

# Youth Retreats

for Any Schedule

Maryann Hakowski

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# Dedication

In loving memory of Walter Hakowski

May the angels bear you up; give you to drink the holy cup.  
May the saints come welcome you; here is a life forever new.

(From Gary Hardin and James Hansen's "Farewell Blessing")

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# Introduction

## Why Offer a Retreat?

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Retreats are a special way to reach out to young people. They are a proven way to be effective in evangelizing and building community. They can be powerful, life-changing events for young people. They are times to get away from daily routines; they include many components of a well-rounded youth ministry program; and they allow time for tackling issues in depth.

A retreat provides an environment for grappling with faith issues and learning new ways to pray. It is an opportunity for young people to celebrate their faith in new and different ways.

Young people and adults have a chance to share their faith stories and build relationships of trust. Young people need and want these relationships with significant adults. Adults want to be approachable to young people and to transmit values and faith. A retreat is a place for sharing the Gospel message. Often, we adults learn as much as young people do.

A retreat is a chance for everyone to have a lot of fun and to play and pray together as one community and one Church.

## An Overview of This Book

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This book includes five retreats, each designed for a group of twenty-five to forty senior high young people. They are adaptable for smaller or larger groups. One-day, half-day, overnight, and weekend programs are offered. The retreats have a wide variety of topics that speak to the needs and daily experiences of young people.

One of the strengths of these retreats is that they have been tested and improved based on feedback from teens in parish youth groups and Catholic high school classes in Pennsylvania, Virginia, Illinois, and Missouri. Young people have participated in these retreats and have had the opportunity to comment on ways to improve them. In some cases, they have participated in planning the retreats.

An additional strength of these retreats is their flexibility. They can be used as written or they can be adapted to meet particular needs of your group. Individual talks, icebreakers, and discussion activities can be used in the classroom or in other youth ministry settings as well.

## The Philosophy Behind the Retreats

The retreats in this book are based on the philosophy that a healthy retreat experience must give retreatants an opportunity to gain a better sense of self, to build relationships with others, and to grow closer to God.

### Developing a Better Sense of Self

Most young people in high school are grappling with their self-identity. They are still testing their values and developing character—that is, deciding who they really are. Retreats offer affirmation and opportunities for building self-esteem and identifying personal gifts that can be shared with others.

### Building Relationships with Others

Relationships—with peers and with parents or guardians—are a constant concern for young people. By translating the Gospel of Jesus Christ into action for everyday living, retreats can give young people options for daily decisions about relating to others.

### Growing Closer to God

Adolescence is a time when young people question, struggle with, and sometimes doubt their faith. They are searching for God but often do not realize it. They are starting to discover the difference between religion and faith and are not sure where they fit in.

Retreats offer teens a comfortable setting for examining and talking about their relationships with God. Retreats are times to deepen those relationships and learn new ways to communicate with God.

## Components of the Retreats

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### Icebreakers

These activities do much more than break the ice. They help participants learn each others' names, stretch their legs and their minds, and learn new skills as they play games. The activities also introduce new segments of a retreat.

### Talks

Talks are prepared by both adult and teenage team members. Teenage team members have the authority of a person who is speaking to peers. Their concerns and fears, triumphs and relationships, speak right to the place where young people are. Young people need and want to hear from caring adults, too. Talks also offer an opportunity for a ministry leader, a parent, or a parish priest to share his or her thoughts, feelings, and personal faith stories.

Because speakers truly need to think about and pray about a topic before they begin writing a talk, each speaker can be given a handout relating to his or her specific talk that has a list of points to consider as the speaker prepares. In addition, appendix A, "Helpful Hints for Giving Talks," can be given to speakers.

### **Creative Activities**

Learning through experience is a key ingredient of all the activities in this book. Variety is important. Retreat activities should challenge the imagination and offer different ways for young people to express themselves. Some creative activities include role-plays, dramas, games that teach, videos, skits, art projects, affirmations, and exercises using modern music.

### **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 and being 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. Some hints for leading small-group discussions are offered in appendix B, "Guidelines for Retreat Team Leaders."

### **Quiet Time**

A mix of short opportunities for reflection with one longer period of quiet during retreats provides beneficial interludes. After each talk, ask the retreatants to take 5 minutes to think and reflect. On all overnight and weekend retreats, each person 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.

### **Liturgies and Prayer Services**

A retreat is an ideal opportunity to expose young people to a variety of prayer experiences, to expand their personal repertoire of ways to approach God. Some possibilities for placing prayer within a retreat schedule include a morning and an evening prayer, a reconciliation service, a closing prayer, and a liturgy. Include a variety of prayer forms in your services. Music, Scripture, symbols, storytelling, shared prayer, mime, personal witness, secular stories or poems, traditional prayer, and prayer with motions are a few possibilities.

### **Prayer Points**

A prayer point is a creative introduction to reflection. It is designed to help retreatants think of something in a new way. It is also often an occasion for creative prayer experiences.

### **Eucharistic Liturgies**

Liturgy is often the high point of a retreat. A retreat, by nature, is a celebration of faith, and it is only fitting that we include the Eucharist, the most precious celebration we have as Catholic Christians.

If a priest is not able to join you for the entire retreat, plan to meet with him beforehand and share the theme of the retreat so that he is better able



to prepare a homily. Another option is to hold the retreat liturgy at the home parish and invite family and friends to join you.

## Preparation

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### **Recruiting and Training a Retreat Team**

The team approach to retreat planning allows the retreat coordinator to tap into 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, are comfortable leading activities, and show a willingness to share their faith.

Some tasks for team members include the following:

- meet several times to prepare for the retreat
- lead a discussion group
- give a retreat talk
- serve as leaders of prayer
- participate in all activities
- give directions for activities
- enforce retreat ground rules

Hold three or four team meetings before the retreat. Such meetings are for planning and training, and they foster community, cooperation, and teamwork. Here are possible agendas for a series of four team meetings.

#### **First meeting**

- Introduce the team.
- Explain the theme and the goals of the retreat.
- Review the tentative schedule.
- Explain the team responsibilities.
- Review guidelines for working with small groups.

#### **Second meeting**

- Explain the purpose and the method of the witness talks.
- Divide responsibility for the talks and the activities.
- Discuss ways to promote the retreat.
- Designate committees for food, liturgy, promotion, and entertainment.

#### **Third meeting**

- Practice giving the directions for the retreat activities.
- Allow half the team to practice its talks, while the other half offers evaluations and suggestions.
- Plan the prayer services.

### Fourth meeting

- Let the second half of the team practice its talks.
- Finalize the prayer services.
- Review the supply lists.
- Finalize transportation plans.
- Discuss last-minute changes and questions.

Emphasize that team members are also retreatants. All team members, including the adults, are required to participate in all the activities, from icebreakers to liturgy.

Appendix A, “Helpful Hints for Giving Talks,” and appendix B, “Guidelines for Retreat Team Leaders,” are useful for team members as they prepare for the retreat. Copy and distribute these appendices at a team meeting.

## Promoting a Retreat

A great retreat is not going to go anywhere unless you promote it and get the young people in the parish or school excited about it. Here are some possible ways to publicize a retreat:

- **Personal contact:** Teen team members can call, write, or e-mail students or young people or invite them after class, at youth ministry gatherings, and after Mass.
- **Mailings:** Send a letter, a flyer, or a formal invitation to every young person in the parish or school, giving all the reasons for attending a retreat.
- **Presentations:** Give a presentation at a youth ministry gathering or in class. Bring along young people who will share their retreat experiences.
- **Sign-up booth:** Set up a sign-up table each Sunday for several weeks. Team members can take registrations and answer questions after Mass.
- **Recruiting parents:** They are your best allies. Tell them about the retreat. Answer all their questions. Ask them to encourage their teens to attend.

## Setting

Getting away from the parish or school setting is important for a retreat experience. This is preferable for daylong retreats, but it is 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. Whatever site you consider, look for these necessities:

- adequate bathroom and shower facilities
- comfortable sleeping accommodations with separate facilities for teen males, teen females, adult males, and adult females
- modern kitchen or food service facilities
- spacious meeting rooms
- recreational areas—outdoor sports courts or an open grassy area
- an informal chapel or a small, quiet room with moveable furniture

You may also want to ask about the facility's group rules, the policy on damage, the availability of audiovisual equipment, and other pertinent matters.

## Permission Forms and Transportation

Check with the parish and diocesan director of youth ministry on required medical and permission forms for youth trips. All teens must have a permission form and medical form. Each adult at the retreat should also have a medical form.

All adults participating in any way in your retreat program must complete the background checks and safe environment training required by your parish and diocese.

Check also with your parish or diocese on regulations for transporting teens. As a rule, no one under twenty-one years of age is permitted to transport teens. Under no circumstances should teens transport other teens. Make sure all the adult drivers have accurate directions to the retreat location. They should also swap cell phone numbers in case they need to contact one another.

## Finances

Calculate what the retreat will cost. When determining a budget, include the cost of food, supplies, renting the facility, and transportation. Then determine the cost per person.

In most cases, retreatants must pay for all or part of the cost. Some of the funds may come from the parish budget or the school budget. To keep costs down, you may want to ask for donations of food from parishioners or do some fund-raising. An added benefit of fund-raising is that it promotes the retreat.

Cost should not prevent anyone from attending a retreat. Start a scholarship fund and make the money available when needed.

## Meals

You can have the best program in the world, but if the food is poor, your retreat is going to be in trouble. If you are going to a facility where meals are provided, here are some questions you should ask beforehand:

- At what times are the meals served? Is the staff flexible on this?
- What type of food is served? Ask for a menu for each meal you will be served while you are at the facility.
- How large are the portions? Is it possible to have seconds?
- Are provisions made for people who are on special diets? for vegetarians?
- Are snacks provided? in the evening? during the day?

If you will be doing your own cooking and using the kitchen at the facility, you should ask the following questions:

- How large is the kitchen?
- What appliances are available?
- Do we have to bring our own utensils, pots, and dishes?

- What are the guidelines for using the kitchen?
- What happens if we break something?

Seek volunteers from the parish or school to run the kitchen at the facility and prepare the meals. It is difficult for team members, who are running activities and giving talks, to prepare meals. Plan meals that are filling, well balanced, and easy to prepare. Consider preparing some meals in advance and simply heating them at the retreat.

**Supplies** Some general supplies are used on most retreats:

- pencils or pens
- a pencil sharpener
- white paper
- construction paper
- poster board and newsprint
- glue or glue sticks
- masking tape and cellophane tape
- index cards
- scissors
- markers
- crayons
- old magazines
- candles
- copies of *The Catholic Youth Bible*® (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press) or another Bible
- songbooks or parish hymnals
- liturgy supplies
- large-screen television
- VCR, DVD, and CD players and batteries
- first-aid kit

Make a detailed list of everything you need for the entire retreat and check off things as you prepare. The activities in this book that require specific supplies are accompanied by a detailed list; this will help you in planning. Always bring extra supplies, just in case.

## What the Retreatants Should Bring

Give the retreatants a list of what they should bring to the retreat. For a typical retreat weekend, tell participants to bring the following: comfortable clothing appropriate for the time of year, an extra change of clothing and shoes, personal toiletries, sleeping bag, pillow, flashlight, sports equipment, and a snack to share.

You will also want to include a list of things that participants should not bring to the retreat, such as iPods, CD players, cell phones, pagers, electronic games, and other valuables.

**Emergencies** Be prepared for emergencies. Before the retreat, make a list of the phone numbers for the nearest police station, rescue squad, and firefighting unit. Make sure you have the name and number of the facility manager, especially if she or he does not live on the property. Find the fire exits so you can point them out to everyone at the start of the retreat.

Locate the hospital nearest to the facility and make sure every adult team member has the phone number and clear directions on how to get there. Make sure you have medical information for each retreatant. The best treatment is prevention. Make sure the facility you use and the activities you choose are a safe environment for retreatants. At least one adult team member should have basic Red Cross training. Check to see if the facility has a first-aid kit. If not, then be sure to bring one.

**Discipline** Set a strict code of conduct and stick to it. Guidelines are necessary on retreats to avoid problems and make the stay enjoyable for all.

If you are on a school retreat, the school code of conduct should remain in force. Also check on the rules of the facility you will be using.

Make sure all retreatants know the rules before the retreat. Review the code of conduct again upon arrival at the retreat site, answer questions, and clarify specific rules. It is always a good idea to have parents and teens sign copies of the ground rules when they register for the retreat.

Here is a partial list of retreat ground rules. You can develop other rules with your team.

1. No smoking is permitted.
2. No alcohol or drugs are permitted. Anyone bringing these substances to the retreat will be asked to leave immediately.
3. Cell phones, pagers, CD players, and electronic games should be left at home.
4. All retreatants must stay in designated retreat areas.
5. Any emergency must be reported immediately to an adult.
6. Respect and take care of the building and grounds. Any damage should be reported immediately.
7. Food is permitted only in the cafeteria or canteen.
8. Everyone is responsible for turning off the lights and turning down the heat when leaving a room.
9. Retreatants must be prompt for all activities.
10. Name tags are to be worn for all retreat activities.
11. No boys are permitted in girls' rooms, and no girls are permitted in boys' rooms.
12. A lights-out time will be in effect each night.
13. All rooms and bathrooms should be in order before you leave them.

**Traditions** Traditions are fun and a special part of retreats. They are the extra touches that one remembers or treasures for years. Some possible traditions are as follows:

- Ask a volunteer to say grace and allow the people who sit at that table to eat first. (You should not have any trouble getting volunteers after that meal.)
- Have everyone dress up for a candlelight dinner served by the retreat team.
- Distribute medallions, customized T-shirts, or personalized prayer books.
- Give each retreatant a reflection booklet of poems, prayers, and songs compiled by the team. It is important to note that you must follow copyright regulations when copying any printed material. Permission to reprint any copyrighted material must be obtained from the publisher.
- Before the retreat, ask people at the parish or school to write words of encouragement for the retreatants. Give the notes to individuals or to the group throughout the retreat.
- Pick a theme song for the retreat.
- Before the retreat, divide the retreatants into pairs as prayer partners. Give each partner the other partner's name to pray for during the retreat. However, keep the identity of each prayer partner a secret until the sign of peace is made at the closing liturgy.
- Take lots of photos for a retreat album. Pose for a group photo and make sure everyone gets a copy after the retreat.
- Gather with friends and family back at the parish for a noisy, joyful welcome home.

**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 your approach 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.

# Retreat 1

## What Is Your Net Worth?

### Introduction

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“What Is Your Net Worth?” is a day-long retreat for comparing and contrasting society’s definition of self-worth with God’s definition of our great worth. The retreat may be held at the start of the Lenten season, in September at the start of the school year, or in January at the start of the new year.

- Goals**
- To help retreatants to grow in self-worth in light of Gospel values.
  - To teach retreatants new ways to study and reflect on the Scriptures.
  - To encourage retreatants to examine their conscience in light of the Sunday Gospel readings.
  - To help retreatants recognize the importance of having a support system and providing a support system for others.
  - To challenge retreatants to “cast their nets with Jesus” and grow as Christians in faith and action.

## Schedule

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The following sequence for “What Is Your Net Worth?” is just one suggestion for arranging the schedule. Use the column labeled “Actual Plan” to record the activities, sequences, and starting times that will work for you.

<i>Time</i>	<i>Activity Name</i>	<i>Activity Type</i>	<i>Actual Plan</i>
9:00 A.M.	Getting Caught Up in Discussion	Community building	_____
9:30 A.M.	Gathering and Welcome	Introduction	_____
9:45 A.M.	What Is Your Net Worth?	Discussion	_____
10:00 A.M.	Break		_____
10:15 A.M.	How Does God Define Our Net Worth?	Scripture activity	_____
11:30 A.M.	Lunch		_____
12:15 P.M.	What or Who Is Your Safety Net?	Sharing and prayer	_____
12:45 P.M.	What Is Tangled in Your Net?	Examination of conscience	_____
	What Is Caught in Your Net?	Writing project	_____
1:30 P.M.	Break		_____
1:45 P.M.	Where Do You Need to Cast Your Net?	Quiet time	_____
2:00 P.M.	Cast Your Net with Jesus	Networking	_____

### General Materials and Preparation

- The suggested space needs for this retreat include a large gathering space, tables for small groups, and a designated prayer space.
- Gather the following items:
  - name tags, one for each retreatant
- Create a portable supply basket for each small group, containing the following frequently used items:
  - pens or pencils
  - markers
  - scissors
  - glue sticks
  - self-stick notes
  - participant journals or blank sheets of paper
  - songbooks or hymnals
  - copies of *THE CATHOLIC YOUTH BIBLE* or another Bible
- Place a basket at each group table.



## Detailed Description of Activities

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### Getting Caught Up in Discussion (9:00 A.M.)

#### Preparation

- Gather the following supplies:
    - heavy fishnet that is large enough to cover a small table
    - a stapler
    - a small table
    - a white cloth that is large enough to cover a small table
  - Copy the questions found in resource 1, “Questions for the Net,” onto a sheet of blue paper and cut the paper into strips. You will need one question for each participant.
  - Staple the strips of questions all over the fishnet.
  - Place the white cloth on the table, and place the fishnetting, with questions attached, on top of the cloth.
1. As retreatants arrive, invite them to pull one question each from the netting. Ask each person to find a partner and share the answer to the question. When the partners finish, invite them to swap questions and find another partner.
  2. Repeat this process until all retreatants have arrived and you are ready for the introduction and welcome.

### Gathering and Welcome (9:30 A.M.)

1. Introduce yourself and welcome everyone to the retreat. Thank the retreatants for sharing the net questions during the first activity. Tell them how glad you are that they got “caught up” in getting to know one another and sharing. Encourage them to be open and to continue to share throughout the retreat day. Continue by making the following points in your own words:

Retreats offer great opportunities for better understanding ourselves, others, and God. This retreat includes Scripture, sharing, prayer, fellowship, and a meal.

During this retreat, we will look at how society views our “net” worth as compared with the great value God places on each one of us. We will learn about the “safety nets” in our lives and how we can be there for others. We will also explore the obstacles that tangle our nets and make it tough to be a disciple of Jesus. Most of all, we will explore ways that each of us can get caught up in the net of discipleship.

## **What Is Your Net Worth? (9:45 A.M.)**

### **Preparation**

- Gather the following supplies:
  - newsprint
  - markers
  - masking tape
  - two copies of *THE CATHOLIC YOUTH BIBLE* or another Bible
- Ask two retreatants to prepare to proclaim the Scripture readings: Mark 1:16–20 and John 1:35–42.

### **1. Begin a large-group discussion with the following questions:**

- How do you think society measures your net worth?
- What tools do you and I use to measure worth?
- What would you consider to be the measurements of success?

Record the group's answers on newsprint.

### **2. Follow up by asking this question:**

- What are the dangers of measuring our net worth in these ways?

Again, write the responses on newsprint.

### **3. Invite the two young people that you have chosen to proclaim the Scripture passages to come forward. The reading from Mark should be proclaimed first. Invite all the retreatants to listen attentively to the Scriptures. Allow retreatants to have a moment or two of silent reflection after each proclamation.**

### **4. Ask the retreatants:**

- How do you think Jesus measures our net worth?

Again, record their answers on the newsprint, contrasting them with the answers recorded earlier in the discussion.

### **5. Close this discussion with a few of the following thoughts:**

If you are still fishing for the topic of this retreat, think back to these readings and remember that in the eyes of God, your worth is immeasurable, especially by any human standards. Come, discover how much God and Jesus value our net worth.

## **Break (10:00 A.M.)**

## How Does God Define Our Net Worth? (10:15 A.M.)

### Preparation

- Gather the following supplies:
  - copies of handout 1, “The Steps for *Lectio Divina*: Spiritual Reading,” one for each person

#### 1. Introduce the activity in the following way:

In the first activity, we cast a net of questions to get to know one another better. Then we compared the way society measures worth with the great worth Jesus grants to each of us. Now we turn to the Scriptures to take a deeper look at what God reveals to us.

Invite retreatants to form groups of six to eight people. Assign one adult leader to each group. Invite each group to be seated at a table. Make sure each group has a basket of supplies.

#### 2. Ask the groups to search the Scriptures for examples of how God defines our net worth or of how God does so through Jesus. They should come up with at least one example for each person in their group and list the examples on a sheet of paper.

#### 3. Ask each group to choose one of the Scripture passages for further discussion. Allow a minute or two for them to decide which passage to use. Provide each retreatant with a copy of handout 1. Offer the following information:

*Lectio divina* is a Latin term that literally means “divine reading” or “sacred reading.”

*Lectio divina* is a way of allowing the Scriptures to become again what God intended them to be—a means of uniting us with him.

*Lectio divina* aims to make us aware of God’s presence through a five-step process: *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, *contemplatio*, and *actio*:

- *Lectio* is receiving the word of God.
- *Meditatio* is allowing the word to be present in our awareness.
- *Oratio* is sharing ourselves in prayer.
- *Contemplatio* is resting in the presence of God.
- *Actio* is responding to God’s message with action.

#### 4. Describe the *lectio divina* process as noted on the handout. Then invite the groups to walk through the process together. You might need to remind them of the steps as they go along. Some basic direction is noted here:

- One person reads the Scripture passage aloud and pauses at the end for one or two minutes of silence. During the silence, group members choose a word or phrase that has drawn their attention.
- Each person is invited to share aloud the word or phrase. No elaboration is necessary.
- A different person reads the same passage a second time and pauses for two or three minutes of silence. During the silence, retreatants reflect on

this question: How does the word or phrase that has touched my heart touch my life today?

- Invite retreatants to share their answers aloud.
  - A new person reads the passage a third time and pauses for two or three minutes at the end. During the silence, group members reflect on this question: What is Christ calling me to do or become today or this week?
  - Invite everyone to share the results of their reflection.
  - After full sharing, everyone prays silently for each person in the group.
  - Anyone may pass at any time. If a retreatant prefers to pray silently instead of sharing with the group, he or she can simply state this aloud and conclude the silent prayer with an “Amen.”
5. When all the groups have had ample time to work through the process, invite them to return to the large group. Ask for a spokesperson from each small group to read the passage the group discovered and share some of what the group learned in praying the passage.
6. Conclude with a discussion of the following questions:
- How was this process for you? Was it helpful?
  - Did your experience or interpretation of the Scripture text change throughout the process? If so, how?
  - What would be the value of incorporating *lectio divina* into your regular prayer routine?

Be sure to note that with simple adaptations, an individual can use this method just as easily as a group can.

**Lunch (11:30 A.M.)** You do not have to serve fish sandwiches for lunch, but let your kitchen crew and table decorating committee have some fun with the menu and table décor so they connect with your retreat theme.

**What or Who Is  
Your Safety Net?  
(12:15 P.M.)**

**Preparation**

- Gather the following supplies:
  - masking tape
  - a long bamboo pole (an old broom handle would also work well)
  - netting from the previous activity
  - blue and white yarn, cut into 6-inch pieces, one piece of each color for each retreatant
  - scissors
  - newsprint
  - markers

- With the masking tape, make a long straight line down the center of the meeting space. Arrange half of the chairs on one side of the line and half on the other side.
1. Ask for a volunteer to help with a special demonstration. Take the person aside, give the bamboo pole to him or her, and ask him or her to walk on the masking tape line, pretending to be a tightrope walker. Tell the volunteer to go ahead and have some fun with the charade.
  2. Ask the entire group the following question:
    - How is walking a tightrope sometimes similar to our everyday lives?

Invite the retreatants to share their answers aloud and then come forward and write their answers on the masking tape line on the floor.

3. Ask for eight volunteers for another demonstration. Take them aside and tell them they have to create, using only themselves as props, a safety net for a tightrope walker. Tell them to be creative and have some fun. Have them perform their act.
4. Now ask the retreatants the following questions:
  - What makes tightrope walking challenging?
  - What would a person need if, instead of walking on a line of masking tape on the floor, she or he were suspended way up in the air far above our heads?

Summarize the answers to the questions in the following way:

Sometimes in our everyday lives we feel as if we are walking a tightrope. We have to balance school and work, relationships with family and friends, and school work with other activities. Sometimes the pressures can seem overwhelming, and we lose our balance. Through the support of family and friends and the love of God, we can bring our lives into balance again. Sometimes we are the ones in need of a safety net formed by this network of God and others. Sometimes we are the safety net for others.

5. Give each person a piece of blue yarn and a piece of white yarn. Gather the retreatants in a group around the fishnet. Invite them to be silent for a moment as you begin a prayer experience.
6. Ask each person to pray for someone in need, someone who needs a safety net right now. Explain that retreatants should not pray for an individual by name; rather, they should pray by describing a situation. For example, "I would like to pray for a friend who is struggling with . . ." or "a family member suffering from . . ." Also, give them the option of praying for someone silently if they wish. After they have offered their prayers, invite them to tie their pieces of white yarn to the fishnet. Allow enough time for everyone wishing to participate to do so.

7. For the second prayer, ask retreatants to pray individually for someone who is there when they are in need, someone who is a safety net for them. Invite the young people to tie their pieces of blue yarn to the fishnet after their prayers have been shared. Once again, allow the option of silent prayer.
8. Close by inviting all to hold these people up in prayer for the remainder of the retreat. Then offer this final prayer:

Lord, we thank you for being our safety net during the tough times of our lives. Bring us closer to you each day so we may find true balance in our lives. Thank you also for the blessing of friends and family members who hold us up. Give us courage to reach out to those in need through word, action, and prayer. We pray this in your Son's name. Amen.

## What Is Tangled in Your Net? What Is Caught in Your Net? (12:45 P.M.)

### Preparation

- Gather the following supplies:
  - index cards, one card for each small group
  - newsprint
  - markers
- Copy the citations for the Gospel readings for the next several Sundays onto the index cards. You will need one Gospel passage for each small group.

1. Ask the participants the following question:

- What is an examination of conscience?

Summarize their answers, and then share this definition:

Prayerful reflection on and assessment of one's own words, attitudes, and actions in light of the Gospel of Jesus; more specifically, the conscience evaluation of one's life in preparation for reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. (*The Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth [CFH]*, p. 409)

Continue your comments in this way:

Although an examination of conscience is most needed when we prepare for the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, we can examine our conscience at any time. A retreat is a great opportunity to look at our relationships with God and others and consider how we need to change. The Gospels are full of challenges for us to grow and change.

2. Invite the retreatants to regather in their small groups. Ask each small group to choose one of the upcoming Gospel passages you have written on the index cards. Ask the group members to read the passage individually first. Then ask them as a small group to talk about the questions or challenges found in the passage.

3. Provide each group with a sheet of newsprint and a marker or two. Ask the group members to write down at least five questions that would challenge others to examine their conscience. Use John 9:1–42, the passage in which Jesus heals the blind man, as an example, and offer the following questions as examples:

- Have I harshly judged the actions of others without knowing their motives or their backgrounds?
- Some people who are blind are still able to see God clearly. Why am I not able to see God all the time?
- When was I blind to someone else’s needs, paying attention to only my own needs?

Allow about 20 minutes for the groups to complete this task.

4. If time permits, invite a few groups to share the results of their work. Conclude this activity in the following way:

In our crazy, busy, noisy lives, it is important to make time to reflect on the Scriptures. Taking time to look at the areas in our lives that need some change is important if we are to really remain open to hearing and living the word of God in our everyday lives.

Encourage the retreatants to make a practice of examining their own conscience. Make them aware of the times that the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is available at the parish or school.

## **Break (1:30 P.M.)**

### **Where Do You Need to Cast Your Net? (1:45 P.M.)**

#### **Preparation**

- Gather the following supplies:
  - copies of handout 2, “Questions for Quiet Reflection,” one for each retreatant

1. Give each person a copy of handout 2. Ask them to read the Scripture passage (John 21:1–14) noted on the handout and to reflect on what they have learned during the retreat so far by spending some quiet time writing their answers to the reflection questions. Ask them to find a quiet space where they will not be distracted or tempted to start a side conversation.

### **Cast Your Net with Jesus (2:00 P.M.)**

#### **Preparation**

- Gather the following supplies:
  - a large ball of brown yarn
- Invite two older teen team members to each prepare a 5-minute witness talk. To help them prepare, give them both a copy of resource 2, “Suggestions for the Cast Your Net with Jesus Witness Talk,” as well as a copy of appendix A, “Helpful Hints for Giving Talks.”

# Acknowledgments

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