



Guidance for first time retreatants

First time retreatants sometimes ask for guidance for structuring their retreat time. Here are a few suggestions...

Rest, reflection, and renewal are key

Pathways' motto "Rest, reflection, and renewal" is trustworthy. Make that your first priority. Watch carefully for the inner nudging or instinctual sense of what will open you to experience rest, reflection, and renewal during your retreat, and let go of any of these ideas in favor of what feeds your spirit moment-by-moment through your day.

Body prayer

Consider starting your day with this body prayer, and returning to it as often as you wish during the day:

Await - hold hands cupped in front of you.

Allow - extend hands above your head

Accept - hold hands crossed over your heart

Attend - spread arms wide

This prayer can be done sitting, standing, kneeling, or walking. Say the word aloud, or silently to yourself. Hold each position as long or short as you feel it in the moment.

Journaling

Journaling is a helpful retreat practice. You might sit quietly with your journal and ask these questions:

- What is going on in my life that I am grateful for?
- What is particularly challenging in my life right now?
- What is my deepest longing?

Lectio Divina

Finally, you might spend some time in Lectio Divina with a meaningful text, and journaling about your experience. You can select a text from the [lectionary reading](#) for the week that you are in retreat. Or you might find one of the attached texts worth pondering.

Lectio Divina is an ancient practice of praying the scriptures. This meditative way of reading scripture encourages us to listen, notice, open, and respond to the Word of God praying within us. In this

practice we do not so much read scripture as scripture reads us. We come to the text not for information but for the transformation of our lives.

Begin by lighting a candle and pausing to open to Spirit's illumination.

Listen (Lectio) Read the passage aloud a first time, simply become familiar with it. Then read the passage aloud a second time, listening for a word or phrase that captures your attention, interest, or imagination. Sit in silence for 2 or 3 minutes and gently repeat this word to yourself.

Notice (Meditatio) Read the passage aloud a third time. Notice how the word or phrase touches or connects to your life. What images, feelings, or memories arise? Sit in silence for another 2 or 3 minutes and notice and welcome what comes.

Open (Oratio) Read the passage aloud a fourth time, and open to invitation. Is there an invitation to receive, rest in, or respond to? Sit for 2 or 3 more minutes in silence, and open to God's invitation and to your heart's response.

Rest (Contemplatio) Finally, rest in silence. After four or five minutes of silence, journal about your experience.

If you do a full day retreat, consider doing Lectio on the same piece twice during the day - once in the morning, and then returning to it in the afternoon. You may be surprised how your attention shifts as you go deeper into the text.

Here are some texts you might consider using for lectio divina:

- For I am certain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, neither heights nor depths - nor anything else in all creation - will be able to separate us from the love of God that comes to us in Christ Jesus, our Savior. Romans 8:38-39
- Forget the events of the past, ignore the things of long ago!
Look, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth - can't you see it?
I'm making a road in the desert and setting rivers to flow in the wasteland. Isaiah 43:18-19
- You created my inmost being and stitched me together in my mother's womb.
For all these mysteries I thank you - for the wonder of myself,
for the wonder of your works - my soul knows it well. Psalm 139:13-14

Conclusion

This is a lot, probably way more than you should tackle in one day. So keep in mind the advice from the top of the page: Watch carefully for the inner nudging or instinctual sense of what will open you to experience rest, reflection, and renewal during your retreat. Let go of any of these ideas in favor of what feeds your spirit moment-by-moment through your day. Don't worry about getting it "right." You've already received an "A" in retreating, just by showing up.