

A Christian retreat is an intentional time away to experience a new awareness of the presence of God. It is an opportunity to get some distance and see things in perspective. It requires a pace that is unhurried and conducive to rest and relaxation in order to come back with a renewed sense of living as Disciples of Christ.

A retreat is a chance for an encounter with God, with other people, with creation, with issues, with self. A retreat is an intentional strategy to withdraw from everyday life. When we retreat, it is not for the purpose of just getting away and staying away. Everything involved in getting away, and all that is done while away, involves coming back with a renewed faith and sense of purpose in our spiritual life. "We go to the mountains not to see mountains, but to see the valleys with a new perspective." Hopefully we will deepen our relationship with God by intentionally reflecting and meditating. Whether you do this alone walking down by the river or by talking and celebrating with others, it is needed in order to come back with a renewed sense of love. Jesus modeled this pattern of celebration and reflection, and it is instructive for people today as well.

Retreats deepen the fellowship of a community through shared experiences and can focus the energy of a group, whether your purpose is to do planning, problem solving, team building, to tackle a topic of interest or concern or just to have fun. Retreats at Roddy Tree Ranch are great, particularly for family and children ministries to allow fellowship outside of the church.

Remember, people attend what they help to plan. So, if you're looking to reach a larger or different audience than just the usual crowd, invite and involve others to assist in planning for the retreat as well. As you probably know people that participate in the planning of an event are far more likely to take ownership and show up.

When can we go? The date is very important and some churches come at a certain time every year, like the third weekend in a particular month. Make sure to check school calendars for concerts, weekend games, tests, etc., that would affect the attendance of your particular audience. Also at times when in-service days or other days off might allow for a possible new pattern - like a Saturday evening through Monday, for instance, or a Monday through Thursday. Let us share our many years of experience with you on planning church retreats. ***Keith and Gretchen Asbury and the Gambrells/ Owners Roddy Tree Ranch***

For More tips on Planning Church Retreats these tips were taken from the following website: There are no rules for the right way to do a retreat, but there is one wrong way, and that is not to know your purpose. Decide up front what you want to accomplish, and then plan your retreat. There are many possibilities and combinations, but let me offer three general types of retreats.

1. Play-and-pray retreat. This retreat offers both fun and extended times before the Lord. Though this may seem like a freewheeling setting without much structure (there is some free time), it is highly planned. Think through the games and the prayer times so they can accomplish your retreat goals.

Typically, these kinds of retreats are held to develop relationships and increase team spirit and morale. But a play-and-pray retreat is also great for spiritual breakthrough, fasting, and hearing God's voice. Play-and-pray retreats are usually 1 to 2 days in length.

2. Planning retreat.

3. Personal and professional growth retreat. This retreat is focused on staff training. The possible variations are limitless. You might bring in a speaker/coach/facilitator or lead it yourself. The most common topic is leadership, but spiritual formation is also a worthwhile investment. You might travel together to a conference but include significant discussion times with your team. The key is to make sure the content of the retreat has application to the lives of your staff members.

Determine who attends the retreat.

Who gets to go often creates political skirmishes and hurt feelings, but don't let these things serve as guides for who attends. Make your selections intentionally. Who attends is determined by the purpose.

Determine your budget.

Again, there are no rules here, but don't be cheap. You are investing in the future of your church when you invest in your staff. If you don't have much money set aside this year, plan for a more generous amount next year. Funds for the retreat should be under the leadership development category in your budget.

Select a location and set the date.

Hotels work OK, but a retreat/conference center is better because it usually gives more of an out-of-town feel. If you choose a hotel, make sure it suits your purpose—such as a clergy couple getaway weekend—or has great outdoor recreational options such as a pool, spa, golf, walking gardens, etc.

Avoid the major obstacles to a successful retreat.

- 1. Unclear purpose**
- 2. Lack of preparation**
- 3. Last-minute preparation**
- 4. Unmotivated attendees**
- 5. Poor location (no thorough on-site check before booking)**
- 6. Staff missing (calendars not cleared in advance)**
- 7. Lack of follow-through (You must follow up on idea implementation, assignments, and questions that arose during the retreat.)**

I recommend two retreats a year, one of which is a planning retreat. Have fun.

—Dan M. Reiland, D.Min., Lawrenceville, Georgia.

http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200304/082_stf05_retreat_sb.cfm