parishes and communities and fail to find faith-nurturing programs which continue such bonding and prayer in a less intense way. They feel disillusioned if the human realities and weaknesses of the parish faith community do not match the idealized vision presented. [Luke 4:14]

It is important that retreats be recognized as tools in the faith nurturing process. They are effective tools of evangelization and catechesis. Many young Catholics have been prompted to conversion of heart through the retreat experience. It must also be recognized, however, that a retreat cannot bear the weight of being the only tool used by a parish or movement. Retreats are most effective when they are part of an integrated program that addresses the multiple needs of youth. [1Tim 4:12-13], [Renewing the Vision: A Framework For Catholic Youth Ministry, USCC 1997]

References Scripture and Catechism of the Catholic Church

Num. 23:3-4 “Perhaps the LORD will meet me, and then I will tell you whatever he lets me see.” He went out on the barren height, and God met him.

EX 19:17 Moses led the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stationed themselves at the foot of the mountain.

1 Sam 4:4 The LORD called to Samuel, who answered “Here I am.”

Is 51:2 Look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth; When he was but one I called him, I blessed him and made him many.

Luke 4:14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news of him spread throughout the whole region.

1 Tim 4:12-13 Let no one have contempt for your youth, but set an example for those who believe, in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity. Until I arrive, attend to the reading, exhortation, and teaching.

APPENDIX

This section includes samples, guides, and resources that can be used to help plan, implement, and evaluate your retreat.

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

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

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

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

1986 by Stephen F. Tholcke, Diocese of Sacramento

LISTENING SKILLS

There are many ways of listening. Sometimes we listen just for the facts; sometimes we listen for the message behind the facts. It is possible to say there are two levels:

- A. Literal listening
- B. Inner/heart listening

When a person shares their story with us, they want to be valued. They want to be recognized as giving you a part of themselves. Some simple skills help us to do this:

- A. **Silence:** This is leaving time and space for the other person to speak, to respond.
- B. **Passive Affirmation:** Responses such as a smile, a nod of the head, a "yes", or like expressions tell people you are with them.
- C. **Active Listening:** This type of listening involves a variety of skills: clarifying, repeating, paraphrasing. The point is to let the person know whether you understand what they are saying.
- D. **Focus Statements:** These are summations of what you have heard. It sums up the overall message, and lets the person know their ideas have been recognized.

Group structures can also be used to help build climates. The three most common ones are:

- A. **Simple Sharing:** Each person gives their opinion without discussion. Clarification may be asked, but the thought stands without an evaluation.
- B. **Group Listening:** As people share their ideas, common themes and ideas evolve. After the conclusion of sharing around an idea, you stop to hear the message of the whole. What is the group saying about the topic?
- C. **Discussion:** The format is more give and take. The focus should be on an issue, not on the personal feelings or opinion of the participants.

EVALUATING AN ICE BREAKER OR GAME

1. Were the directions clear? Were they loud enough?
2. Was the leader facing the entire group?
3. Was the leader enthusiastic? Did the leader pick up on humorous situations?
4. Was everyone involved? Were there periods of waiting?
5. Were the materials prepared and ready-to-go?
6. How did the group respond? Did they enjoy the activity? Were they bored? Did the game get "out-of-hand?"
7. Evaluate the length of the game. Was it played too long? Too short?
8. What was the atmosphere after the game? Did it lead into the next activity or talk?
9. How could the game, or the leadership of the game, have been improved?
10. Were safety measures maintained?

EVALUATING A TALK

1. Was the speaker loud enough? Comment on the speaker's pace, diction, inflection, eye contact with the audience, and mannerisms.
2. Did the talk identify with the audience?
3. Was the speaker prepared? Did the speaker use appropriate resources in developing his/her talk?
4. Did the speaker use personal examples? Did the speaker relate in the first person? Was the language understandable? Did the speaker avoid excessive emotionalism?
5. Did the speaker appear genuine and honest? Was there an effort to share his/her personal faith?
6. Did the speaker refer too much to notes? Was there an outline?
7. Comment on the time the speaker took. Could the talk have been given in less time with the same effort? Was there a conclusion?

HOW TO WRITE A TALK

1. What is the topic or theme of the talk? How much time is allotted for the talk?
2. What three (3) objectives (think, feel, do) should be covered in this talk? (The key objectives should have been agreed upon by the team during the retreat planning process.) What ideas can support the objectives?
3. What is the starting point of the retreatants? (If the topic is moral decision making, and none of the participants have any information or experience in that area, the talk should reflect that.)
4. What personal experience have you had that relates to the topic? (If the topic is focusing on different ways to pray, it would be important for the presenter to share ways he/she has prayed - using Scripture, music, reflection, for example.)
5. How do the Scriptures deepen our understanding of the Church's tradition? (What experience or part of our history as a people of faith can speak to the topic?)
6. What activity or process can you use to help the retreatants "internalize" the information? (What will help make the topic more real for the participants?)
7. What resources are available to use in gathering facts, planning activities, discussion questions for your talk?

What dimensions should be integrated in all talks?

Jesus:

How does the talk relate to the person of Jesus and the Gospel message?

Action:

How does the talk lead the participants to live a more faithful Catholic Christian life?

Interpretation/Reflection:

How have we enabled each person to interpret what is happening in their life in light of our Catholic Christian life? How does prayer fit in the reflection?

Practice your talk with members of the team before you give it on the retreat. The team members can offer suggestions for improvement.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN PLANNING A RETREAT

FACILITY

Name of Facility:

Address/Telephone:

Director/Caretaker:

Is there a basic **rental fee**?

Is the rate based on the number of participants?

Is the rate based on the number of meals served/nights stayed?

Does a **contract** need to be signed?

Who is **authorized** to sign a contract?

Is a **deposit** required? Is the deposit non-refundable?

Is a **certificate of insurance** needed prior to renting the facility?

Do you have to **check-in** at a specific time with a specific person?

What are the rules/guidelines for **clean-up**?

What is the policy on **damage** to the facility by an individual or by the group?

What about **fire safety**? What is the procedure used by the facility in case of **fire**?

Can **candles** be used inside any of the buildings?

Is **smoking** permitted inside any of the buildings?

What are **safety/evacuation** plans for other disasters (tornadoes, high water, accident, first aid, etc)?

Is the facility **handicapped accessible**?

What types of **buildings** are available for use?

Are there **dormitories** or private/semi-private rooms?

Are **linens** (towels and sheets) provided?

Is there a different housing for priests, brothers, sisters or married couples? Is there a **chapel**?

Is it carpeted? Are chairs available? What is the capacity? What types of **meeting room** space is available? Is it carpeted? Are chairs/tables available? What is the capacity?

What are the **bathroom facilities**?

Are **paper towels & toilet paper** provided?

Is there a separate facility for females and for males?

How many **sinks, toilets, and showers** are there?

Are there **electrical outlets** in the bathroom? Is there any restriction on hot water use?

What type of **kitchen facility** is available for use? Can you do your **own cooking**? What **equipment** is available to use? (Mixer, coffee maker, dishwasher, microwave oven, steam kettle, stove/griddle/ovens)

What will you need to bring with you? (**Kitchen utensils**: examples may include pots & pans, dishes & silverware, spices, dish towels, dish soap)

What kind of **refrigerator/freezer** space is available?

What is the capacity of the **dining area**?

Is there a **recreation area**?

What **recreation equipment** or games are available?

Is a **map to the facility** available?

What are the **roads conditions** to the facility?

How long will it take to get there? Is there limited **parking**?

TRANSPORTATION

How will you get your group to the retreat location?

Follow the **Youth Ministry Guidelines** regarding transportation/drivers.

Will you reimburse your drivers for **gas**?

If you **rent vehicles**, will you divide the cost among the participants?

If you rent a **bus**, have an adult ride with the participants to the retreat location.

Providing the adult with a **cellular phone** in case of an emergency would be recommended. (Not all bus drivers have cellular phones.)

Do your drivers have a **current drivers license**? Adequate **insurance**? **Seat belts** for all passengers?

Be sure that drivers have a **medical/consent to treat form** for each passenger.