

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO



Archdiocesan Virtual Asynchronous Retreats

TIME WITH GOD ON YOUR TIME

User Guide for Facilitated Group Retreats



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It is recommended that you read through this guide before you begin your retreat.

Purpose

These retreats offer the opportunity to step away from the busyness of ministry and pressures of daily life to reflect on the Catholic faith, prioritize spiritual wellness, inspire witness and recharge one's missionary activity by way of an engaging and easy to navigate format. Finding a quiet place to retreat to from time to time helps us to refresh and recharge. Jesus was no exception; He needed to find times to slip away from the crowds and from His work so that He could reconnect with God the Father. We go on retreat so that we can come to know God more fully, know ourselves more fully and to have the strength to carry out what God might be asking of us.

Audience

These retreats were created to meet the spiritual needs of catechetical leaders, catechists and youth ministers, with the intention of expanding additional topics for use by catholic school principals and teachers, parents and all adults in the Archdiocese of Chicago with the potential of sharing beyond our area.

Retreat Goals

In alignment with the Archdiocese of Chicago vision of Renew My Church, these online retreats are designed to help parish ministers, volunteers and all lay people encounter Jesus and grow in their sense of missionary discipleship, build community through prayerful reflection and discussion and become inspiring witnesses of faith. Grounded in prayer and reflection, these retreats are designed to breathe new life into methods of sharing the Gospel and invite others to bring the Good News of Christ to the world.

Timeframe

These retreats are designed to be adaptable for your programming needs. They were created with a 60-minute timeframe in mind but can easily be extended (or combined with other Sway retreat presentations) for a multiple session group retreat experience. Note: see the section Resources for Ongoing Enrichment on page 9 for ideas.

Sample Timeframe for a Two-Hour Facilitated Retreat

While this sample timeframe may help you envision a facilitated group retreat, it is important to remember that the Holy Spirit will be guiding your retreat experience and therefore flexibility with the timing of specific aspects of the retreat will be helpful.

RETREAT TOPICS	APPROXIMATE TIME
Welcome and Opening Prayer	15 minutes (Facilitator and opening prayer video)
Ice Breaker (Optional)	10 minutes (Facilitator)
Setting the Tone for the Retreat	10 minutes (Facilitator and welcome video)
Topic Introduction	10 minutes (Facilitator and intro video)
Scripture	5 minutes (Audio and visio divina)
Silent Time	5 minutes (Instrumental music)
Video Reflection	10 minutes (Facilitator and video)
Personal Silent Reflection (Journaling)	15 minutes (Instrumental music)
Discussion Question	30-45 minutes (Small groups and general sharing)
Action Steps	15 minutes (Facilitator and guide)
Closing Prayer	5 minutes (Facilitator and video)

Creating a Sacred Space and Reflective Atmosphere

When a gathering space is decorated with tangible symbols of our faith, we are able to more easily step away from the chaos of daily life and enter into a mindset of prayer and reflection. For in-person retreats, consider gathering some religious items (e.g., a Bible, a Crucifix, images of Mary or the saints, candles, holy water, prayer cards or flowers) to create a small prayer space in the center of your gathering location. For virtual retreats, encourage participants to create a sacred space in their homes, such as a space that is uncluttered and decorated simply with a few religious items (e.g., a Crucifix, an image of Mary, and a candle). In any retreat format, playing instrumental background music as participants are gathering or logging on will also help to create a reflective and prayerful atmosphere.

Group Dynamics

Be attentive to who your group is and what their needs are. There will be different levels of reflection based on the dynamics of your group. For example, some individuals and/or groups may need a longer amount of time for personal reflection prior to being open to group reflection and discussion. Your role as a facilitator is to accompany those in your group, to walk with them at their pace and according to their comfort level. Remember that your role is to ultimately help participants encounter Jesus and bring the Good News of Christ to the world. Keeping this in mind throughout the retreat will help you to guide conversations that build community and inspire all participants to witness to their faith when they are ready.

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Take a few moments before your retreat starts to welcome participants and provide any brief instructions that are needed for your retreat, such as providing discussion question handouts or posting documents in the meeting chat.

It will be helpful to give the following basic instructions (or something similar) to participants before starting the Welcome Video and Opening Prayer:

Let us take a moment to quiet ourselves...set aside our worries and concerns of this day...and “place our needs...and our very selves into to the loving arms of God...(pause for a moment)... Let us begin our time together ‘In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.’ Amen.”

Ice Breaker

Ice breakers can be an effective way of starting a retreat and to integrate new members or to connect with one another before the main purpose of the retreat is presented. The most important characteristic of the ice breaker is that it promotes participation, team-building and openness to share. One common ice breaker is "**would you rather**" or "**get to know me.**"

Topic Introduction

There is a PDF linked in the Resources for Ongoing Enrichment section of each retreat that provides the text of the introduction. You may want to share copies of this with your retreat participants for their continued reflection after the retreat.

Scripture

When proclaiming Scripture aloud:

- Begin the reading by saying, “A reading from...” (ex: A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans).
- End the reading by saying, “The Word of the Lord.” All respond, “Thanks be to God.”
- End a Gospel reading by saying, “The Gospel of the Lord.” All respond, “Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.”

Lectio Divina is a flexible and easy way to pray with Scripture. Learn more about Lectio Divina with these short videos: **Lectio Divina** and **What Is Lectio Divina?** You may decide to extend the Scripture reading and reflection during your retreat using the steps of Lectio Divina’s “Divine Reading” of Scripture:

1. Invoke – Call upon the Holy Spirit to guide your prayer
2. Lectio – Read the passage slowly and thoughtfully while imagining yourself in the scene
3. Meditatio – Meditate on the passage while pondering what stands out to you and what you feel God is saying to you
4. Oratio – Rest with your thoughts, allowing them to become your prayer as you respond to God from your heart
5. Contemplatio – Contemplate the passage as you continue to rest in God’s love and listen to Him
6. Actio – Consider what action God is calling you to and offer a resolution for today

Reflection Video

The video reflection is intended to help participants grow both spiritually and in their knowledge of the faith. A retreat facilitator may choose to expand on the video reflection or retreat topic prior to a period of silent personal reflection. Particularly meaningful would be a short (3-5 minute) witness testimony of what the reflection or retreat topic means to you personally and in your ministry.

There is a PDF linked in the Resources for Ongoing Enrichment section of each retreat that provides the text of the reflection video. You may want to share copies of this with your retreat participants for their continued reflection after the retreat.

Personal Reflection

The personal reflection questions were created to help participants ponder the retreat topic and Scripture passage, become more attentive to the voice of God in their lives and to grow in their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This period of silent and reflective pondering allows the Holy Spirit to deepen one's awareness of what God is revealing to us during the retreat. This time will also allow participants to form their thoughts for the group discussion portion of your retreat. During personal reflection, participants are encouraged to do some of the following:

- Journal their thoughts on the introduction, Scripture reading or video reflection
- Ponder what words, images or ideas stood out to them and how those relate to their life now
- Follow the prompting of their heart as they dialogue with God
- Consider what God is saying to them or encouraging them to do
- Reflect on the personal reflection and discussion questions

There is a PDF linked in the Resources for Ongoing Enrichment section of each retreat that provides the text of the personal reflection questions. You may want to share copies of this with your retreat participants so they can write down their thoughts and responses during the retreat.

Discussion Questions

The provided discussion questions are to get your conversation started. If you have other questions in mind that you think would resonate with your participants, feel free to include those. When moving into the discussion time of your retreat, be sure to provide clear instructions to participants. Be attentive to allowing the opportunity for all participants to share their thoughts and comments. When conducting retreats virtually, it is helpful to provide a participant order for sharing responses, remember to allow for people to say "pass" when it is their turn if they are not ready to share and then allow for time for final comments from those who have not spoken.

There is a PDF linked in the Resources for Ongoing Enrichment section of each retreat that provides the text of the group discussion questions. You may want to share copies of this with your retreat participants so they can write down their thoughts and form their responses for group discussion during the retreat.

Action Ideas

Prayer often moves us to action. In this section of the retreat, we offer some ideas and ways to respond to the movement of the Holy Spirit and turning prayer toward action. These action ideas are intended to spark participants own ideas for how they will work to live out their faith as missionary disciples working to build community. Perhaps your retreat participants will even discern an action idea that may be carried out as a group.

There is a PDF linked in the Resources for Ongoing Enrichment section of each retreat that provides the text of the retreat action ideas. You may want to share copies of this with your retreat participants and encourage them to consider practicing one of the suggested action ideas as an extension of their retreat experience.

Closing Prayer

As with the opening prayer, it may be helpful to make these basic comments (or something similar) to participants before starting the Closing Prayer:

“As our time together comes to an end, let us pause to reflect on the inspirations that have come to us during our retreat...(pause for a moment)...(watch the Closing Prayer video)...

“We end our time together ‘In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.’ Amen.”

If you would like to dedicate time for personal intentions prior to the Closing Prayer, you may invite participants to share their personal prayers in the typical format of Universal Prayers where the participant begins their intention with “I’d like to pray for...” and after they complete their intention, they say, “We pray to the Lord.” All respond, “Lord, hear our prayer.” These intentions can be gathered together by praying The Lord’s Prayer after which you would conclude with the Closing Prayer Video in the retreat presentation.

Resources for Ongoing Enrichment

While these retreats have been designed with a 60-minute timeframe in mind, each retreat presentation includes a list of resources for ongoing enrichment. Facilitators can select from these ideas to turn the 60-minute retreat into a longer retreat experience. These resources can also be used as follow-up resources to share with participants. Additionally, you may decide to select a few of the retreat presentations to use if you'd like to host a half-day or full-day retreat while incorporating breaks and longer periods of personal reflection and group discussion. We encourage you to be creative with the enrichment resources as you plan your retreat

There will be retreat-specific PDFs of the Introduction and Reflection Video texts, Personal Reflection and Discussion Questions, and Action and Enrichment Ideas linked at the beginning of this section of each retreat. You may want to share copies (print or email) of all the PDFs with your retreat participants prior to the start of your retreat. Within the retreat presentation, if you click directly on these links, they will take you out of the retreat and to the PDF. However, if you "right click" on the link, you can select "open link in new tab" which will allow the retreat to remain open in one tab while the linked PDFs open in separate tabs. Additionally, when you "right click" on the link, you will see an option to copy the link which you can then paste in the chat of a virtual meeting for participants to have direct access to the PDFs.

Presenter Information

For continued follow-up of the retreat topic, you and your retreat participants are invited to visit the links included in the Sway presentation for the presenter's website, blog or resources for further learning and inspiration. As the retreat facilitator, you may consider doing one of the following for the retreat participants:

- Share an article or video link(s) with participants as a reminder of your retreat
- Purchase a book written by the presenter (if applicable) for participants as a thank-you gift for their commitment to their faith formation and to encourage their on-going faith formation and spiritual reflection
- Consider reaching out to the presenter to see if they'd facilitate a longer retreat, parish mission or parent presentation at your parish (in-person or virtually)

Technology Reminders for Virtual Retreats

It is helpful to start your meeting log on window at least 10 minutes prior to the start of your retreat. This gives participants time to join the meeting and get their computer settings worked out before the retreat begins. It will be essential for you to familiarize yourself with the flow of the Sway retreat prior to presenting it virtually. We also recommend practicing when and how to screen-share (remember to include your computer sound when you are screen-sharing and to stop screen-sharing during group discussions).