

Archdiocese of Santa Fe

Arquidiócesis de Santa Fe



Guidelines for Adolescent Retreats

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Youth retreats are a component of the Church's pastoral ministry to youth. Such retreats are part of a total ministry to youth and complement efforts to meet the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and relational needs of adolescents. The purpose of this time apart is to allow youth to reflect upon the movement of God in their lives, to provide a climate in which the young person might encounter Christ as alive among us, to experience community, and formulate their personal response to the call of discipleship received in baptism.¹

Because the word "retreat" has many meanings within contemporary society, it is important to define its meaning within the pastoral setting. A youth retreat might be defined as a time when adolescents withdraw from their normal activities to reflect upon their lives and identify in Christ Jesus. This withdrawal, alone or with a community of youth, provides the participant with the opportunity to deepen his/her knowledge of self, God, and others; to experience community in Christ, and to explore the shape of his/her response to Christ lived out within daily life.²

Youth Retreats

Youth ministries in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe have long made use of retreats to evangelize and catechize young people. Because retreats are such an important process in the faith-growth of adolescents, it is vital that they are based on sound principles.

These guidelines are offered, to present principles to be followed when planning and implementing any parish retreat experience. These principles apply to parish based retreats as well as to retreats facilitated by parish or other retreat teams anywhere in the Archdiocese or originating in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe and are to be applied for evening, daylong and multiday retreats. The Archdiocese of Santa Fe prohibits overnight retreats with all mid-school age children and younger. High School overnight retreats are only permitted at approved Archdiocesan retreat facilities. All Archdiocesan-wide retreats involving adolescents must be conducted at approved facilities.

While young people are in our care, we have a great responsibility for their safety, as well as their physical and spiritual well-being. In addition, retreats present occasions during which the Archdiocese, parish and individuals can be found to be liable in any setting, even with proper authorization and documentation.

¹ References Scripture and Catechism of the Catholic Church: Acts 2:42 NAB "They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to prayers."

² Mark 6:31

Guiding Youth Retreats

A. Theological Principles

Youth retreats should be designed to foster a personal relationship with Jesus that leads to discipleship within the community of the church.

Retreats are a type of experience through which the church exercises her pastoral ministry to youth by:

- proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ
- fostering the formation of Christian community
- providing opportunities for participants to reflect upon questions of faith and life experience in the light of the Gospel
- challenging retreatants to a personal response of service.³

The doctrinal content of youth retreats should be theologically consistent with the official teaching of the Catholic Church and the Second Vatican Council. Use of Scripture should be from approved Catholic Biblical translations (for example, NABRE) and other translations and paraphrases of Scripture supplementing, but not replacing, such translations.⁴

Prayer, in its liturgical, communal, and personal forms, is an essential aspect of the retreat experience, opening participants to ongoing conversion and deepening of faith.

Retreats for youth should provide life-giving liturgical celebrations which are:

- based on principles of sound liturgy
- appropriate for the age and occasion
- celebrated with sufficient time to allow full preparation and participation by the assembly⁵

B. Psychological Principles

Retreats should provide the opportunity for participants to integrate their experience and thereby deepen their sense of belonging and meaning.

Retreat environments and experiences must be characterized by acceptance, growth, and freedom. **It is never appropriate to manipulate either an experience or the environment in order to obtain a specific response from those participating.** Emotional manipulation should never be utilized.

Retreatants should be given diverse opportunities through which they may express themselves and feel safe in during so. The psychological well-being of participants is safeguarded by maintaining a good balance of recreation, reflection, prayer, structured activity, rest and diet throughout the retreat.

³ Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry – USCCB, August 2010

⁴ USCCB Approved scriptural text www.usccb.com

⁵ Documents of Vatican II Sacrosanctum Concilium #14

Retreats for adolescents especially lend themselves to peer ministry. Not only does such an approach encourage the sharing of the Christian experience, but it also further encourages youth to exercise their baptismal call to witness to Christ. Care should be taken to see that peer ministers receive appropriate training and preparation.

Remember that retreat experiences are only one aspect of a continuing faith formation process: Therefore, they are most, and perhaps only, effective within the context of comprehensive youth ministry.

C. Catechetical Principles

Human experience is the starting point for youth catechesis, joining the personal journey of youth to the Christ story.

The content and design of youth retreats should be age appropriate and should be varied; i.e., the same type of retreat should not be repeated with the same group over and over.

Storytelling, faith sharing, and personal witnessing, as well as time for private reflection and journaling should be respected as necessary elements in communicating the Gospel message.

Retreats with catechetical themes are as important as those with evangelization themes. It is recommended that retreat planners choose faith themes provided by the ASF Youth and Young Adult office.⁶

Retreats should lead young people to service and actions for justice and peace as well as to “personalize” their faith, not “privatize” it.

Discussion, group processes, small group sharing, and activities involving all youth participants should use the group dynamics appropriate for the activity, group, content, and goals of the retreat and should be led by those trained in these dynamics. Training is available through the ASF Youth and Young Adult Ministry Office, 505-831-8142.

⁶ Refer to ASF Youth and Young Adult website for age-appropriate theme.

D. Developmental Principals

1. Early Adolescence ⁷ (ages 10/11- 14)

When planning retreat activities for younger adolescents, keep the following in mind as conditions necessary for healthy Christian faith growth in this age group.

Provide opportunities for:

- Physical Activity: Time to stretch, walk, relax; i.e. non-competitive games and activities. Be mindful of the physical limitations of the participants and any activities that may result in physical injury.
- Competence and Achievement: Provide opportunities where they can succeed and be affirmed.
- Self-Definition: Provide time to absorb new ways of thinking and doing; provide time with friendship groupings.
- Creative Expression: Provide opportunities to express creatively new feelings, interests, abilities and thoughts through activities such as drama, role playing, arts and crafts and journaling, etc.
- Positive Social Interactions with Peers and Adults: Provide time with peers that allows for support, companionship, and challenge. **All adults should act as responsible role models and mentors for retreatants at all times.**
- Structure and Clear Limits for the Safety of All: Provide explicit boundaries, rules and limits, allowing participants some input in setting them.
- Meaningful Participation: Successful events are planned with, not for, young adolescents. Provide opportunities wherein they may develop a sense of responsibility.

⁷ The opportunities listed are not comprehensive nor intended to be incorporated in every retreat for early adolescents (ages 10/11-14), but are listed to provide definitions and directive should that theme or topic be presented.

2. Middle and Late Adolescence (ages 15-18/Freshman –Senior year in high school) **

When planning retreat programs/sessions/experiences for older adolescents keep in mind the following conditions necessary for healthy Christian faith growth in this age group.⁸

Provide opportunities for:

- Responsible Participation
Participate as full members of the faith community and society, experiencing a sense of belonging and mission.
- Moral Decision Making
Gain knowledge and experience in making moral decisions based on Gospel values and Sacred Tradition.
- Positive Social Interaction with Peers
Form and experience positive relationships with peers and develop friendship-making and - maintaining skills.
- Self-Knowledge and Faith Integration
Explore who they are and who they can become in the light of Christ and the believers, the Church.
- Conscience Formation
Develop a social consciousness that is grounded in Scripture and the teachings of the Church by exploring, discussing, and acting on social justice and peace issues.
- Healthy Christian Values
Understand their sexual growth and develop healthy Christian values and attitudes regarding their own sexuality. Parents should always be notified prior to the retreat if topics regarding sexuality are integrated as a theme, focus or teaching.
- Prayer
Develop personal prayer lives by experiencing a variety of prayer forms and styles.
- Positive Social Interaction with Adults
*Develop relationships with adult Catholic Christians who will share their own faith journeys and who will ask questions that encourage critical thinking and theological reflection. **All adults should act as responsible role models and mentors for retreatants at all times.***

⁸ The opportunities listed are not comprehensive nor intended to be incorporated in every retreat for middle and late adolescents (ages 15-18 / Freshman - Senior year in high school), but are listed to provide definitions and directive should that theme or topic be presented.

E. Youth Retreat Team Leadership

1. Retreat Team Selection

It is recommended that a process for retreat team selection include:

- a. Being called and discerned to ministry with youth
- b. Having the call confirmed by the community

Desirable qualities of a team member may include: prior retreat experience, openness to work as a team member, ability to share faith appropriately with youth, enthusiasm, sensitivity, creativity, listening skills, musical ability. These qualities are not intended to be exhaustive or exclusive, but illustrative.

2. Retreat Team Training

Comprehensive skills training for retreat teams is available through the Youth and Young Adult office of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, 505-831-8142. All team members (anyone 18 and older) must attend the Abuse Awareness Workshop and will comply with the principles to create a safe environment. To register for a class, call Annette Klimka in the Safe Environment Office at 505-831-8144.

F. Retreat Team and Individuals coming from Outside the Archdiocese of Santa Fe

All outside Retreat Teams or individuals ministering to young people of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe are required to comply with the Speakers Approval Process and register with the Archdiocesan Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries. Before bringing in an outside group (and/or individual) to facilitate a youth retreat, please check to see that the group (or individual) has been cleared to work with your young people within the Archdiocese and have received the appropriate permission.

All clergy and religious from outside of the Archdiocese must have permission from the Archbishop of Santa Fe and be vetted through the Speakers Approval Process. Permission for them to present must be on file with the Archdiocese of Santa Fe Vicar General's Office before being allowed to minister.

If the clergy, religious, outside group or individual is not currently registered as approved speakers/presenters on the ASF Speaker's list, the process for approval can take up to six months, so please plan early.

G. Concluding Comments

Besides being excellent evangelization and catechetical approaches, retreats are an integral component of any faith-formation ministry which, by definition, seeks the conversion of others. The main task in facilitating a retreat is to create the *ambiente*, the *milieu*, the environment where young people can experience the grace of conversion.

Conversion is experienced as a relationship with Jesus Christ and "is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful:" That is, it is not a private experience, but is uniquely communal and sacramental. It is a spiritual journey that is lifelong and has a beginning, a middle, and an end: It does not end with confirmation, for example.

One should not harbor the expectation of a 'spiritual high' indefinitely. Prolongation of such a state would more likely be the result of pathology than healthy growth. Evangelization strategies aimed at artificially sustaining only one dimension of the conversion journey miss seasons of growth that are equally important.

If retreat efforts center on collaboration with the Holy Spirit in the work of conversion, then the fruit of those efforts will be visible in the life of the youth who experience the retreat.

Recommended Retreat Components for all Adolescents

| Physical | Spiritual | Psychological/Social/Catechetical | Supportive Components |
|---|--|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rest/Sleep 2. Recreation time 3. Balanced diet 4. Access to outdoors/nature if possible | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Liturgical celebration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority on Eucharistic celebration for two-day retreats • Reconciliation service if in keeping with retreat design 2. Prayer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communal • Private • Reflection time 3. Scripture | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Balance of private time and group time 2. Opportunity for pastoral care and guidance 3. Reflection time on human, personal and communal experience 4. Community building 5. Opportunities for participation and involvement 6. Creative activity/expression 7. Input/presentation/follow-ups 8. Discussion and sharing opportunities | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Early program planning and design 2. Early Team Preparation 3. Orientation or preparation of participants and/or parents/guardians 4. Follow-up process 5. Evaluation by team and participants-post retreat |