

## **Retreats in daily life**

Traditionally, a ‘retreat’ has meant an extended time of silent prayer and reflection, away from everyday life. Usually such retreats have been made in a religious setting such as a monastery or retreat house.

Although anyone might welcome a time of prayer and quiet reflection, not everyone can spend time or money on a residential retreat away from home. In recent years ‘daily life’ retreats have become widespread. These retreats, which are accessible to more people, offer some of the elements of a residential retreat, but — as their name implies — the prayer and reflection take place with the context of ordinary daily living.

Although the idea of a daily-life retreat has long been associated with the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola, nowadays such retreats are not necessarily Ignatian: a great variety is on offer. With the exception of ‘19th annotation’ retreats (see below), retreats in daily life do not assume previous experience of making a retreat: all you need is a desire to deepen your personal relationship with God.

### **Who can take part?**

Retreats in daily life are simple and adaptable. They are designed to fit in with participants’ daily commitments, such as to their partners, families or jobs. Instead of going away from the ordinary realities of daily living, retreatants bring these into the retreat, praying with them and looking for the connections between their faith and their living. Any unforeseen events during the retreat are simply integrated into it, as part of life.

Retreats in daily life are arranged locally, as and when they are needed. It is possible for individuals to make such retreats, but usually they involve a group. Many are ecumenical, adapted to the members of different Christian traditions and bringing people together in a shared spiritual journey. Costs are kept to the minimum.

### **Groups**

In a **week of accompanied prayer** a group of retreat guides visits an area to lead the retreat. Although the initiative may come originally from just one church, the team will often suggest that members of other local churches be invited to join the retreat. The format is flexible, and can be tailored to the needs of the particular retreat group. Typically each retreatant makes a commitment to daily prayer and an individual meeting each day with a guide; and usually all involved meet together at the beginning and end of the retreat.

There may be opportunities through the week to attend talks, to pray together, or to listen to one another’s experience. Some retreats remain group events throughout the week. Retreat guides may be drawn from more than one denomination, and may be lay, members of religious communities, or ministers. Some church members will take part in the retreat; others may be involved in preparing for the retreat and supporting it as it happens by praying for those involved.

Other events are more structured, with planned themes or a shared focus for prayer. In **Open-Door retreats** group members meet weekly for nine weeks. They prepare individually for each session, and share reflections on their experiences, and listen to talks from the leaders.

Retreats in daily life aim to respond to the lives of those involved. They may focus on the individual concerns of retreatants; or they may address a concern chosen by the group organising the retreat, such as social justice.

### **Individuals**

It may be possible to arrange an **individually-guided retreat**, with daily meetings over a week or so. More commonly, however, *individuals* making retreats in daily life follow the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius over a long period. These are often called **19th-annotation retreats** (in reference to Ignatius’ note in the Exercises about this way of making them), and such a retreat may be spread over nine months or a year. Every week or two the retreatant will meet with her or his guide, who may live at some distance. The retreat will also entail a commitment to daily personal prayer and reflection.

This is a considerable undertaking: before embarking upon it, it is important to have experience of Ignatian spirituality and of ongoing spiritual accompaniment. You may be able to arrange an exploratory period of such guidance before committing yourself to the Exercises as a whole.

### **Information from the Retreat Association**

Many daily-life retreats are arranged by people who themselves have found such retreats useful, and so wish to share the opportunity with others. They invite a team of guides to come to the local setting. The Retreat Association may be able to provide further information about such retreats to be held locally, and indicate likely costs.

## Training

Some people, having made several retreats, train as guides for others. The Retreat Association has information about many of the training opportunities in local areas.

Leaflet titles that may be of interest include:

- Individually-guided retreats
- Open-door retreats
- Choosing a spiritual guide

The Retreat Association also publishes the magazine *Retreats*, in December of each year.

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The Retreat Association comprises these Christian retreat groups:

- Affiliates of the Retreat Association (AFF)
- Association for Promoting Retreats (APR, mainly Anglican)
- Baptist Union Retreat Group (BURG)
- Catholic Spirituality Network (CSN)
- Reflect – Methodist Spirituality

The Retreat Association aims to foster the growth of the spiritual life by the practice of retreats. For information contact:

The Retreat Association  
PO Box 1130  
Princes Risborough  
Bucks HP22 9RP

Tel: 01494 569056  
info@retreats.org.uk  
www.retreats.org.uk



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