

## What will I take away?

It's good to arrive for a retreat with an open mind. Be confident that you will experience God's grace, but be open to its being in a way you don't expect. If you have a particular agenda, such as making a decision, God may bring you to the point of decision making, or he may not. It may be that some completely different issue rises to the surface. Accepting this is a valuable way to grow in openness to God's leading. When you go home, it may take a few days to 'digest' all you have experienced on the retreat, and it's often useful to continue your journal for a while. You will find that, even if you may not have sorted your whole life out, you have grown in serenity and gained strength from God. Above all, a retreat helps you grow in knowing with your heart, as well as understanding in your head, that God loves you as his precious child.



## What should I bring?

A Bible

Your journal

Additional paper and pens

Walking boots (if you want)

offa  house

Some pointers for those coming on an individually guided retreat for the first time

### What will I find when I come?

Booking to go on an individually guided retreat means that a person is committing themselves to spending time with God intensively for a few days, and leaving the pressures of daily life on one side. The retreat house will be your home for the time you stay here, and the staff will do everything they can to ensure that it feels like home, a kindly space in which to relax and become open to God. It is important to eat



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plenty and get lots of rest; although it is often enjoyable, an IGR is also hard work, and not the time to be penitential about food. All retreatants are very welcome, whatever their church affiliation. Many do not attend church; there is no need to be self-conscious because only your guide will know.

### **What will I do all day?**

The day is usually structured around times of prayer together, such as morning and evening prayer and a daily eucharist, and one-to-one meetings with your guide. In between, retreatants will spend a number of sessions in prayer alone, usually with passages of scripture to meditate on. There will also be opportunities to explore other ways of praying, for example with colour or using a labyrinth, and time to walk off all the energy that comes up in the prayer times. The space in between sessions is a good way of allowing the intensive prayer experience to settle; space for things to shift in your heart, below the level of conscious thinking.

### **Silence**

In order to help retreatants enter deeply into the presence of God, distractions are kept to a minimum. Most of the retreat is in silence, with silent meals (sometimes accompanied by music). Of course no-one will check up to see if you are texting your friends or listening to the radio, but doing that will stop you stilling down, and lessen the retreat experience. The world can wait for a couple of days. If you have not experienced a silent retreat before, you may find it takes a day or so to adjust, but it's worth persevering. Many people don't want to start talking again when the silence is over.

### **What will my prayer guide say?**

Prayer guides come from different denominations and may be lay or ordained. They will be experienced in listening to others and trained to help retreatants listen to God. They will have spent time before you arrive, pondering the information you have given and praying for the Spirit to help him/her guide you in the most helpful way. In the first session, they will ask

you if there is anything looming large in your life at the moment. The conversation will then develop over the course of the retreat, depending on how you interact with the scripture passages you are offered for meditation. It often happens that people move away from the thing they thought the retreat would be focusing on.

The important thing is to be open to God's leading. The more you are able to share with your guide, the more they can help you discern God's presence in your life. Apart from meditating on scripture passages, you will be invited to keep a journal during the retreat, especially for noting how you experienced each prayer period. Things can change very rapidly, and it's good at the end of the day to review how you felt in the morning. It also helps you not to forget the important insight you had earlier, if your mind is full of something else when you come into the daily meeting with your guide. Your experience of prayer may be full of joy in God, or blank, or painful; or all three. Your guide will help you explore how you are feeling, whether happy or sad, and think about your deep-down desires and what God is saying to you by means of consolation and desolation.