

Youth Retreats

(From Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 2007)

Retreats

Retreats are perhaps the most effective programs a parish can offer its youth. Retreats create short-term small faith communities where faith questions can be explored in an in-depth way over an extended period of time, usually a weekend. Because retreats are often evangelizing events, they intentionally draw together adolescents' lived experiences and relationships and place them in the context of the divine mystery.

Just as there are many different catechetical approaches, there are many different kinds of retreats. Some retreats have been known to draw several dozens of teens into one shared experience. Others are intentional about keeping numbers small. Much depends upon the theme, the psychological and spiritual development of the participants and the goals of the retreat. Whatever the circumstances, retreats often provide intense and profound experiences of God's loving presence in the lives of young people.

Advantages of Retreats

- Retreats can be designed specifically to meet the age/development/spirituality of the participants.
- The thematic approach in an intensive time frame allows for a thorough examination of the subject.
- Since most retreats occur off-site, getting away for a few days enhances the experience of "doing something unique and different."
- Like intensive summer programs, retreats often mix different types of activities together in order that different learning styles are engaged.
- When youth are voluntarily present, they usually are committed to active participation and invest themselves in the success of the program.

Some Concerns about Retreats

- Retreats can be costly. The rental of the facility, transportation and feeding a group of growing teens over an entire weekend can strain personal and parish budgets.
- Retreats held at a site other than the teens' own parish raise a number of legal and liability issues related to transportation and supervision.
- Some adults are more comfortable with teaching than they are with witnessing or openly sharing their own faith story. Presenting one's own witness talk can be much more threatening than transmitting doctrine. Other retreat dynamics like prayer

experiences, small group discussions, community building activities and the like may call upon adult and youth leaders to take on tasks for which they are unprepared. Therefore, special training for both adult and youth leaders is necessary.

- Young people may be distracted by the novel environment, and the overnight stay can lead to special discipline challenges.
- It is unrealistic to expect young people (and adult leaders, too) to attend several retreats during the year so that they might be exposed to several faith themes. Therefore, the retreat model works best when it supports other catechetical models. It is generally not recommended that retreats become the primary mode of catechesis.
- When young people attend a retreat offered outside of their parish and led by persons unconnected to their parish, care must be taken to help retreatants connect their retreat experiences, learning and development back to their ongoing lives in their faith community. Unfortunately, such retreats can have the opposite effect, drawing young people away from their parishes or even competing with parishes for their time and commitment.