

**A RETREAT GUIDE**  
**for**  
**FIRST-TIME RETREATANTS**



**at the**  
**HERMITAGE SPIRITUAL**  
**RETREAT CENTER**

**HOW TO DO A RETREAT**

Welcome! We have been preparing for your arrival. Now that you are here, what's next? If you clearly know why you are here and what you wish to be and do on your retreat, you may not need any help. For those of you who are less sure, or perhaps are making a retreat for the first time, we have some suggestions garnered from our own experience.

## GETTING SETTLED

It is often helpful to begin by creating for yourself a comfortable space. Bring in your belongings, situate them in a way that feels familiar, and explore the retreat center so as to be able to claim it as “home.” You may feel like doing the same with the outdoor space – identifying the location of the Stations of the Cross and the Labyrinth, and perhaps taking a short walk down the path to the lake – even trying the bench.

Most persons who come need to be intentional about “letting go” and becoming fully present here. It means consciously putting on hold the demands and responsibilities “back home.” We give you permission to do just that! It is likely you may be experiencing about now a desire to rest, maybe even taking a nap. Do so, and give in to the tendency to want more than the usual amount of sleep you get. Give yourself that gift -- you deserve it.

## GETTING STARTED

When you are ready, find a comfortable spot, equipped only with a pen and notebook for “journaling.” Journaling is a fine way to make your experience one of both “action” and “reflection.” Each moment of life has much to teach us, but unless we reflect on what is happening, the meaning is likely to pass us by. Use your notebook throughout your stay, continuing to ask “what is happening?” You might begin by getting in touch with why you came ... really. Was it to get away from something or someone? Was it to gain clarity about an issue or problem? Was it to sort out things in order to set priorities? Was it for an “attitude adjustment” to gain a better perspective on life? Was it to search for God? Was it to read some of the things you brought, or find some new reading by which to be fed? Was it to find yourself? Was it to sort through the clutter in a desire for greater simplicity? Was it curiosity? Was it something you thought you “ought” to do? Was it someone else’s idea or recommendation? Was it a yearning inside you that you can’t quite name? Was it the desire to feel closer to God? Are we getting close? By getting in touch with *why* you are here, you can better discern the *what*, *how*, and *where* that you need in order to open yourself to the gifts of this time apart.

## EMBRACING THE SILENCE

Above all, throughout your retreat, taste deeply the silence. You have been freed from the constant noise that bombards our busy lives -- liberated from TV, radio, telephone, rush hour traffic, airplanes overhead, and people. Turn off your cell phone. Now quiet your mind, letting go and freeing yourself of any internal “chatter” that may be going on in your head. Breathe deeply and receive thankfully this rare and marvelous gift of silence. Taste it deeply, let it speak, and permit it to enter your very being, content for the time being to let the world turn without you.

## CREATING A SCHEDULE

All of us have “rituals” and “liturgies” that structure our lives, though we may not be conscious of them. Often they come into being over time, without our having intentionally chosen them. We are creatures of habit, so that, for example, the daily “when” and “how” of our rising and retiring are fairly constant, and the “what” and “when” and “how” of our eating have routine to them. We ritualize almost everything we do. Sometime during your retreat you may want to review the informing habits that have come to structure your life daily, weekly, and beyond. Be concrete. Then ask yourself if there are changes that might better reflect who you would like to be and how you would like to live – thereby proposing some disciplines for the change. While on retreat, you might experiment with intentionally structuring your time to attain a meaningful flow.

Monasteries do this by dividing the 24 hour day by the Trinity, naming eight 3-hour periods of the day to be marked by liturgical prayer. Consult the yellow “A Daily Office” booklet on your desk for one way of marking your daily flow.

## EXPLORING AVAILABLE RESOURCES

As for how to use the time in between such markings, we invite you to explore the notebook on your desk entitled “Possible Retreat Resources.” Consult the table of contents for possibilities that sound interesting to you.

You might also want to spend some time with the “Diverse Spirituality” booklet prepared by our Hermitage Spiritual Retreat Center Board, a group of fifteen persons representing a rich spectrum of faith traditions and professional-personal experience. Drawing from their personal pilgrimages, they have written short pieces describing personal practices that deeply feed their souls. You may be surprised by the diversity of these spiritual practices. As you read, you may find yourself thinking, “I do that, but I never thought of it as a “spiritual” practice.” Exposure to this diversity may enable you to “name the name” and become more intentional about doing them as spiritual practices. You may also want to explore some of the practices that are new to you.

If you would like to try a visual, tangible discipline such as the Rosary, there are laminated instructions for this on the desk and you will find a rosary hanging on the wall.

Most retreatants find it centering to curl up with some spiritual reading. If you did not bring some with you, we invite you to peruse our carefully chosen library. Books by Fr. Paul may be purchased at cost.

The Eucharist is a central act of spirituality that characterizes most Christian traditions. If participating in this act is of interest to you, Eucharist is celebrated daily at 5:00 PM in the hermitage chapel to the west of the retreat center. If spiritual guidance would be helpful, it is available for the asking.

### **OUTDOOR OPPORTUNITIES**

You may want to take walks during your stay. We encourage you to glory in the array of nature’s abundance. On the north side of the retreat center, you will find a marker directing and inviting you to walk the fourteen Stations of the Cross path. There is a laminated description of this spiritual practice on the desk, and you will find on the coffee table a specially prepared booklet for you to carry with you as a meditation guide on that walk.

You may want to experience “walking our Labyrinth,” which is located on the east side of the retreat center. It is the same size as the ancient one imbedded in the floor of Chartres Cathedral in France. On the desk you will find a laminated description of this old and treasured spiritual practice.

There is something about water that is intensely spiritual -- so gaze at it, wade or swim in it – and let your senses be refreshed.

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Above all, at the end of your retreat you will probably conclude that what happened here was less what you had planned and more that into which you were led. May it be so.