

# **Holy Name Passionist Retreat Center**

## **The Retreat Captain's Handbook**



**Promoting and Recruiting for  
the Weekend Retreat  
at Holy Name Passionist Retreat Center**



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# I. THE GOAL

*GIVE ME YOUR SICK*

*YOUR BLIND*

*YOUR SINNERS*

*GIVE ME YOUR SAINTS TO BE INSPIRED*

This is the inscription on the base of the Sacred Heart statue near the front entrance to the Retreat Center. It comes from the heart of Jesus, whose arms are out-stretched to receive us. Together we will lead others to Jesus Christ.

Think of the best experience you have had on retreat. Remember what it did for you? It may have changed your life in some significant way, perhaps even dramatically. It may have answered a pressing problem or released you from tension, doubts and fears. It could have led to a new awareness of God's personal interest in you, as well as updating your religious education. It offered physical rest, peace and recollection.

Those experiences, the meeting of those kinds of needs, are what we seek to share with others. We want to pass on to them the Good News, the blessings, the peace and spiritual awareness we have received.

That's what retreat recruiting is all about.

## II. Promoting the Retreat in Your Parish

As Retreat Captain, you are being asked to take charge of the recruiting activities in your parish by organizing a campaign, contacting parishioners, encouraging them to attend a retreat, and striving to accomplish your recruiting goals. Your “term of office” as Parish Retreat Captain is three (3) years, beginning July 1, and renewable by mutual agreement with the Retreat Director.

Keep in mind that a retreat is a powerful, personal experience. People's lives are changed on retreat. So, the heart and core of retreat recruiting is that same personal approach: people inviting people! Your invitation demonstrates a sincere concern for them and their needs, especially their spiritual needs.

In sharing a bit of your own retreat experience, others will relate to you, to your experiences, to the help you have received. They can identify with you, their peer, and feel that what worked for you can also work for them. The personal touch makes the difference!

The following suggestions are offered to assist you in developing your own personal recruiting program for your parish.

- 1. Develop your plan.** At least two months in advance of your retreat date, using the aids provided by the Retreat Center, plus any ideas you feel would be effective in your parish, develop a recruiting plan. Include dates and activities such as inserts in bulletins, talks to parish groups, etc. Write out your plan, and share it with your co-captain(s).
- 2. Contact your pastor.** Discuss your plan with him. Request his support for your efforts in promoting the retreat. Ask him to personally encourage people to attend. Propose use of the “pastor announcement letter” provided by the Retreat Center in the parish bulletin.

- 3. Contact the Ministry Leadership in your parish.** Discuss the possibility of encouraging retreats as part of their ministry program with deacons and other heads of ministry. A retreat may also be something they want to personally participate in as a way of renewing themselves and “recharging their batteries”. Provide the Retreat Center with their names so that we can add them to our parish staff mailings.
- 4. Contact the parish secretary.** Arrange for placement of the retreat announcements and pastor announcement letter in the Sunday bulletin at least several weeks prior to your recruiting deadline. You can use the bulletin announcements provided by the Retreat Center, or alter them to create your own.
- 5. Start or continue building a team to work with you.** A look at recent retreat statistics tells us that the use of recruiting teams has been the single most successful element in good recruiting. Some teams practically fill the house! Ask the enthusiastic team members to participate as co-captains (and, at the same time, train your eventual replacement for the time when you’re ready to “retire”!)

Once you have a team committed to working with you, contact them and hold a meeting at least one month prior to the retreat weekend.

If you are the only recruiter in the parish, carefully select some others who have shown a willingness to work and who can work with you. Who's available to help? Think of the people with you on retreat last year or other parish leaders who may have made a retreat in times past. Some of these people will be willing to do something, maybe a little, perhaps a lot. Every effort is appreciated.

As you talk to members of the parish about the weekend retreat, ask them to help you by spreading the word to their families, friends, co-workers and other parishioners. Encourage those who sign up to strongly consider bringing or inviting their senior high school age son or daughter, another family member, or a friend.

The payoff? More people helping, more involvement of the parish, more mouths to spread the good word, increased parish coverage, more enthusiasm, more ideas, more anticipation and more results – and less stress on the captain!

6. **Keep your quota in mind.** Your quota is set as a target for you to strive for – based on past experience. It's the number of people you want to attend the retreat. Let us know if you think you might exceed your quota and we'll work with you to see that everyone has an opportunity to attend a retreat weekend.
7. **Invite people to the retreat.** The key to anyone coming to a retreat is being asked. There are two avenues to pursue: asking those who have made retreats in the past, and asking those who have never attended a retreat at Holy Name.

**INVITING PREVIOUS RETREATANTS: those who have made retreats in the past.** The Retreat Center provides each Captain with a listing of all people who are on the mailing list. The list indicates the year of the person's first retreat and retreats attended in the past five years. By mail, each will receive a current retreat flyer and registration envelope. These are the most likely candidates and are the ones who should be most actively recruited. Assign specific names to each of your team members for personal contact and invitations to attend.

Please help us keep the mailing list up to date by carefully checking the current address and telephone number of each retreatant called. Let us know of any changes.

**INVITING NEW PEOPLE: those who have never attended a retreat at Holy Name.** Another successful element in good

recruiting is reaching out to new people, first-timers. Where are they? They're at work, across the street in your neighborhood, in your family, slipping out the side door of church on Sunday, in the RCIA, Lectors, Eucharistic Ministers, residents of the last pew in Church. Ask your pastor and other ministry leaders the question: "Do you know any people in the parish who really need to make a retreat?"

Many of today's inactive church members can see a situation right now where they could become active members. Some say they would return immediately if they were simply invited to participate in a meaningful religious function by a member of that group. Reaching out with an invitation each year will produce a harvest over time. People will feel important because you took the time to invite them.

**WHEN PEOPLE SAY "NO":** often it results from misunderstandings about retreats. If you hear excuses such as: "I don't have time," "It's for old people," "I might have to bare my soul," or "hard beds, bad food." it may be fear of the unknown, not knowing what's going to happen. Because of those feelings, some people shy away from the first retreat experience.

How can the recruiter help overcome the misunderstandings, the fears, the excuses?

- **Talk about the staff:** pleasant, down to earth, human people. They listen, they understand. They smile, and even tell jokes!
- **Talk about the Retreat Center:** the good food, the comfortable single-occupant bedrooms with private baths, the tranquility of the chapel with its special "Limpias" Crucifix, the variety of reading materials in the library, the religious bookstore.
- **Talk about the schedule:** there is free time; you're not regimented, but have a chance to rest, to unwind, to think, to read. There are a variety of experiences on the schedule – all encouraged, but optional. Show them a copy of the weekend retreat schedule / flyer.
- **Talk about the grounds:** the peace and quiet of 10 wooded

acres where you can walk or sit and enjoy the fresh air; the birds and squirrels; the outdoor Stations of the Cross.

- **Talk about the atmosphere:** informal, accepting, encouraging, comfortable, quiet – in the Passionist tradition.
  - **Talk about the retreatants:** all ages & walks of life, normal people, parents, business people, workers – good people trying to be better people!
  - **Talk about the “cost:”** A free-will offering is asked of each retreatant. There is a suggested donation based on the cost of operation. No one should stay away from a retreat for financial reasons. Assistance is available for retreatants with financial hardships. Call the Retreat Center for additional information.
  - **Talk about the opportunity for Reconciliation:** the grace of healing that occurs week-in and week-out. The staff will meet you wherever you are in your walk with the Lord.
- 8. Arrange transportation.** People sense that you are genuinely interested in them when you offer to coordinate transportation to the retreat, especially if your parish is a long distance from the Retreat Center. Carpooling is a necessity for some and can be particularly helpful for new retreatants.
- 9. Keep in Communication with the Retreat Center.** The facilities are limited and our goal is a full house each retreat. Attendance quotas are established in order to match our resources with the needs of the people in your parish. We must know if you are, or are not going to fill your quota. Also, we must know if those signed up will actually attend. By keeping in touch, we hope for a full house at each retreat.

DROP-OUTS and NO-SHOWS happen. The reasons are numerous: overtime work, family sickness, car troubles, last minute fears. Not everyone who signs up for a retreat will actually attend. Please notify the Retreat Center as soon as you hear of any registered person who cannot attend.

As you can see, your continued contact with each retreatant is



important. We send each an email confirmation letter upon receipt of their online or written reservation (hence the need to make reservations as soon as possible.) Stay in contact with them and confirm their intentions to attend. No-shows and drop-outs hurt the retreat ministry; that unused “space” could have been offered to another person who perhaps wanted to come but couldn't due to a lack of space. The Captain, keeping in touch in this manner, will be helpful to everyone!

Let us know if you have any questions, needs, new ideas, etc. We'll do all we can to assist you. Call (713) 464-0211.

**10. For those who can't come on your parish's scheduled weekend:** No one should miss the opportunity to make a retreat. Ask the person to attend an alternate weekend, or suggest the person and spouse attend a married couples retreat. Have him call the Retreat Center to make reservations. Remember, retreat recruiting is an ongoing activity!

**11. Pray for the success of the retreat.** The core of the retreat movement is founded on a solid spiritual basis and the power of God working in each of us. During the retreat, Christ will manifest his power to save and change lives. We know that many retreatants "experience a miracle" at Holy Name. We need to cultivate this expectation in our own hearts as we attempt to communicate it to others.

Prayer also helps to strengthen us and prevent discouragement. It takes time and a strong commitment to recruit and personally share with others what can happen on retreat. Like the Jesus himself, we sow seeds: some will take a year to bear fruit, some a longer time. God's help, gentle persuasion, kind encouragement, and prayer will win the day.

### **III. A Sample Recruiting Plan:**

#### **At or immediately after the Captains' meeting:**

- Give the Retreat Center the names of the heads of various ministries and the deacon(s) in your parish that could help you in promoting retreats as an adjunct to their ministry.
- Start talking to active team members about joining you in recruiting, perhaps as a co-captain.
- Ask fellow retreatants to be part of the team.
- Think about planning a special event to “kick-off” recruiting in your parish. Possible activities include a chili dinner or hosting hospitality after the weekend liturgies.

#### **At least six weeks before the retreat:**

You will have an informational letter and list of previous retreatants from the Retreat Center and can begin actual recruiting.

- Have a meeting with your team in order to divide the lists of past retreatants for phone calls.
- Prepare your plan for recruiting people from your parish.
- Meet with the pastor, discuss your recruiting plan and ask for his support. He will have received a letter from the Retreat Center asking for his support and inviting him to share Saturday lunch or dinner with his parish group.
- Schedule bulletin announcements. Place notices / posters on bulletin boards.
- Schedule a short talk at the Masses well in advance of the retreat. A talk at the Men's Club or other parish organizations can also be helpful. Show the recent Retreat Center color video to parish groups (it's only 11 minutes long, very helpful).
- Contact the Retreat Center to arrange picking up a color poster and brochures to have available after Mass on a weekend at least 3 or 4 weeks before your retreat weekend.
- Arrange transportation for those who need a ride to the retreat.
- Pray for the success of the retreat...that the Lord truly touch those in need.

## **Two weeks** before the retreat:

Some last minute reminders:

- Encourage retreatants to register online, by mail or fax reservations so we can send a timely email confirmation letter to each applicant.
- Keep recruiting! Encourage the undecided.
- Let us know of any changes to the parish list; additions, deletions, address changes, etc.
- Let us know immediately of any cancellations so we can work to assign others to that vacancy.
- Pray for the people who are on your list.

## **Ten days** before the retreat:

- Phone the retreat center with to verify the listings, and any special needs.
- Make sure of everyone's retreat transportation needs.
- Pray for the success of the retreat.

## **During, or shortly following the retreat:**

- Consider getting together with those from your parish to discuss recruiting for next year. Now is the best time to ask for help for next year's team and to encourage team members to take the next step by becoming co-captains.
- Start developing your plan for next year.
- Start recruiting!

## **IV. What the Retreat Center Does:**

- We send each retreatant on our mailing list a copy of our annual retreat schedule in the summer, at the beginning of the retreat season. It contains the retreat schedule, parish dates, and your name and phone number.
- We offer one Captains' Meetings at the beginning of each retreat season.
- We provide recruiting information, including bulletin announcements on our website in the Captain's Corner. We also encourage you to take advantage of all the recruiting tools we

have to offer such as the large color poster. We will also send a special mailing to heads of ministry within your parish.

- When we receive the reservations, we send out a written confirmation, which includes directions and other details regarding the retreat.
- We send to your pastor a letter asking his cooperation about six weeks before the retreat date. He is invited to share the Saturday lunch or dinner with the group. (Some even make the retreat with the group!)

## **V. A Word of Appreciation**

Your role as Retreat Captain is essential to the success of our retreat programs. There are many people who are prospective retreatants, but without you, the benefits of a retreat would be limited to just a few. With you, the possibilities are endless!

As you come to share in the retreat experience yourself, look around at those who came with you: see them as they begin and end the retreat. Note the transformation that takes place. The Lord is using you to help others grow in faith and grace. A miracle...

Words cannot express our gratitude, on behalf of all retreatants, for your efforts to spread the Good News. You are part of the Holy Name Retreat "Team", leading into the 21st Century with the Good News of Jesus Christ and what he can do in a person's life!

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