

# ENHANCING A GROUP RETREAT

## Suggestions from Cedar Cross Retreat Center

Below are a few suggestions for enriching your retreat gathered from many years of experience. Relying heavily on presentation may limit the value of your retreat. We have found that varied experiences which involve the participants directly can make a big difference. Some of these include:

- **Nature:** Invite participants to take a reflective walk out in nature, encouraging the use of the Labyrinth and Way of Jesus. Walking a trail until one finds their own spot to stop and reflect can be very helpful. You might invite people to bring back a symbol of what they experienced (such as a leaf, stick or bit of moss) to share with the group. We recommend a minimum of 20 minutes and preferably 45-60 minutes. Folks usually return refreshed and centered.
- **Creativity:** Go out to the Art Studio (prearranged with staff), individually or as a group. Some facilitation is often helpful to overcome the common fears of incompetence and inability to produce work that is “creative” or “beautiful”. Margaret is highly skilled in helping people let go of such fears and in using a variety of art media. Other ways of incorporating creativity include using a piece of music to begin a session, or inviting participants to choose an image that touches them and to journal/share about it.
- **Sharing:** Often the invitation to whole group sharing or Q&A can be a major challenge for quieter people and those who rely heavily on leaders. Beginning to share by pairing up to answer a question, and later grouping by 4's, increases time for each to talk and creates safer space for many. To satisfy a need to hear from everyone, invite people share a word or phrase that reflects what was said in the pairs or small groups. If a minute is provided for reflection beforehand, everyone will be free to listen more attentively once the sharing begins.
- **Reflecting on a Reading.** A Scripture story, parable or teaching can be read, preferably slowly and more than once. Invite participants to listen for a word or phrase that touches them to share with the group. This process can be used also for a contemporary reading or a poem.
- **Journaling.** Provide time for people to write reflectively on what was shared, what they learned and what questions remain.
- **Silence.** Some people are afraid of silence and desire to fill all space with words and noise. It is very difficult to listen to others and God when there is continual interaction. A bigger challenge is to quiet the internal dialogue that runs for many of us. Using a quiet tone that gradually slows down, one can go over some of the basics such as: paying attention to one's breathing; focusing on a sacred word or a candle; repeating a simple prayer; and naming the various distractions (planning, tasks, conversations etc) and letting them float downstream.

Incorporating a range of experiences will often facilitate coming to consensus, feeling support and connection to the group, finding greater creativity in solving problems, or coming together around new ideas. Giving everyone a chance to be heard also can reduce posturing and conflict. Feel free to discuss any of these ideas more fully with us.