

Guidelines for Companioned Prayer™ Retreats

Overview

The third part of the program to learn Companioned Prayer is attending a retreat. The first part is the four learning sessions (experiencing the prayer and learning to companion), and the second part is participating in regular Companioned Prayer ministry meetings.

After people have participated in the four learning sessions and at least two or three ongoing regular Companioned Prayer ministry meetings, all participants should be encouraged to take part in a Companioned Prayer retreat. This retreat provides a personally rich experience where additional time can be spent in a variety of possible ways, such as:

- in prayer;
- in companionship;
- in sharing of our experiences, and their significance to us;
- in learning the nuances of the prayer;
- in fellowship and community;
- in question-and-answer discussions;
- in planning Companioned Prayer ministries;
- in developing and discerning our relationship with Christ;
- in relating our prayer experiences to those of the saints;
- in how our prayer experiences correlate with our Christian faith and traditions,

The retreat can also include an overall theme of a scriptural or personal nature (e.g., the prodigal son, pilgrimage, etc.), a church season (Lent, Advent, etc.), a focus on a particular ministry (teens, homeless, hospice, etc.), the relationship of our Companioned Prayer experiences to those of a saint or mystic recognized by the church, or some other subject. There is no end of possibilities. For example, a simple agenda for a retreat might include:

- Sharing and discussion of personal experiences, and validation of experiences, not just of the prayers during the retreat, but of people's experience since learning Companioned Prayer.
- The contemplative nature of the prayer, including: waiting and noticing, allowing time for cycling, not wanting a prayer experience or outcome, and abiding in Christ.
- The prayer's impact on the Church, and our roles.

Many other agendas are possible. Plan your Companioned Prayer retreat with your group and come up with an agenda that works for the group overall. Do not try to fit too much into what time you have available during the retreat. Let the time you do have be unhurried so that people can sink into their experiences and have time to reflect and listen inside, allowing themselves to be open to the greater truth within, which such an uninterrupted program and setting can allow. You may want your retreat to revolve around only a few topics or activities. Remember, you can always have additional retreats or workshops later.

Keep the retreat a prayerful experience of being close to God and not just an exchange of information. Try to include an opportunity for people to share some of their personal stories if they wish to, and to get to know each other in friendship and fellowship.

Guidelines

- Companioned Prayer retreats can be repeated a few times a year with different leaders and/or different topics or themes. They should be designed for people who have been practicing Companioned Prayer for a while, in addition to people who have recently completed the learning sessions and several follow-on meetings.
- All retreat planning requires considerable lead time. Retreat planning should include a detailed timed outline of activities, topics, and leadership roles. A well-planned retreat should awaken and nurture the participants' intimate personal relationship with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, while also enlivening our fellowship and community.
- Avoid too much instruction, but have instructional materials available for those who need them. Some instructional topics, handouts and exercises can be used, as long as the focus does not become instruction and technique. The retreat experience should remain personal, just as the prayer experience is personal.
- Retreats should be planned to include multiple Companioned Prayer ministries in the area.
- Retreats should be led by more than one person if available, mentoring new leadership if feasible. Certification or credentialing of retreat leadership, such as clerical or religious, or other designation, should not be required or imposed. But retreats should have the support and approval of the sponsoring organization such as the local parish or group of parishes.
- As appropriate, encourage retreat participants to volunteer to present select material, at least the beginning group prayers, the concluding prayers, and the scripture readings. Involving participants will enhance the fellowship of the group.
- Whatever outline created for the retreat, be prepared to modify it as the retreat progresses, in order to best meet the needs of your participants.
- Retreats can be one or two days long, and can be at a church or nearby retreat center if available. A two-day retreat offering optional residential accommodations is ideal.
- A nearby retreat center, such as those operated by a religious order, usually offers a quiet environment set aside for prayer and reflection. These locations are ideal for encouraging participants to let go in faith within the quiet presence of God in their prayer and in their overall retreat experience. Another approach is to offer the retreat at a nearby church different from the one attended by most participants. Perhaps there might be a group in the host church willing to provide set-up, food, clean-up, etcetera.

- Other than the costs to host the retreat (retreat center charges, meals, etcetera) there should be no additional costs to participants. Retreat leaders should donate their time. Costs to accommodate special needs must be borne equally by all participants or by the sponsoring organization. Costs to participants should be kept to a minimum, and never represent a barrier to participation. Financial sponsorship should be available.
- Confidentiality of personal prayer subjects and sharing should be maintained during and after the retreat, unless expressly authorized by the person who shared their experience.
- All venues should be ADA compliant. Special needs of participants should be confidentially sought and accommodated.
- All retreats should comply with the Safe Environment requirements of the hosting and sponsoring organizations, as well as the Safe Environment guidelines of the Companioned Prayer Christian Fellowship available at www.CompanionedPrayer.org/supplemental-resources.