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Scripture ~Based Retreats

FOR TEENS
AGES 10 ~ 19

Scripture-Based Retreats for Teens Ages 10–19

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AGES 10~19**

Laurie Delgatto, general editor



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Introduction

Scripture-Based Retreats for Teens Ages 10–19 is a collection of six retreats: three retreats intended for a young adolescent audience (one half-day, one daylong, and one overnight retreat) and three intended for older adolescents (one half-day, one daylong, and one three-day weekend retreat). Each retreat presents an opportunity for young people to grow in their faith, to grow in their relationships with others, and to grow in their understanding of and appreciation for God’s holy word.

Because groups of young people are so different, you may find these retreats—as written—are not perfect for the setting or the group you will gather. We invite you to look at this collection of retreats as ideas to stimulate your own creativity, not as a set of measured activities that must be followed precisely. We as authors of these retreats never do a retreat the same way twice. In fact, we almost never do a retreat the exact way we planned to do it—the dynamics and needs of the retreatants commonly require adjustments and changes.

Components of the Retreats

The retreats in this book have certain features in common. These features are described in the following sections.

Icebreakers

These activities do much more than break the ice. They help retreatants learn one another’s names, stretch their legs and their minds, learn new skills, and have fun. The activities also introduce new segments of a retreat.

Activities and Sessions

The core segments of the retreat include “sessions.” This is where the deepest learning and reflection takes place. This portion of the retreat also offers the most variety. The retreats include activities for individuals, small groups, and large groups. Some creative activities include role-plays, dramas, games that teach, skits, and art projects.

Discussions

As a general rule, retreatants should be *assigned* to small discussion groups at the beginning of a retreat. When retreatants are asked to find their own groups, they tend to sit with their friends. If you already know the young people, assign groups before the retreat, with a good mix of quiet and outgoing members. Be careful to break up cliques or pairs who are likely to disrupt discussions. If you do not know the retreatants, assign them to groups randomly, perhaps breaking up cliques in that way.

Quiet Time

A mix of short opportunities for reflection during retreats provides beneficial interludes. On all overnight and weekend retreats, each retreatant receives a journal and is asked to write his or her thoughts, feelings, and reactions during these quiet times. The setting for quiet time is important. Whether inside or outside, retreatants need to have room to spread out and be comfortable.

Prayer

You will notice that the prayer experiences for each retreat follow the same basic format:

Call to Prayer

This movement calls the community to prayer. When the group gathers, each action within this movement brings the retreatants toward an openness and attentiveness to what they are about to experience. God calls them to a relationship, and they respond by turning to and engaging God. The group can gather for prayer in many ways; this movement helps the retreatants stop and truly join in the community at prayer.

Listen

In this movement the retreatants listen to God's word alive in their lives today. God speaks through a proclamation of Scripture, poetry, music, storytelling, witness, drama, or current readings.

Respond

After the retreatants have had the chance to listen and reflect on God's message, they need to respond to that message as believers. Through the use of ritual actions, gestures, prayers of intercession, songs, journaling, or composed prayers, the retreatants are invited to a deeper relationship with God.

Sending Forth

In prayer we strengthen our bond with God, but God also inspires us to love and serve the Lord and one another. The sending forth points us to where the world needs Christian action. Some elements in sending the members of the assembly forth include closing prayers, blessings, songs, a sign of peace, or some action.

Preparation

Location

Getting away from the parish or school setting is important for a retreat experience. This is preferable for daylong retreats, but essential for overnight and weekend experiences. Some possible settings include a retreat center, a camp, a cabin in the mountains, a shrine, or an unused convent or school building. If the retreat will be held at a retreat center, it's best to visit ahead of time, see the space, get familiar with the facility and resources, and discuss the expectations of the center.

You will want to find out what supplies and equipment are available for use (and if there is a charge to use them). Also check out the expectations regarding cleanup of the facility.

You will also need to determine how you will feed the retreatants. Some retreat centers provide their own food service; you just show up and are fed as part of the contract. Sometimes you can request certain meals from their menu. And sometimes the retreat team includes a snack or meal coordinator who takes responsibility for planning the menu, buying and bringing the food, and preparing it with a kitchen crew or with the help of the retreatants.

Recruiting and Training a Retreat Team

The team approach to retreat planning allows the retreat director to tap in to the varied gifts and talents of several people, benefit from the perspective of both teens and adults, and share the burden of preparation.

Look for a balance of adults and young people. Try to choose adult team members who have experience with retreats. If this is not possible, invite adults who are involved with young people, active in the parish, and comfortable with their faith. Look for teens who are natural leaders in a group, may already be in leadership roles, and show a willingness to share their faith.

Diocesan Guidelines

In light of heightened public awareness and attention to child protection issues, you must ensure that a safe and healthy relationship is maintained between the adults and the young people who will spend time together. In fact, all dioceses have specific guidelines established for adults who work with young people. Criminal background checks and references for those engaged in ministry are some of the tools that ensure the quality of adults working with young people. Check with the director of religious education, the coordinator of youth ministry, or the pastor to determine diocesan requirements concerning criminal background checks and the use of volunteer covenants.

When deciding how many adults you need for a retreat, check the guidelines of the diocesan office. There might be diocesan guidelines for overnight chaperones as well. Also follow your diocesan requirements for anyone driving young people to or from an event. You will likely need youth permission slips, health forms, and possibly a code of behavior that have the approval of the diocesan office.

Team Member Roles

Retreat Director

This may very well be you—the person ultimately responsible for the retreat happening. If so, your job description includes advance preparation and all arrangements for all activities. This includes the following items:

- Contract with a retreat center or make arrangements for a facility.
- Publicize the retreat.
- Recruit the retreat team.
- Convene and train the retreat team.

- Provide job descriptions for each retreat team member.
- Recruit the retreatants.
- Register the retreatants.
- Gather or buy supplies and materials for the retreat.
- Implement the retreat.
- Wrap up and evaluate the retreat.

Although the retreat coordinator may delegate one or more of these tasks to other members of the retreat team, it is the responsibility of the retreat director to see they are done.

Prayer Coordinator

This person will make arrangements for all the prayer segments of the retreat, including any meal prayers. Choose a person for this role who understands liturgical environments and the flow of prayer. He or she may need to recruit youth readers, youth singers, and adults to be part of prayer in other ways. If the retreat involves a Mass, this person makes all arrangements for the Mass, including music selections and the gathering of all necessary Mass supplies. The prayer coordinator must be in touch with the presider as these plans are made and materials are gathered.

This person may be the prayer leader or song leader for all the prayers. Or this person may recruit various prayer or song leaders for the prayer experiences.

Small-Group Leaders

These team members work closely with the retreatants as they have discussions, plan their small-group presentations, and process large-group activities. Choose individuals for these roles who know young people well and are comfortable with them. Even if you have youth peer leaders designated to be small-group leaders, you may also want to have an adult with every small group. In that case, the adult small-group leaders must know that their role is to let the peer leaders do most of the leading, and to not interject much unless the peer leaders ask for assistance.

Small-group leaders may also act as prayer leaders or song leaders for a particular prayer experience, or they might be called on to lead a section of a large-group session or activity.

Activity Coordinator(s) or Large-Group Session Leader(s)

For short retreats, the retreat director often takes on the role of running the large-group sessions. However, for longer retreats, these roles are more often shared. For example, a small subgroup of two or three adults might take care of all the large-group sessions for a weekend retreat, while the retreat director serves as an overall team coordinator and doesn't take responsibility for any presentations.

You might need a coordinator for the peer leaders, who trains the group of young people who will serve at the retreat as small-group leaders or leaders of certain activities.

If several adults are leading the large-group sessions, then it's the retreat director's job to make sure that the schedule is moving along accordingly and that each activity leader is carrying out her or his assigned tasks.

Supplies Coordinator

Not every retreat has a coordinator for supplies, but for longer retreats, it really helps. This person makes sure everything needed for the retreat is available at the right time and in the right place, so the retreat runs smoothly. For shorter retreats, the retreat director can take on this role. Sometimes the role might be delegated to an assistant or even to one of the small-group leaders.

Snack and Meal Coordinator

Even short retreats require food for the retreatants. The retreat director can take on this role, or it can be delegated. But any retreat that is long enough to include a meal needs a snack and meal coordinator, unless the retreat is being held at a retreat center that already provides all meals and snacks.

Additional Chaperones

Overnight retreats may require additional chaperones. The retreat director and small-group leaders cannot function well throughout the day if they are awake half the night, walking back and forth through the hallways to ensure the retreatants stay in their rooms and the genders remain separated.

Extra chaperones, sometimes volunteering moms and dads, are helpful for night duty.

Team Meetings

Consider having at least two team meetings before the retreat to adequately train the team, assign roles and tasks, and discuss and prepare for all retreat elements.

During the first meeting, allow time for the team members to get to know one another and to pray together. Review the roles and their associated tasks and determine which team members will serve in each capacity. Then review the entire retreat schedule in detail, allowing time for questions and discussion if needed. You may also want to provide the team with a brief training segment on the key elements of working with and facilitating small groups.

During the second meeting, pray together and review all final details. Provide other resources or direction as needed. You also may want to accomplish simple tasks such as small-group assignments, the making of name tags, and other preparations that can be taken care of before the retreat.

Flexibility and Prayer

After all the planning and preparation that goes into a retreat, add these two things to the retreat list:

- Be flexible.
- Pray!

Expect the unexpected. Every group, every young person, and every retreat is new and different. For that reason it is best to mark retreat schedules “tentative.” Structure is important, but you have to meet the needs and concerns of each individual or group. Be open to change, and adapt approaches when needed. Being flexible can go a long way in easing frustration.

Pray. Do it a lot. Do not let the rush of retreat planning brush this aside. Do it before, during, and after a retreat. Be open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit awakening in yourself, the team members, and the retreatants.

Center the retreat on Christ. Think of it as one long, joyous, vibrant, ever-moving, ever-growing prayer to God. Do not be afraid to let go and let God. God is what we are all about and why we do what we do.

1 The *Lectionary* and the Liturgical Year: How Catholics Read Scripture

A Weekend Retreat for Older Adolescents

Overview

The liturgical year is the official context in which Catholics hear the Scriptures proclaimed, and this context is important for our understanding of the Bible. “The *Lectionary* and the Liturgical Year” is a weekend retreat that invites older adolescents to explore selections from Scripture that correspond to each of the seasons the Church celebrates.

Schedule

First Evening

- 6:30 p.m. Arrival of Retreat Team and Final Preparations
- 7:30 p.m. Welcome and Orientation
- 8:00 p.m. Icebreaker: Catch the Light
- 8:30 p.m. Introduction to the Liturgical Year
- 9:00 p.m. Break
- 9:15 p.m. Advent Season
- 10:15 p.m. Advent Prayer Service
- 10:30 p.m. Snack, Crafts, and Recreation
- 12:00 a.m. Lights-Out

Second Day

- 8:00 a.m. Rising
- 8:30 a.m. Breakfast
- 9:00 a.m. Christmas Season
- 10:00 a.m. Break
- 10:15 a.m. Christmas Continues
- 11:00 a.m. Break
- 11:15 a.m. Season of Ordinary Time
- 12:00 p.m. Lunch
- 1:00 p.m. Ordinary Time Continues
- 2:15 p.m. Recreational Break
- 5:00 p.m. Dinner
- 6:00 p.m. Lenten Season
- 7:00 p.m. Break

7:15 p.m. Lent Continues
8:15 p.m. Break
8:30 p.m. Reconciliation Prayer Service
10:00 p.m. Snacks, Crafts, and Recreation
12:00 a.m. Lights-Out

Third Day

8:00 a.m. Rising
8:30 a.m. Breakfast
9:15 a.m. Easter Season
10:15 a.m. Break
10:30 a.m. Easter Continues
11:15 a.m. Liturgy
12:30 p.m. Retreat Concludes with Lunch

Adult Leaders Needed

- small-group leaders—one for each group of seven or eight retreatants
- witness talk presenters
- song leader
- prayer coordinator
- priest (to celebrate the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation and to preside at Mass)
- snack and meal coordinator
- overnight chaperones

General Materials and Preparation

Items that are needed specifically for a certain day of the retreat are listed preceding that day's session. This list covers general supplies and preparation needs for the retreat.

- Determine how many small groups you will have, assuming seven or eight retreatants to a group. Develop group assignments. Assign each group a number and write it in the corner of each retreatant's name tag.
- The suggested space needs for this retreat include a large gathering space, tables for small groups, a designated prayer space, and a "lounge" area for hanging out, playing games, and so on.
- Create four stations in the lounge area: an arts and crafts area, a snack area, a game area, and a place to relax.
- Create a portable supply basket for each small group, containing the following frequently used items. Place one basket at each table in the lounge area.
 - pens or pencils
 - markers
 - scissors
 - glue sticks
 - self-stick notes
 - masking tape

- retreatant journals or blank sheets of paper
- copies of *The Catholic Youth Bible*® or another Bible, preferably one for each retreatant, but at a minimum one per small group
- Designate an area for prayer. For the prayer space, you will need the following items:
 - a table that can serve as an altar
 - a large candle and votive candles and matches
 - a Bible
 - a liturgical calendar
 - a cross or crucifix
 - songbooks
 - a CD player and a CD of reflective instrumental music
- Prepare the leaders who will be offering witness talks. Be sure to work with them, to hear each leader's entire talk before the retreat, and to give specific guidelines for the talks. To help the leaders prepare their talks, give them each a copy of resource 1–A, "Helpful Hints for Giving Talks." In addition, resource 1–B, "Suggestions for the Advent Witness Talk," resource 1–C, "Suggestions for the Christmas Witness Talk," resource 1–D, "Suggestions for the Lent Witness Talk," and resource 1–F, "Suggestions for the Pentecost Witness Talk," should be distributed to the assigned presenters. In the case of the Easter witness talks, remind the small-group leaders they too will offer brief (5-minute) talks to their own group. Provide each small-group leader with a copy of resource 1–E, "Suggestions for the Easter Witness Talks."

Procedure

First Evening

Materials Needed

Gather the following items:

- name tags, one for each retreatant
- glow-in-the-dark light sticks (one for each retreatant, available at local craft or novelty stores)
- handout 1–A, "Liturgical Calendar," one for each retreatant plus one for each small group
- card stock, one 8½-by-11-inch sheet for each small group
- envelopes, one for each small group
- newsprint and markers
- an Advent wreath and greenery
- three purple candles and one rose-colored candle
- four copies of resource 1–G, "A Circle of Light Prayer Experience"

Preparation

- Mount several copies of handout 1–A, "Liturgical Calendar," on a sheet of card stock and cut each one out like a puzzle. You will need one set of puzzle pieces for each small group. Place each puzzle set in an envelope.
- On a sheet of newsprint, create a large liturgical calendar using handout 1–A, "Liturgical Calendar," as a guide.

- Choose a responsorial song or phrase from a songbook for use during the evening prayer service. Consider using music from the Sunday liturgies during Advent.
- Recruit four team members to assist with the readings during the evening prayer service. Be sure to provide each volunteer with a copy of resource 1–G, “A Circle of Light Prayer Experience.”

6:30 p.m. Arrival of Retreat Team and Final Preparations

The retreat team should plan on arriving about an hour before the retreatants. Prepare the small-group leaders by reviewing the evening schedule with them. Be sure to check the facilities, make any necessary final preparations, and gather for a team prayer before the retreatants arrive.

7:30 p.m. Welcome and Orientation

1. As the retreatants arrive, greet them and thank them for coming. Provide them each with a name tag and explain they should wear it throughout the retreat. Assign the retreatants to rooms or cots in the dormitory areas, and invite them to put their things in the room they will be sleeping in and then return to the meeting room. Once they return, tell them to have a seat and the retreat will begin shortly.

2. Invite the retreatants to gather in the large meeting space for orientation. Explain the facilities fully, introduce the team members, and present rules and regulations. These rules and regulations might include provisions for off-limits areas, if any, use of equipment (such as MP3 players, handheld video games, cell phones, televisions), snacks, smoking restrictions, and so on. Stress the need for trust and mutual respect. Answer any questions at this time.

3. Continue by providing the retreatants with an overview of the retreat theme by offering the following comments:

- Why would a Catholic who wants to know about the Bible attend a retreat on the liturgical year? The answer is simple: The liturgical year is not primarily about colors, ashes and palms, poinsettias, and Easter lilies. The liturgical year is the official context in which Catholics hear the Scriptures proclaimed, and this context is important for our understanding of the Bible.
- The liturgical year includes the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Ordinary Time, Lent, and Easter. During these seasons we read selections from the Scriptures that correspond to the great mysteries of our faith.
- During our time together, we will experience the highlights of each of the liturgical seasons and explore some of the Scripture passages and themes associated with each season.

8:00 p.m. Icebreaker: Catch the Light

1. Tell the retreatants to form groups by locating the number on their name tag. Ask them to gather in small circles with those who have the same number. Give each small

group enough glow-in-the-dark light sticks for all but one member (for example, if there are six in a group, give them five glow sticks).

2. Explain that the goal of the game is to “catch the light,” and that when the lights are dimmed, they are to pass the glow sticks around their circle. Tell the retreatants that when the lights go on, the people without a glow stick should stand up. The people standing will take the glow stick from the person on their left, and together all the standing people will form a new group. That group will then give one of its glow sticks to the leader. The lights will again be dimmed, the glow sticks passed, and the same pattern repeated (the eliminated people always take a glow stick from the person on their left and join the larger group of other eliminated people); this makes the original groups smaller and the eliminated group larger. The eliminated group keeps playing, so there will be off-shoot eliminated groups as well.

3. Begin the game by making the room dark enough so the glow sticks show, but not so dark that someone may get injured. Explain that the game will continue until there is only one person remaining from each of the original groups. Once the original groups are down to the last player, have all the eliminated groups form a large circle. Form the single, original players into one circle sitting in the center of the larger, eliminated group. The game continues with just the last of the original players playing (with the eliminated group staying in a circle around the smaller group) until just two people remain in the center. If desired, the last player with the light could win a prize or be dubbed the “light queen or king” for the evening.

8:30 p.m. Introduction to the Liturgical Year

1. Ask the small groups to sit in circles or around tables. Invite them to take a few minutes to share their responses to the following questions:

- What is your favorite liturgical season? Why?
- Name some traditions you or your family participate in during various liturgical seasons of the year.

Allow 5 to 10 minutes for discussion.

2. Give each small group an envelope containing a liturgical puzzle you created from handout 1–A. Do not reveal the newsprint version of the calendar just yet. Announce that the challenge for each group is to assemble the puzzle. Give the groups 5 minutes to complete the task, and then call time.

3. Ask if anyone knows what image the puzzle created. If someone answers correctly, congratulate him or her. If someone answers incorrectly or incompletely, or if no one answers, be sure to offer these key points:

- When you think of a year, probably the calendar year or maybe the academic year pops into your head. But the Catholic Church has a special year, called the liturgical year, to mark the celebration of liturgies. The basis for these seasons is the Scriptures.
- The Scriptures for Mass are selected in one of two ways. During the major seasons of the liturgical year (Lent, Easter, Advent, and Christmas), passages are selected because of their theme, that is, their relation to a particular mystery of

our faith. For the remaining Sundays of the year, known as Ordinary Time, various books of the Bible are read roughly from beginning to end over a number of weeks.

- The liturgical cycle of feast days and seasons helps us remember the past, celebrate the present, and look toward the future.
- The Sunday *Lectionary* uses a three-year cycle based on the three synoptic Gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke present a “similar view,” or *syn-opsis* in Greek. Each year we concentrate on one of these Gospels: Matthew in Cycle A, Mark in Cycle B, Luke in Cycle C. John’s Gospel is featured primarily during the major seasons or to highlight key doctrines such as the Eucharist.
- In addition to a Gospel reading, each Sunday Eucharist includes two other readings. The first reading is usually taken from the Old Testament and is selected in light of the theme of the Gospel reading for that Sunday. The second reading is taken from the letters of Paul or one of the other writings of the New Testament. Like the Gospels, these books are selected so that over the three-year cycle, we have a taste of each of the books of the New Testament.

4. Distribute a copy of handout 1–A to each retreatant. Also at this time post the calendar you created on newsprint. Point out that the colors noted in each season correlate to the colors of the priest’s vestments, the altar cloths, banners, and the rest of the Church’s environment throughout the year.

5. Conclude by noting that the remainder of the retreat invites the retreatants to explore in depth each of the seasons of the Church year. The first season they explore will be Advent.

9:00 p.m. Break

9:15 p.m. Advent Season

1. Gather the retreatants in chairs or on the floor in the middle of the meeting space. Then offer the following comments:

- When you think of the weeks leading up to Christmas, what images come to mind? If your experience is like that of most people during the month of December, images of Christmas trees, candy canes, shopping malls, carolers, and holiday parties probably jump to the front of your mind. December is often seen as a time for making wish lists, sending cards, purchasing gifts, putting up decorations, planning parties, baking, and attending concerts.
- The Church gives us four weeks before Christmas that seem to run against the grain of hectic excitement that surrounds us at this busy time of year—the season of Advent.
- Advent is a time for waiting and watching.
- *Advent* means “coming,” and this season is a preparation for the coming of the infant Jesus.
- Advent is a time to take life a little more slowly and to focus on what we need to do to allow God to enter our heart more fully.

2. Tell the retreatants you will present two occasions when someone is waiting or expecting something to happen. They will be asked to choose between the two alternatives, and, based on their response, to move to the side of the room you have designated as *a* or *b*.

Read as many entries from the following list as time allows, pausing after each one to let the retreatants choose an option and move. Elicit comments about why the retreatants made their particular choices.

- Which is harder to wait for?
 - a.* a school vacation or holiday weekend
 - b.* a major test to be over
- Which would be more stressful for you?
 - a.* waiting to find out whether you got into your first-choice college
 - b.* waiting to find out if you made the varsity team or got a major role in the school play
- Which is more frustrating?
 - a.* being stuck in a traffic jam on your way to a favorite vacation place
 - b.* being stuck in a traffic jam on your way home from a long trip
- Which would be more difficult?
 - a.* waiting outside the principal's office to find out your punishment for skipping school
 - b.* waiting for your parents to come home and get the message you skipped school
- Which is more difficult?
 - a.* waiting for someone you really like to ask you out
 - b.* waiting for the right moment to ask out someone you really like
- Which would be more difficult?
 - a.* waiting in line to take your driver's test
 - b.* waiting for the driver's license examiner to let you know if you passed the test
- Which one do you look forward to more?
 - a.* your birthday
 - b.* Christmas

(The preceding activity is adapted from Claussen and Kielbasa, *Ministry Ideas for Celebrating Advent and Christmas with Teens, Families, and Parishes*, pp. 14–15.)

3. Ask everyone to be seated and then explain the following:

- In our culture we are used to getting immediate results. We often do not like to wait for anything. We bristle at the thought of waiting in line, waiting in traffic, waiting for downloads, waiting to find out important news.
- Advent, which means “coming,” is about waiting—waiting for something big to happen.

- The Scriptures of Advent guide us to a fuller appreciation of what it means to wait in God’s time.

4. Introduce the team member giving the Advent witness talk. After the talk, allow 5 minutes for reflection or journal writing.

5. Ask the retreatants to re-gather in their small groups and to bring their portable supply basket. Give each group a sheet of newsprint. Assign each group one of the following Scripture passages:

- Isaiah 2:1–5
- Isaiah 63:16–17,19; 64:2–7
- Jeremiah 33:14–16
- Matthew 24:37–44
- Mark 13:33–37
- Luke 21:25–28,34–36
- Romans 13:11–14
- 1 Corinthians 1:3–9
- 1 Thessalonians 3:12—4:2

6. Ask that each group spend some time reading and discussing their assigned Scripture passage. Have them use the following questions as a guide for their discussion. You may want to post these on newsprint:

- What insights can we take from this reading?
- What does this Scripture passage call us to pray for?
- How are we being challenged to live out this passage?

Allow about 10 minutes for reading and discussing.

7. Now ask each group to select a key word found in its assigned Scripture passage—for example, the word *watch*. Once they have selected a word, then ask them to create an acrostic using that word. For example, if the word is *watch*, they might create something that starts like this: “*W* is for waiting in hope, *A* is for anticipation of the Savior,” and so on. Give them about 10 minutes to create their acrostic.

8. Call the groups back together and invite each to offer a brief summary of its assigned reading and its acrostic. Then conclude by offering these comments:

- During Advent we wait in anticipation for the birth of Jesus. We wait because we expect something to happen. We wait in hope for God even though we cannot see God.
- During Advent we are conscious God is present with us even when God’s presence is not evident. That is the message of the Advent Scriptures.
- The message of Advent is “wait for God in patient hope.”
- Remember Jesus was in Mary’s womb for nine months. Mary could not see Jesus, but she knew the Word had been made flesh, and she waited in hope for his birth. The Scriptures of Advent remind us we too should wait in patient hope for God.

10:15 p.m. Advent Prayer Service

1. Ask the participants to gather silently in the prayer space. You might consider playing reflective instrumental music as they enter.

2. Explain that as Catholics, we have traditions that help us celebrate the liturgical seasons and the story of our faith. One of the most recognizable of these symbols is an Advent wreath, used by churches and families for four weeks before Christmas. Then offer the following comments:

- In the Catholic Tradition, we use the symbol of the Advent wreath in churches, schools, and homes to help us remember this special time. The round wreath shape reminds us of eternal life, because a circle has no beginning and no end. The greenery symbolizes hope, because even in the winter, when many trees are barren, evergreens have life.
- The wreath includes four candles (three purple candles and one pink). The pink candle is for Gaudete, or joyful Sunday, the third Sunday in Advent. The readings that Sunday reflect great joy, and at the third Sunday, the season of Advent is more than half over. Sometimes instead of three purple candles and one pink candle, four bluish-violet candles are used. Because blue is the traditional color for Mary, the use of bluish-violet candles symbolizes waiting with the pregnant Mary for Jesus to be born.
- Each week one of the candles in the wreath is lit. The following week, the same candle plus the next candle is lit. So by the last week of Advent, all four candles are lit.

3. Now invite the retreatants to form a circle as far away from the center of the room as possible. Ask them to move quietly and reverently.

4. Dim the lights and proceed with the prayer service as noted on resource 1–G.

10:30 p.m. Snack, Crafts, and Recreation

Repeat the rules governing the retreat and explain that lights-out will be announced first at 11:45 p.m. and will be strictly enforced at midnight. Then tell the retreatants they are invited to gather in the lounge area. Encourage the small groups to remain together. In the lounge area, provide snacks, craft materials, and games.

12:00 a.m. Lights-Out

Enforce lights-out as strictly as is reasonable, knowing that some game playing is bound to occur but also that sufficient rest is necessary for the success of any retreat—for both the retreatants and the leaders.

Second Day

Materials Needed

Gather the following items:

- songbooks containing Christmas carols, one for each small group
- resources 1–A, 1–B, 1–C, and 1–D, for the respective witness talk leaders (see the preparation section at the beginning of the retreat)
- six 2-by-2-foot paper stars
- charcoal artist pencils, one for each retreatant

- drawing paper, one sheet for each retreatant
- colored sand (brown, red, white, blue, and yellow—about a cup of each color sheet for a group of fifty retreatments)
- five bowls (each should hold at least a cup of sand)
- five spoons or scoops
- small, clear glass containers like salt shakers or baby food jars, one for each retreatant
- a copy of resource 1–I, “A Lenten Journey,” cut apart for each station for the sand activity
- hard-boiled eggs and supplies for coloring the eggs

Preparation

- Optional: If possible, make the location where breakfast will be served look and feel like Christmas morning.
- Create six 2-by-2-foot paper stars on newsprint. On each star, write one of the following questions (If you have more than six small groups, you may want to double up on the star questions.):
 - Who are your fellow travelers?
 - Who has helped you follow Jesus?
 - How do your actions show you follow Jesus?
 - When you don’t know which way to go to follow Jesus, how do you get pointed in the right direction?
 - Where do you think following Jesus will lead you?
 - Why do you follow Jesus?
- Choose one set of Ordinary Time Sunday readings for each small group. Customize a resource for each small group by using resource 1–H, “Ordinary Time Readings,” and filling in the blanks.
- Determine the locations for the activity (sand stations) for the Lenten journey. Five different stations are needed. If you have more than five small groups, you may want to provide two sets of the stations so that each small group stays together, and no one has to wait for another group to finish before they can begin a station. You will need to place a table at each station and the following supplies on the appropriate table: one bowl of colored sand, a large spoon or scoop, a Bible, and a copy of the relevant reading from resource 1–I.
- You will need songbooks containing the song “Open My Eyes, Lord,” by Jesse Manibusan (*Spirit and Song*, OCP). Or you may choose to create a worship aid that includes the song.
- Recruit one team member to proclaim the Scripture during the reconciliation service.
- Assemble the supplies needed for the option you choose under step 10 of the Reconciliation prayer service.

8:00 a.m. Rising

No formal morning prayer is required, though you may certainly include one if you wish.

8:30 a.m. Breakfast**9:00 a.m. Christmas Season**

1. Gather the retreatants in the main meeting space and ask them to sit with their small group. Invite them to join you in singing a lively rendition of a couple of favorite Christmas carols. Once the singing has concluded, offer the following comments:

- This morning we celebrate the season of Christmas, so Merry Christmas, everyone.
- The season of Christmas begins at the evening liturgy of Christmas Eve and lasts until the Sunday after the feast of the Epiphany.
- Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus and the mystery of the Incarnation. Let's take a moment to stop and listen to the Christmas story we hear in the Scriptures.

2. Proclaim Luke 2:1–20. Pause for a moment and then continue with these comments:

- God entered the world as an infant, fully human in every way.
- Christmas is a joyful feast during which we remember God is with us, bringing hope and joy to the world by sharing our humanity.

3. Ask the retreatants to gather in their small groups, collect bibles from their supply basket, and spend some time reading Matthew 1:18—2:23 and Luke, chapters 1–2. Allow them a few minutes to read the passages, then ask them to discuss the similarities and differences between the two scriptural accounts of Jesus's birth. Allow about 10 minutes for discussion.

4. Provide each group with at least one songbook. Assign each group one of the following Christmas carols (make sure these carols appear in the songbooks you distribute).

- “Silent Night”
- “The First Noel”
- “Angels We Have Heard on High”
- “What Child Is This?”
- “Joy to the World”
- “We Three Kings of Orient Are”
- “O Come, All Ye Faithful”
- “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”
- “O Little Town of Bethlehem”
- “O Holy Night”
- “It Came upon a Midnight Clear”
- “Away in a Manger”

5. Tell the groups to look up the song they have been assigned to determine whether different verses of their song reflect Luke's or Matthew's version of the birth of Christ. They should also note how much of the song is not based directly on the Scriptures. Allow about 10 minutes for them to complete this task.

6. Now direct each group to rewrite their assigned song to more accurately reflect either Matthew's or Luke's account of the birth. In some cases their assigned song will need some major overhauling; in other cases some slight changes will do the trick. Allow about 15 minutes for them to complete this task.

7. Invite each group to present its findings and its revised song (or a portion of it) to the larger group. Then conclude by inviting the retreatants to reflect on possible reasons the Gospel versions differ, and why the two versions are often mixed together into one account.

Option: Invite each group to create a Christmas card that clearly states Christian beliefs about Christmas. Discuss the possibility of the Christmas Scriptures being the first Christmas card greeting. Have the retreatants explore whether modern Christmas greetings are patterned after what we read in the Scriptures.

10:00 a.m. Break

During the break, place the six stars around the meeting space floor, leaving enough room in between for a group to sit or stand and discuss the question on the star.

10:15 a.m. Christmas Continues

1. Introduce the team member giving the Christmas witness talk. After the talk allow 5 minutes for reflection or journal writing.

2. Ask the retreatants to find a place in the room where they can sit comfortably or lie down. Explain that the Christmas season includes the feast of Epiphany. This feast celebrates the visit of the Magi, who offered Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

3. Invite the reader to proclaim Matthew 2:1–2. Allow time for the retreatants to absorb the reading, and then dim the lights and begin playing a recording of reflective music.

4. Read the following script slowly and clearly, pausing at the ellipses for a few seconds:

- The reading we just heard gives us a lot of information. It tells us that some people who lived far away from the land of Israel saw a bright star. They believed such stars appeared only when great rulers and kings were born. So they packed up their camels and their caravans and began their search for this new king. Their journey would end with a great surprise. . . .
- The reading also leaves a lot of questions unanswered.
- How many people made the journey? Tradition tells us there were three Wise Men because three gifts are mentioned, but there may have been as many as twelve, each with an entourage. What was life like for this large group of people traveling together, following a star? . . .
- Why did they do it? As far as we can tell, there were no religious connections or family ties. What made these people put their life on hold to follow the star? . . .
- How long did the journey take? They certainly did not make it in time to see the infant Jesus in the manger. It probably took a while to make preparations for the

- journey. Once they got started, the journey may have lasted more than a year. Did they ever want to give up and go home? . . .
- They did not have a map. They simply followed a star. If they were truly wise, shouldn't they have prepared a little more and gotten clearer directions? . . .
 - The position of the stars changes as the earth rotates. Also, the travelers probably encountered cloudy nights when no stars were visible. And, of course, stars are not visible in the daytime, when most of the traveling would have taken place. All those factors lead to the most puzzling question of all: What did they do when they lost sight of the star? . . .
 - Did you ever have a great dream? What was it you wanted so badly you were willing to give up a lot to make it happen? . . . What stars did you follow? That is, what steps did you take to make it happen? . . . What obstacles did you face along the way? . . . What kept you going? What motivated you to push ahead, even though things looked hopeless for a time? In other words, what did you do when you lost sight of the star? . . .
 - The Wise Men had a great dream: to find the king whose star appeared in the eastern sky. Do you have a great dream right now? What is it that you need to do or find that will bring greater meaning and happiness to your life? . . .
 - The Wise Men faced numerous obstacles. They probably lost sight of the star many times. They may have traveled for weeks without seeing the star. But they traveled with three gifts—gifts far more important than the gold, frankincense, and myrrh they carried for the newborn king.
 - The Magi had faith. They believed with all their heart they were going in the right direction for the right reasons. . . . Do you believe your great dream will help bring God to the world? . . .
 - The Magi had hope. They knew they would eventually find what they were looking for. But it would take persistence, patience, and an open mind. What is it you are hoping for? . . . Are you willing to be persistent and carry on, even when things look hopeless? . . . What will test your patience? . . . Are you open to new possibilities, even if things don't turn out exactly as you thought they would? . . .
 - The Magi had one another. When one person was ready to give up, the others probably urged him on. They were a community of journeyers. Who are your fellow travelers? . . . Whom can you count on to see the star when you lose sight of it? . . .
 - Close this time of meditation by asking God to help you recognize the gifts of faith and hope that live in your heart and the gift of other people who share your world.

(The preceding meditation is from Claussen and Kielbasa, *Ministry Ideas*, pp. 82–83.)

5. Turn the lights back on and ask the retreatants to sit up. Point out that you have placed six stars in various parts of the room. Assign each group to stand near one of the stars. Then explain that each group will move from star to star and discuss the question posted on the star.

6. Allow a few minutes for each group to discuss its first star question. Then ask the groups to move to another star. Continue this process until all groups have had the chance to discuss all six questions.

7. Re-gather the retreatants and conclude this portion of the retreat by inviting a few people to summarize the message of the Epiphany Scriptures in their own words.

Option: Instead of the above activity you might consider showing a Christmas movie that portrays the nativity scene and the Magi visit.

11:00 a.m. Break

11:15 a.m. Season of Ordinary Time

1. Invite the retreatants to gather in their small groups. Then offer the following comments to introduce the season of Ordinary Time:

- Now we'll spend some time exploring Ordinary Time. Rather than meaning "common" or "mundane," this term comes from the word *ordinal*, which simply means "counted time" (first Sunday after Pentecost, etc.), which is probably a better way to think of this time of the year.
- Counted time after Pentecost always begins with Trinity Sunday (the first Sunday after Pentecost) and ends with Christ the King Sunday or the Reign of Christ the King (the last Sunday before the beginning of Advent).
- The Sundays of Ordinary Time are used to focus on various aspects of the faith, especially the mission of the Church in the world.
- The *Lectionary* readings for these Sundays tend to be semi-continuous readings through certain sections of Scripture, especially through the synoptic Gospel of the year. During Ordinary Time the readings are not chosen according to a theme.
- The Scriptures of Ordinary Time highlight Jesus's life between his entry into this world and his entry into Jerusalem. Ordinary Time covers Jesus's mission and ministry. Essentially it is a how-to manual for disciples. We hear the stories of Jesus's miracles. We listen to the master storyteller himself explain the Kingdom of God through parables. We face the challenge of recognizing who Jesus is and what God asks of us, just as the first disciples did centuries ago. We struggle to surrender ourselves and be available for others through service. Jesus calls us by name to share in his mission and ministry.
- Even in the season of Ordinary Time, living as Christians is far from ordinary!
- In this portion of the retreat, we will explore more fully the season of Ordinary Time and the Scriptures associated with the season.

2. Provide each small group with a filled-in copy of resource 1–H and some newsprint and markers. Review the instructions on the resource aloud, noting that each group will need to spend time reading its assigned Scripture passage, answering the questions on the resource, and creating some type of presentation. The presentation can be as creative as the group prefers—dramatic, artistic, musical—but everyone in the group needs to be involved. Inform the groups they will have 35 minutes to complete these assigned tasks. They are welcome to use any of the materials (newsprint, markers, craft items, etc.) you have provided. They are also welcome to spread out, and if weather permits, even go outside to prepare.

3. After 35 minutes call the groups back together, noting that immediately following lunch each group should be ready to give its presentation. If they need additional time, they can continue to plan and work during lunch. Then dismiss everyone for the meal.

12:00 p.m. Lunch**1:00 p.m. Ordinary Time Continues**

1. Gather everyone in the main meeting space. Assign the order of the presentations, asking for good listening skills while presentations are being made. Emcee the presentations and make necessary connections. Engage the audience as needed.
2. Conclude this portion of the retreat by synthesizing the points made in the morning as well as the afternoon presentations. Be sure to include the following comments:
 - As we have seen, the term *Ordinary Time* can be misleading. On the surface the season seems to suggest that life and faith carry on as usual. The truth, however, is quite the contrary when the readings of the season are taken into account. Discipleship is a main focus of the Ordinary Time *Lectionary*. Truly living as a disciple of Jesus is out of the ordinary! Being Jesus's follower goes against the culture—taking to heart his message of love contrasts with the messages of modern society.
 - Thus, Ordinary Time is a misnomer because the schema of Scripture readings calls us to be extraordinary.

2:15 p.m. Recreational Break

Provide snacks, recreation options, and a quiet zone in the dorms for resting.

5:00 p.m. Dinner**6:00 p.m. Lenten Season**

1. Re-gather the retreatants in the meeting space, and allow a few moments for everyone to get settled. Then proclaim Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18. Allow a few moments of silence to follow.
2. Introduce the season of Lent by noting that the Scripture passage the retreatants just heard is the Gospel proclaimed each year on Ash Wednesday. Then offer these points:
 - When you think of Ash Wednesday and Lent, what comes to mind—dark colors, burned palms, solemn music, searching, aloneness, sacrifice, and even sadness and death?
 - Lent is marked by a time of prayer and preparation leading up to the celebration of Easter. Because Sundays celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus, the six Sundays during Lent are not counted as part of the forty days of Lent and are called the Sundays *in* Lent.
 - The number 40 is connected with many biblical events, but especially with the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness preparing for his ministry by facing the temptations that could lead him to abandon his mission and calling. Christians today use this period of time for introspection, self-examination, and repentance.
 - The forty days of Lent can seem like an eternity, which is why the term *forty days* is appropriately used to signify a “very long time” in the Scriptures.
 - Ash Wednesday, the seventh Wednesday before Easter Sunday, is the first day of the season of Lent.