



Adult Faith Formation: Beyond the Books

By Meg Ashcroft

During our childhood years, we begin to learn the prayers, practices and beliefs of our faith. These form the foundation upon which an adult faith is built up. But as any of you know who are responsible for a building, structures require constant attention and upkeep or they will deteriorate.

The same is true of our faith lives. Without personal commitment to continued growth, the foundations of our faith can become unsteady and even crumble beneath us. If, in the words of the popular song from the musical *Godspell*, we want to "See Thee more clearly, love Thee more dearly, follow Thee more nearly day by day" where can we turn? Fortunately, the Catholic Church is blessed with some wonderful resources and programs to not only support an individual's intellectual understanding of the faith, but also to help believers grow into a more intimate, spiritual relationship with our gracious and loving God. Two of these resources are retreats and spiritual direction.

At one time or another, most of us feel the need to get away from it all for a while. Sometimes a vacation is the answer. At other times, we might be searching for a more meaningful and challenging experience and choose to go on a retreat. A retreat is a refreshing experience of withdrawing to a quiet place to take a fresh look at life, to sort things out. The kind of retreat that will best meet your needs depends on your own personal journey through life. At times we feel a need for solitude and the chance to be alone. At other times discussion and reflection with our spouse, a familiar group, or with people previously unknown to us is most appropriate.

Retreats are not a "one size fits all" experience. Rather they include a wide variety of formats and topics. There are retreats for women, men, engaged and married couples, youth, young adults, widowed, divorced, separated, recovering alcoholics, etc. Retreats might have as their focus scripture, different kinds of prayer, various spiritualities (e.g. Ignatian, Franciscan, Twelve-step), service and ministry, or a season of the Church year—to name a few.

Retreats can last anywhere from part of a day or weekend to several weeks or months. They may be conducted in complete silence with the

retreatant meeting daily with a director, or they may include talks by a retreat presenter followed by group discussions and time for journaling, personal reflection and prayer. Don't hesitate to call a retreat center and ask about their program offerings. A list of some of the facilities in New Mexico is provided at the end of this article.

Many people could not afford the expense or time off to make more than one retreat a year. What could you do if you wanted ongoing support in your spiritual journey throughout the year? One option is to meet with a spiritual director on a regular basis. These individuals are trained to "walk with" individual spiritual seekers. They listen to the director's story, ask insightful questions, and guide the person's reflection on one's prayer life, relationships and other issues.

A spiritual director is not a counselor or therapist but a person who is committed to an ever-deepening prayer life, and to helping others find God in all things and situations. For centuries, it has been the custom for members of religious communities and the priesthood to seek the wisdom and guidance of spiritual directors. Lay people of many denominations have more recently discovered the value of this important spiritual practice for their lives. Sharing our struggles and doubts with another person in confidence helps us to be honest with ourselves and to see things we may otherwise have overlooked. If you would like to find a spiritual director, ask your pastor, local religious communities or retreat center staff for names of spiritual directors in your area.

The desire to grow in the spiritual life is not a selfish one. Taking time for ourselves to go away for awhile on retreat and/or to meet with a spiritual director ultimately affects everyone with whom we are in contact during our daily lives. The better we understand our individual selves and our God, the more lovingly we can interact with others. So treat yourself to a retreat—God would love to spend some quality one-on-one time with you!

Note: Some retreat centers offer their own programming while others only provide facilities for individuals and/or groups to use for retreats and conferences.

Retreat Centers in The Archdiocese of Santa Fe

Abbey of Christ in The Desert
P.O. Box 270 Abiquiu, NM 87510
505-470-4515

Immaculate Heart of Mary Retreat And Conference Center
Mount Carmel Road,
Santa Fe, NM 87501
505-988-1975

Canonian Spirituality Center
5625 Isleta Boulevard, SW
Albuquerque, NM 87105
505-452-9402

Madonna Retreat And Conference Center
4040 St. Joseph Place NW
Albuquerque, NM 87120
505-831-8196

Center For Action And Contemplation
550 Atrisco Drive Sw
(P.O. Box 1246 Albuquerque, NM 87195
505-242-9588

Norbertine Center For Spiritual Life
5825 Coors Boulevard SW
Albuquerque, NM 87121
505-873-4399

Dominican Ecclesial Institute (D+E+I)
1815 Las Lomas Road, NE
Albuquerque, NM 87106
505-243-0525

Pecos Benedictine Monastery
Our Lady of Guadalupe Abbey
P.O. Box 1080 Pecos, NM 87552
505-757-6415

Fitzgerald Center
Po Box 10 Jemez Springs, NM 87025
505-829-3586

Sangre De Cristo Center
Tr. 4, 410 State Road 592
Santa Fe, NM 87501
505-983-7291

Spiritual Renewal Center, Inc.
2348 Pajarito Road Sw
Albuquerque, NM 87105
505-877-4211

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