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# Getaways With **GOD**

**Youth Retreats** For Any Schedule

Maryann Hakowski

# Getaways with God

Youth Retreats for Any Schedule

Maryann Hakowski

Saint Mary's Press®

To Kyrie Hakowski Murawski,  
my song of mercy,  
may you always have the courage  
to march to the beat of a different drummer.



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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 proven to be effective in evangelizing and community building. They can be powerful, life-changing events for young people. They are times to get away from daily routines and include many components of a well-rounded youth ministry program and offer time to tackle 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 two-way sharing of the gospel message. Often we adults learn as much as the young people do.

A retreat is a chance for everyone to have a lot of fun. We can play and pray together as one community and as 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. One-day, morning, evening, overnight, and weekend programs are offered. They cover a wide variety of topics in a way that speaks to the needs and daily experiences of young people.

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

Another 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 the youth group setting. Many of the activities include alternate or optional activities. Some of the retreats include additional ideas at the end of the retreat that you can use to expand the retreat—for example, turning a daylong retreat into an overnight retreat. Appendix C is an index that lists all the activities and is categorized by type of activity to help you pick out those that will meet your specific needs.

## **The Philosophy Behind the Retreats**

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

### **Developing a Better Sense of Self**

Most students in senior high school are grappling with their self-identity. They are still testing their values, developing their character—deciding who they really are. Retreats offer affirmation, a chance to build self-esteem, and help identify the gifts they have to share with others.

### **Building Relationships with Others**

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

### **Growing Closer to God**

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

## **Key Components of the Retreats**

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### **Icebreakers**

These activities do much more than break the ice. They are ways to learn names, chances to stretch, games that will teach, or introductions to 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 speaking to their peers. Their concerns and fears, their triumphs and relationships, speak right to the place where young people are. Young people need and want to hear from caring adults too. This is an opportunity for a youth group leader, a parent, or a parish priest to share his or her thoughts and feelings and personal faith-story.

Because the speakers truly need to think about and pray about a topic before they begin writing the talk, each talk in this manual has a handout with a list of points for the presenters to consider as they prepare. In addition, appendix A has the handout, “Helpful Hints for Giving Talks.”

### **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 the young people to express themselves. Some creative activities include role-plays, dramas, games that teach, videos, skits, art, affirmation, and modern music.

### **Discussions**

As a general rule, small discussion groups should be *assigned* 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 with care 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 handout, “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, scriptures, use of symbols, storytelling, shared prayer, mime, personal witness, secular stories or poems, traditional prayer, and prayer with motions are a few possibilities.

### **Eucharistic Liturgies**

Often a liturgy is the high point of a retreat. A retreat, by nature, is a celebration of faith, and it is only fitting that we celebrate 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 he is better able to prepare a homily. Another option is to hold your retreat liturgy at your home parish and invite family and friends to join you.

# Retreat 3

## A Pilgrimage Retreat

### Introduction

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“A Pilgrimage Retreat” introduces the idea of “praying with your feet.” Each part of the retreat takes place in a different location. As the retreatants (pilgrims) pray throughout their retreat pilgrimage, they are also called to journey in prayer throughout their lives. The themes of this pilgrimage retreat would make it an excellent Lenten experience.

This daylong retreat includes several different forms of prayer:

- music: contemporary, liturgical, and Taizé
- scripture and quiet reflection
- storytelling, poetry, and drama
- traditional prayers: Rosary, Litany of the Saints, the scrutinies
- shared prayer, journaling, and creative prayer

- Goals**
- To reflect on the great sacrifice of Jesus and the great hope of the Resurrection
  - To encourage the pilgrims to take up their own crosses of suffering and struggle and carry them in union with Jesus
  - To help teens understand the importance of turning to Jesus in time of need or trouble
  - To reflect on God’s immense, immeasurable, unconditional love for each one of us and to recognize that we all need to forgive and be forgiven
  - To help the pilgrims work together, support each other, and light the way for each other
  - To challenge teens to invite others to journey to Jesus
  - To include God in all we do, including our daily lives and dreams for the future



## Schedule

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The following sequence for “A Pilgrimage Retreat” is just one suggestion on how to arrange your schedule. There are thirteen stops if you use the full retreat outline. You may create a shorter version of the pilgrimage by choosing fewer stops. You may also consider turning this daylong retreat into an overnight retreat starting after dinner and ending at lunchtime the next day. 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.   | Welcome, What Is a Pilgrimage?              | Intro                  | _____              |
| 9:10 A.M.   | “Jesus, Remember Me”                        | Traveling song         | _____              |
| 9:20 A.M.   | <i>The Greatest Love Story Ever Told</i>    | Poem                   | _____              |
| 9:30 A.M.   | Sharing Our Story                           | Self-disclosure talk   | _____              |
| 9:45 A.M.   | The Scrutinies                              | Prayer/song            | _____              |
| 10:00 A.M.  | Praying the Rosary                          | Traveling prayer       | _____              |
| 10:10 A.M.  | <i>Message in a Bottle</i>                  | Small-group discussion | _____              |
| 10:35 A.M.  | Walking in the Light of Christ              | Traveling song         | _____              |
| 10:45 A.M.  | Psalm 91: A Responsive Prayer               | Responsive prayer      | _____              |
| 10:55 A.M.  | “Were You There?”                           | Traveling song         | _____              |
| 11:10 A.M.  | Finger Rosaries                             | Craft project          | _____              |
| 11:35 A.M.  | “Shepherd Me, O God”                        | Traveling song         | _____              |
| 11:45 A.M.  | <i>Guess How Much I Love You</i>            | Children’s story       | _____              |
| 12:05 P.M.  | “Litany of the Saints”                      | Traveling prayer       | _____              |
| 12:15 P.M.  | A Humble Meal                               | Lunch                  | _____              |
| 12:45 P.M.  | Walking in the Light of Christ              | Traveling song         | _____              |
| 12:55 P.M.  | What’s That I See Hanging Around Your Neck? | Witness talk           | _____              |
| 1:15 P.M.   | “Were You There?”                           | Traveling song         | _____              |
| 1:25 P.M.   | How Music Brings Me Closer to Jesus         | Reflection             | _____              |
| 1:55 P.M.   | Hand-in-Hand                                | Cooperation walk       | _____              |
| 2:10 P.M.   | <i>Tale of the Three Trees</i>              | Story/journal time     | _____              |
| 2:35 P.M.   | “Jesus, Remember Me”                        | Traveling song         | _____              |

|           |  |                       |       |
|-----------|--|-----------------------|-------|
| 2:45 P.M. | Taizé Prayer and<br>Candle Lighting    | Song/reflection       | _____ |
| 3:00 P.M. | Taizé Continues                        | Traveling song        | _____ |
| 3:10 P.M. | Jesus Suffers with Those<br>Who Suffer | Newspaper prayer      | _____ |
| 3:30 P.M. | Walking in Silence                     |                       | _____ |
| 3:40 P.M. | Waiting at the Tomb                    | Dramatic presentation | _____ |
| 4:00 P.M. | End of Pilgrimage                      |                       | _____ |

## Detailed Description of Activities

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### Designate a Location

Make sure you map out the route for your pilgrimage and walk it prior to the retreat. You will need to identify thirteen different places to stop—twelve if you end at your starting location—if you use the full retreat outline. Make sure the locations are within a reasonable walking distance (5 to 10 minutes) from each other. Your pilgrimage could take place at a local or national park, a shrine, retreat center, or church camp. In an urban center, consider traveling from church to church.

### Welcome, What Is a Pilgrimage? (9:00 A.M.)

This talk introduces the theme of pilgrimage and gives teens an idea of what to expect during this journey of prayer and reflection.

#### Preparation

- Gather the following supplies:
  - medium-size nails
  - large cross to carry throughout pilgrimage
  - a Bible marked at John 3:16 and Matt. 16:24
- Ask a team member to prepare a 5-minute opening talk to introduce the theme of the retreat. Or you may give this opening talk yourself as retreat director. To help the person prepare, give him or her resource 5, “Suggestions for Opening Talk.” You will also want to give the presenter a copy of appendix A, “Helpful Hints for Giving Talks.”
- Recruit two teens to read the Scripture passages, John 3:16 and Matt. 16:24.

1. As retreatants arrive for the pilgrimage, give each of them a nail to carry with them throughout the day.
2. Ask the teen you recruited to read John 3:16. Then introduce the team member who is going to give the opening talk.

3. After the talk, begin with the sign of the cross. Ask the second teen to read Matt. 16:24. Then direct the cross bearers to begin walking to the first stop.

**Travel to Stop 1:  
“Jesus, Remember  
Me” (9:10 A.M.)**

**Preparation**

- Teach the song, “Jesus, Remember Me” (*Taizé: Songs for Prayer*, 1998, no. 11) to at least three teens so they can be the song leaders for this portion of the journey. The tune is very easy to learn.
1. As the group walks to the first pilgrimage stop, have someone lead the group in singing “Jesus, Remember Me.” The song leader or another pilgrimage leader may begin by sharing the special meaning of the song to them. Sing the refrain at least two times before you start walking.
  2. Start by singing the refrain quietly, almost as a whisper (*pianissimo* in musical terms) and slowly increase the volume, then decrease the volume and end the singing as a whisper again. Try to keep the group traveling in a cluster rather than spreading out in a long, thin line. This will keep everyone singing together.

**Stop 1: *The Greatest  
Love Story Ever Told*  
(9:20 A.M.)**

This poem invites teens to reflect on Jesus’ great love for us, far greater than any imaginable love.

**Preparation**

- Gather the following supplies:
    - copies of handout 4, *The Greatest Love Story Ever Told*, for each reader
  - Recruit one or more readers to read the poem, *The Greatest Love Story Ever Told*, and divide up the stanzas as needed. Give the reader(s) a chance to practice in advance.
1. At this stop, *The Greatest Love Story Ever Told* should be read very meditatively to the entire group. Be sure the readers read reverently, with meaning, and loud enough for all to hear. Wait until all walkers have reached the stopping point and are quiet before starting the reading.

**Travel to Stop 2:  
Sharing Our Story  
(9:30 A.M.)**

**Preparation**

- If you feel it would be helpful to start conversation, copy the following questions onto slips of paper and make copies for the pilgrims.
  - If you wrote a book about yourself, what would it be called?
  - What is one high point in your story?
  - What is one low point in your story?
  - Who are some of the characters in your book?