



Guidelines for Planning an Effective Retreat to prepare for the Sacrament of Confirmation

Jesus said, “Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.”

Catholic retreats normally consist of a time period spent away from the home parish and familiar routines, usually under the direction of a priest, in order to lead the youth closer to Christ no matter where they are in their faith. Retreats can vary in length and theme but all are rooted in the same message: Each person has an origin, a purpose and a destiny in Jesus Christ guided by the Holy Spirit. God created each person to be united with Him in a relationship of love. Jesus came to forgive people their sins and reunite them with the Father. Each person is united with the Father and Son through the Holy Spirit in receiving the Sacraments of the Catholic Church, in which they are strengthened to be faithful to this relationship of love. Eternal life with God in Heaven depends upon a person’s relationship with Him here and now.

I. How is a Confirmation retreat different from a longer religious education session?

“Retreats differ from conferences, seminars, and meetings in that the primary work is interior spiritual development through a prolonged period of reflection rather than simply being exposed to information, techniques, and inspiration.” (Catholic Encyclopedia)

- An effective retreat provides participants an opportunity to:
 - step away from everyday distractions and routine.
 - be in a quiet atmosphere to hear and speak with God.
 - encounter or deepen their friendship with God.
 - seek God’s healing grace.
 - relax to allow for an inner change of heart to occur that is critical to deepening faith.

II. What are the (usual) basic elements of a Confirmation retreat?

- Adequate time specifically set aside for prayer and contemplation – A retreat usually includes a time of silence in adoration to allow students the opportunity to be with Jesus, experiencing His healing love. Holy Mass, the highest form of prayer, and reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation are essential elements of a retreat.
- Personal prayer experiences such as praying with Scripture (*lectio divina*) – Quiet time for spiritual reading, praise and worship, Liturgy of the Hours, the Rosary or the Divine Mercy Chaplet may be included for longer retreats.
- Presentations, reflections, small-group discussion, and personal testimony – Time is needed for small-group discussions & inviting a response that leads to deeper conversion.
- Icebreaker/Games – These activities help break down barriers, inviting relationships of trust to form, and allowing the joy of being a disciple to shine forth. Some resources are:
 - Acts One Eight by Life Teen: www.lifeteen.com
 - Chosen: www.confirmationstudy.com including sample retreat schedules
 - www.thereligionteacher.com/catholic-ice-breakers/

III. What should be the basic goals of a Confirmation retreat?

Content will depend upon the time(s) of the retreat(s).

Presentations and other components of the retreat are to help the young people:

- Develop a more intimate union with Jesus Christ in prayer (CCC1309).



- Encounter Christ in the Mass.
- Cultivate a relationship with the Holy Spirit as well as have a more lively familiarity with His actions, gifts & promptings to be capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities.
- Understand reasons to be committed to living a Sacramental life, by participating in Sunday Mass each week and receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation frequently.
- Comprehend how to live life in the Holy Spirit.

IV. How will the schedule lead participants to deepen their friendship with God?

- Minimum Duration – “Time spent at the retreat site would involve a minimum of about 6 hours for a single-day retreat.” (Catholic Encyclopedia).
- The retreat(s) need to have a balance of a variety of activities, such as thought-provoking talks, icebreakers, games, humor, prayer, small-group discussions, that engage the participants on different levels mentally, physically and spiritually. The time allotted for these activities should be arranged in an intentional way that naturally leads young people into a deeper sense of engagement in the retreat. When planning the schedule for the retreat, it is good to consider an “emotional timeline,” to be sure that the spiritual aspects of the retreat and other components flow correctly. For instance, a leader would not want to play a humorous video clip before entering into a time of prayer.

V. What should I look for in a presenter(s)?

- Presenters are to be practicing Catholics in good standing with the Church who are committed to daily prayer as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Parishes are encouraged to find presenters outside of their local parish. If a parish brings in a speaker from a category not listed on the speaker policy or from outside the Diocese of La Crosse, that speaker must be approved through the Diocesan Speaker Policy.
- Presenters are to have proper formation/training and experience as well as being currently active in youth ministry. This is necessary in order to engage participants by displaying a general knowledge of where the participants are in their faith, developing a rapport with them through trust, giving an appropriate personal testimony, knowing how to tell stories of Saints to teens, allowing time for quiet reflection, and incorporating humor. The presentations need to be based upon Sacred Scripture and the *Catechism*.

VI. Why should I include adult leaders from the local parish?

- Using adult leaders from the local parish is vital to the relational ministry that will help keep the participants connected to the Church and to each other through ongoing conversion and evangelization after the retreat(s). Parents are also to be included in the retreats in various ways.

VII. What is the value of fostering the same goals with the youth after the retreat?

- In the parish sessions following the retreat many of the aspects need to be carried forward, intentionally helping the youth to be committed to their relationship with Jesus and the Holy Spirit in their lives.

VIII. Who can help with the retreat location, the presenter(s), and developing the schedule?

- If you need suggestions and/or help with any of these aspects, please contact Christopher Rogers at crogers@diolc.org or Ann Lankford at alankford@diolc.org.