A Personal Spiritual Retreat
(A detailed explanation of retreat ingredients follows)

Retreat Theme: God knows us by name and Cares for Us

Retreat Schedule

Day One:
10:00 AM       Arrival, getting settled
10:30 AM       Thirty minutes of silent listening and preparation
11:00 AM       Scripture readings to focus the retreat theme
                John 13:1-17, Psalm 121, Isaiah 40:27-31,
                John 10:1-5, 2 Corinthians 1:3-22 (read all… then
                focus 2 or 3 that speak to you for retreat duration)
12:30 PM       Lunch break
1:30 PM        Reading for reflection and spiritual enjoyment
3:00 PM        Recreation or exercise
3:45           Rest
4:30 PM        Review and reflection (Pray the chosen Scriptures)
6:00 PM        Dinner break
7:30 PM        Prayerful listening and reflection
9:00 PM        Daily examination of grace
10:00 PM       Retire for the evening

Day Two:
8:00 AM        Breakfast
9:00 AM        Thirty minutes of silent reflection
9:30 AM        Scripture, prayer, worship, Holy Communion
                Benediction
10:30 AM       Pack up
11:00 AM       Depart for home or office
Retreat Model One: Growing Deeper with God

This personal retreat “Where the Heart Longs to Go: A Personal Spiritual Retreat” is a time (ideally 24 – 48 hours) set apart from the daily routine to be in conscious communion with God. Often the time available for the discipline of solitude in the midst of a hectic daily schedule is not sufficient for the review and reflection of our lives and relationship with God, which is essential for sustaining spiritual vitality. Setting aside one day every month for a personal planned spiritual retreat can do wonders in a pastor’s relationship with God, and his life and ministry.

While personal solitude retreats that are planned into a pastor’s schedule are most beneficial when they are periodical (monthly), pastors learn to adjust the hours to fit the demands of their schedule. Even six to eight hours alone each month will accrue tremendous spiritual benefit in their lives.

The setting for the personal retreat is very important. Retreatants will gain by going to a place in a natural setting away from everyday trappings – places like a retreat hermitage, a prayer cabin, a guesthouse at a camp, a prayer room in a colleague’s church, a motel room, Catholic retreat center, a tent in the boundary waters or if need be, an unused room in the home. This place needs to be a place where the retreatant cannot be contacted except in emergency.

Retreat Content

The personal solitude retreat should follow a simple schedule of silent listening and meditation, reading scripture and devotional reflections, reviewing one’s spiritual journey, journal writing, recreation and rest. Following is a suggested format for such a
retreat experience. These instructions detail the above 24-hour timed personal retreat schedule.

**Silent listening:** The retreat begins with at least thirty minutes of silence given to quieting the noises within and without. This allows the body, mind and spirit to let go of the stress and weight of the daily press of ministry responsibilities and enter into the peace of mind that Jesus offers to all who will go away with him to a quiet place; *Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest* (Mark 6:30-31). It may be helpful to play music, which aids in developing a receptive and quiet spirit. Retreatants are to relax in a comfortable chair or lie on a couch or floor, letting the love of God flow into them. Jan Johnson’s words of preparation and guidance for this particular stilling of the mind and soul are helpful.

You are guided in quieting your thoughts and inner activity, and in paying attention to the presence of God. Nevertheless, it’s sometimes difficult to throw off thoughts about the doughnut shop you passed earlier or who might telephone you while you are away from home. If you let these obstacles take control over your meditation, you become like the rocky ground into which seeds fall, but the plants wither quickly in the shallow soil (Matthew 13:5-6). It can be a struggle to detach from the world in order to attach to God. But it is well worth it to learn how to be still and know that God is God.¹

**Meditation and praying the scripture:** When the heart and mind are sufficiently quiet, retreatants should turn their attention to the Gospels in the Word of God, or in some other part of the scriptures. One resource for this prompt is *Listening to God, Using Scripture as a Path to God’s Presence*, by Jan Johnson. This book has 30 Bible studies for meditation and spiritual formation. It is good to begin with a story about Jesus and his interaction with another biblical character in order to be drawn into the

movement, sounds and scenes of the Word. One such example is the story of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples (John 13:1-17). The challenge is to link one's faith with the imagination as the text is read. A way of doing that is to put oneself in the place of one of the characters, for example Peter in the foot-washing story. Retreatants are encouraged to feel his emotions and responses as Jesus begins to wash his feet. Peter’s first response to Jesus’ foot washing gesture was to deny Jesus his request. When Jesus said, “Unless I wash you, you will have no part with me” (John 13:8 TNIV), Peter then responds by saying; “Not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well” (John 13:9, TNIV). Perhaps that could be pictured as the retreatant soaking in a hot tub full of Jesus’ love, every cell immersed over a period of time.

Retreatants are instructed to not read too many verses at a time. It is better to read only the verses needed to tell one incident in the life of those about whom they are reading. They are encouraged to savor each phrase and verse. Let their reading lead them into meditation, and their meditation into prayer. They are to enter into dialogue with Jesus as they interact with the story in the text. That is an exciting form of prayer. They can let the dialogue with Jesus flow out of their questions and observations of the text, and then ask Jesus how this relates to their life right now. Then they are to stop and listen to discern his response. It is good to have a journal near by to record personal impressions and experiences.

Readings for reflection and spiritual enjoyment: Retreatants are asked to bring a devotional book by authors such as Henri Nouwen,\(^2\) Evelyn Underhill,\(^3\) John of the

Cross,⁴ Richard J Foster and James Bryan Smith,⁵ Thomas A Kempis,⁶ The Desert Fathers,⁷ or the excellent A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants,⁸ by Reuben P. Job and Norman Sawchuck. The twelve personal retreat models that are listed in the back of A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants have informed and inspired the personal retreat model that is offered here. There are many books that can provide the catalyst to open one’s heart and mind to the presence of God. Retreatants are encouraged to use one that will prepare them for listening to God’s still small voice.

**Review and reflection:** Now is the time to take stock of one’s own life before God. Retreatants are to begin by reviewing their journal entries for the past month if they utilize the practice of journaling. Or they can review their lives over the last month using an appointment book to remind them of their contacts and experiences. Then they can review the covenants they have made with God, themselves and others with an eye to seeing how faithful they have been to keep them. That might include their call by God to ministry, ordination vows, and their commitment to be the pastor of their present church.

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³ Lunsden Barkway, Editor, An Anthology of the Love of God from the Writings of Evelyn Underhill, Morehouse-Barlow Co., Inc. 1976.


⁶ Thomas A Kempis, Of the Imitation of Christ, Oxford University Press, 1929.


their marriage vows and parenting responsibilities. Next they may want to consider a set of spiritual accountability questions, writing responses to each in their journal. A resource for questions might include those that John Wesley encouraged each of his disciples to answer or some of the questions that have been put together (see Spiritual Direction questions). By using a journal to chronicle one’s spiritual life, a pastor can revisit aspects of her spiritual journey to assist a review during her next personal retreat.

**Prayerful listening and reflection:** Setting aside books and pen, retreatants are to bring mind and heart together in silence before God in order to allow the Lord to speak from all that has been read, felt and written. They may sit in silence or enjoy a leisurely walk near their retreat experience away from noise and distractions.

**Exercise and Recreation:** If the retreatant is on a twenty-four hour retreat or more, he will want to engage in some form of vigorous exercise such as swimming, hiking, calisthenics, biking, cross country skiing or jogging. Combining physical with spiritual exercise makes the retreat holistic and balanced.

**Rest:** Retreatants are encouraged to take time to rest body, mind and heart to allow time for mental and spiritual digestion of what they have experienced in their retreat. A short nap of 30 minutes or so can greatly facilitate the ability to listen spiritually. As one drifts in and out of consciousness, the Spirit of God has access to the conscious and subconscious mind. They can trust the Lord by tuning in to the spirit following such a rest.

**Daily Examination of Grace:** The retreatants are asked to take 15 - 30 minutes to review the day. They are to consider the following questions: How did the Spirit of God

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lead you? Where did you recognize Christ’s presence in your day? Was there a time when he spoke to you and you missed it? They then take time to thank the Lord for every person, and every gift received that day. Then they review their feelings (positive and negative, painful and pleasant) that emerged during the day’s experiences. Feelings are clear signals of where the action was during the day. They are encouraged to choose a remembered feeling and express the prayer that emerges as that feeling is brought into God’s presence. It could be praise, petition, and conviction, a cry for help, a longing for healing or a lament. Prayers are closed with The Lord’s Prayer.

**Celebrating Solitude with God:** The ending time needs to capture the spirit of the retreat and celebrate the presence and love of God. The retreatant is encouraged to spend some time in the word, worship, prayer and the blessing of the Lord’s Supper. They are encouraged after the Lord’s ministry of washing, to enter into communion with him as he continues to give himself and his love in the sacrifice of his body and blood. Retreatants are called to recommit their love and devotion to the Lord and the service of his church.

**Repeating the process:** If the retreat allows further time (another 24 hours), the above process can be repeated, using new scriptures and readings.)

This personal reflective retreat is commended to pastors who are interested in renewing their relationship with God. It is incumbent on pastors to invest prime time into their relationship with the Lord of their life if they want to sustain spiritual vitality. This can be done on a daily basis and in a more prolonged time on a monthly (periodic) basis to become comfortable in the loving presence of their maker and sustainer.