

† **Are You Taking Enough Time for Yourself in this Busy World?
Make Room in Your Life for a Retreat**



INVITATION TO FRIENDSHIP

Popular Merton scholar James Finley in his book, *Awakening Call*, wrote that this yearning for a life of prayer is a "delicate, subtle fire - a desire without name, which people sense to be the presence of God calling them to union."

"A desire without name . . . calling us to union." This desire is the foundation of all prayer, the source of all religious experience. I can pray only if I believe God is the author of this invitation to friendship. Prayer is recognition of this relationship.

SEARCHING FOR GOD?

We need experiences that awaken in us the presence of the Divine. Experiences that grab our attention, that nudge us into consciousness of the wonder of life as it continues to unfold in and through every aspect of creation.

Every age and every stage of life asks something new of us. The burning bush of Moses' journey to God tells us that life abounds in reminders of God's presence. Gerard Manley Hopkins, the Jesuit poet, says that all of creation is sacramental, charged with loving reminders of the nearness of that creative energy we sometimes call God.

We live in a age when we are waking up to the vastness of the universe and to the longevity of time. We are beginning to suspect that we have been birthed forth from a womb of endless becoming. The God we have been searching for may seem to elude us only because the god for whom we search is too small. In moments of contemplative openness and receptivity we sense that the reality we seek has been with us all along.

Think of a retreat as a gift to yourself — a way to step aside from everyday concerns to relax and care for your soul. A retreat is a quiet time spent at an inn-like facility usually just a short driving distance from the city. Once you settle in, you will find the surroundings comfortable and warm. You will be surprised how much you have in common with others who join you at the center.

The meals are home-style and nourishing. The program is casual and stimulating. The experience is reflective and spiritual. The beauty of the grounds and wooded landscapes will assure you that you are walking on holy ground.

The kind of retreat you are searching for depends on your own personal journey through life. At times we feel a need for solitude and the chance to be alone. At other times discussion and reflection with a group would be more suitable. Sometimes a weekend is all the time available for retreat, and again others need a week or more.

KINDS OF RETREATS

Preached or conference-type retreats: For larger groups the retreating experience usually centers around a central theme: prayer, sacred scripture, the life of Jesus, holiness and marriage, women's / men's spirituality. A presenter or retreat leader provides intervals of talks and periods of reflection or of optional personal sharing. You will be gone from Friday to Sunday afternoon, and you'll feel like you have been away for a week's vacation.

Married Couples retreats: From time to time many retreat centers provide a program focused on the needs of married couples. The format is similar to the conference retreat, but the experience provides opportunity for the couple to reflect on their gift of married life to each other, and an occasion to talk together about it.

Guided retreats: In this form, smaller groups (five to ten or more persons) gather for a daily conference together, and then are on their own the remainder of the day. They meet individually with a director for personal consultation.

Directed retreats: For those seeking a more extended retreat experience there is the option of a retreat period as long as 30 days. The daily time of prayer is measured by the person's personal need and experience. The retreatant meets daily with a director who facilitates the experience of prayer and personal growth.

Retreat in daily Life: In this format, the retreatant remains engaged in ordinary daily activities at home or at work, but makes a commitment to an hour of daily prayer usually based on sacred scripture. The retreatant meets with a director every other week for an hour. The retreat may last as long as six to eight months.

Retreats for younger people: Retreat centers have a great reputation for providing an exciting place for programs for young adults. Many parishes and schools design their own programs for a healthy occasion to affirm, challenge and celebrate with young people. Arrangements should be made early to assure the dates of your choice.

Focused topics for retreat: The variety of retreat or seminar topics is almost endless. Personal growth programs include such topics as dealing with loss, gender issues, retreats for those with addictions, seminars focused on ecology, peace and justice issues, aging, single parenting, personality types, coping with stress. Contact a center near you for the topic of your interest. A few centers even have family retreats!

Bring your group to a retreat center: If you are looking for a quiet setting for parish meetings, workshops, seminars or renewal programs, you will find the reflective environment of a retreat center most suitable for adult education and organizational development work. Midweek dates and evening programs will be hosted in a relaxed setting both convenient and productive.

What does it cost? Each center has a suggested offering for the different kinds of retreats. Of course, the length of your stay at the retreat center, the number of meals included, and the personal meetings with a director all affect the cost. We suggest that you ask the center when you make your choice of the kind of retreat you will be making. Some centers suggest a specific fee, others ask for an appropriate donation.

Location: Most large metropolitan areas have a retreat center within driving distance. In the United States and Canada there are over 600 centers. Each location has its unique characteristics and a rich heritage and style of spirituality. Information about programs may be obtained from the centers listed from the link at left.

<http://www.retreatsintl.org/experience.htm>