

Deacon and Lay Ministries
Self-Directed Discernment Retreat
Five days of focused prayer



Overview:

The Holy Spirit provides the gentle nudge to discern God's call. This is God's personal invitation to you to further fulfill your baptismal promise.

- *Is the Lord asking me to revitalize my family life?*
- *Does God desire that I learn new skills to be more productive in ministry?*
- *Does our loving God have a plan for me as an ordained deacon or an authorized lay minister?*

These five days will afford a unique opportunity to be present to God: To grow in your relationship with Jesus as a companion and with the Holy Spirit as a guide and inspiration.

Welcome to a time of challenge, prodding and direction by the Spirit of God. As you enter this time, be confident that the Holy Spirit will guide you to a decision that is right for you.

The five days will focus on the following topics:

- My Story
- Living a Balanced Life
- God Forgives
- God Prepares the Way
- God Announces the Way

Body, mind and soul are entwined.

While attending to the movement of God within, also be aware of your physical health. Consider fasting beyond the directions that are part of this retreat by eating a healthier diet during these five days.

Rest more.

Include exercise, especially walking.

Be aware of your limitations and follow your doctor's orders regarding diet and exercise.

The following are elements that are essential to successful discernment.

Take some time to digest them before moving forward slowly, deliberately and confidently.

Keys to Successful Discernment

Overcoming the instability of our emotions

Christian life is a matter of conviction and love (which is a matter of the will).

Embracing our humanity

The attraction of the riches and pleasures of this life are neither to be pursued nor minimized, but placed in their proper perspective.

Allowing the Word of God to find “good soil” within us

(Matthew 13:1-9)

Being honest and pure in our motivation

“Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, . . .”

(Philippians 2:5 . . .)

Concentrating on others

not thinking of our gifts and ourselves.

Willing to pray for enlightenment

Desiring self-knowledge

accepting the objectivity of outsiders.

Desiring a committed life

a lifetime commitment rather than involvements that are short-term in nature.

Authenticity in the pursuit of holiness

sincerely striving for sanctity and wanting to lead others to a holy life.

Desiring a faith that never stops growing

until we are consumed by the Lord.

Growing in sensitivity to the needs of others

and to learning how to help people meet their needs - especially the need for God.

Growing in our sense that God has something great planned for us

acquiring a spirit of humility and virtuous living.

May Jesus be your companion on the way.
May the Holy Spirit guide and direct you
May our loving God, Father, Son and Spirit
fill you with grace and peace in seeking God’s will.

Day One – My Story

Prayer is a conversation with God with whom we have a personal relationship.
My story is the story of that relationship; especially my relationship with Jesus.

Slowly and prayerfully -
recall that you were born and raised in a particular place at a particular moment in history
recall whatever memories and images linger in your mind.
Allow the Lord to show you your life.

Who is there?
What occurred?
Were there moments of conversion?
Were there moments of great hope and/or great love?
How were you transformed in each of these moments?

My parents were...
School meant this to me...
My closest friends were...and we used to...
When I started dating, I felt...
After my schooling, my early days seeking a career were...
My marriage and my children mean this to me...
My friends changed (from/to)...I changed (from/to)...
My career developed in this way...
Life has thrown some curves at me, like the time...
I have hopes and dreams. They begin with...
God was present when I...
God seemed absent when I...
The crossroads where I am right now manifests itself in this way...
I wish...

**Has a personal relationship with God been an important part of my life?
Is it an important part of my life now?**

Loving God, help me to see my life through your eyes. Where have I helped your will to be done? Where have I failed? Where have I grown? Where have I shown leadership? Guide me in understanding the precious moments of my life and grant me the grace to know that they are stepping stones to being fully human and fully alive. Be with me as I uncover the mystery of where I am going on this journey. Help me to reconcile my past as I venture into what is new. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen+

Today - **Fast from breakfast.** (Follow your doctor's orders regarding diet and exercise. Be sure to stay hydrated and have small, nutritional snacks.)
Set aside alms for the poor.
Deliver them to the parish's poor box at the end of the retreat.
Spend 10 minutes in silence somewhere without interruptions or distractions.
Pray Psalm 113 twice; once slowly and once more slowly still.

Morning Meditation – Day One

Oh, that today you would hear His voice: Do not harden not your hearts. Psalm 95:7b-8a

We take as our starting point our ordinary self with its various desires and interests. Either we give up trying to be good, or we become very unhappy indeed. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving back all these desires and interests, listening instead to that other voice, ...letting that larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in.

C. S. Lewis – Mere Christianity

One of the most powerful, and necessary foundations for effectiveness in any field is commitment. Commitment implies that our aims, energies and time are aligned with each other. It means not scattering our personal or material resources. Everything moves in the same direction.

Jesus warns against the opposite: being divided inside ourselves (Mt 12:25). Riding the fence of life, not knowing what we are about, brings weakness in our character, even – or especially – in the spiritual realm. If our energies are scattered, when big challenges come, we will collapse (Mt 7:26-27).

Many of us are aligned with our true values some of the time. For example, we set a daily prayer time, but when an opportunity to leave early for a day trip comes along, we abandon our prayer that day.

Is every part of my life aligned effectively behind what I believe in?

Do I want to live a committed life?

Lord, you know where I stand in my commitments. Please be with me where I am and help me grow in strength and purpose toward where you want me to be.

Marilyn Gustin

Evening Meditation – Day One

Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. Mathew 16:24

The point of the cross is that love, if it is real, stops at nothing. On the cross, God says, "I love you no matter what." This is the cup that Jesus drinks. This is the test and measure of true commitment.

Not my will, but yours be done.

Before Sleep - Day One

Do an examination of conscience and an act of contrition

Lord, now you let your servant go in peace. Your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people; a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel. Luke 2:29-32

Hail Mary...

May the all-powerful Lord grant us a restful night and a peaceful death. Amen+

Day Two – Living a Balanced Life

We occasionally come in contact with people who live ordered, balanced lives. They are in harmony with nature and have meaningful relationships. Our hope is to be inspired by their example and live at peace within God's creation. The purpose of the freedom God gives is to allow us to lead balanced, purposeful lives.

The word *indifference* makes me...

Most of the time, my desires and my choices are directed toward...

When my friends look at my life, they say...

Today, I will name and strive to be inspired by people who are models of freedom – giving themselves freely for others.

As St. Ignatius of Loyola says;

God's gifts of creation are to be used to help us achieve the end for which they were created.

Our task is to rid ourselves of whatever gets in the way of that purpose for which we were created.

Am I willing and able to talk with others about my faith?

Ever-present God,

*I long for meaning and purpose in my life –
a purpose that brings joy and grace to myself and my family
and service to your faithful people.*

*Most importantly, I ask for the grace
to be inspired by those around me and come to the fulfillment of my purpose.*

Help me to be an inspiration to others.

*May I balance my work, my family, my recreation and all of which I am capable
by the right use of the freedom you give me.*

I pray in your Son's name – Jesus.

Amen+

Today - **Fast from lunch.** (Follow your doctor's orders regarding diet and exercise.)

Be sure to stay hydrated and have small, nutritional snacks.)

Set aside alms for the poor.

Deliver them to the parish's poor box at the end of the retreat.

Enter into silence for 15 minutes in a place without interruptions or distractions.

Pray Psalm 40 twice; once slowly and once more slowly still.



Morning Meditation – Day Two

Oh, that today you would hear His voice: Do not harden not your hearts. Psalm 95:7b-8a

“Today” Etch that word on your mind and heart. You can remember yesterday; you can imagine tomorrow; you can only live today. It is the supreme importance of the present moment. We are tempted to tolerate the routine or the rupture of the present with an eye toward the rapture of the future. We endure today’s travail in hope of tomorrow’s ease. I have never forgotten a framed sign I read decades ago in a convent chapel:

*“Priest of God, say this Mass as if it were your first Mass,
as if it were your last Mass, as if it were your only Mass.”*

Something similar can be said to you each day:

*“Child of God, live this day as if it were your first day,
as if it were your last day, as if it were your only day.” - Walter J. Burghardt, S.J.*

Evening Meditation – Day Two

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own son but handed him over for us all, how will He not also give us everything else along with him? Who will bring a charge against God’s chosen ones? It is God who acquits us. Who will condemn?

Romans 8:31b-34a

Many voices demand our attention. There is the voice that says, “Prove you are a good person.” Another voice says, “You ought to be ashamed of yourself.” There is also the voice that says, “Nobody really cares about you,” and the one that says, “Be sure to become popular, successful and powerful.” Beneath all these voices is a still, small voice that says, “You are my Beloved. My favor rests on you.” That’s the voice we all need most to hear. To hear that voice requires effort; it requires solitude, silence and a strong determination to listen. That’s what prayer is. It is listening to the voice that calls us “my Beloved”.

Henri Nouwen

Before Sleep - Day Two

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you. I detest all of my sins, not because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, but because they offend you, my God, who are all-deserving and worthy of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace, to confess my sins, to do penance and to amend my life.

Lord, now you let your servant go in peace. Your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people; a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel. Luke 2:29-32

*Hail holy queen, mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope.
To you do we cry, poor banished children of Eve.
To you do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears.
Turn then, most gracious advocate, your eyes of mercy toward us,
and after this exile, show us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus.
O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.*

May the all-powerful Lord grant us a restful night and a peaceful death. Amen+

Day Three – God Forgives

Today I want to taste the mercy of God –
to enjoy fully the forgiveness which is God’s gift to me.
For a moment, I can focus on God’s delight in me
because I am part of His beautiful handiwork of creation.
I am created in God’s image!
I can accept this fact even though, at times, my guilt feels overwhelming.
Forgiveness is only a reality when I freely change my behavior and my thoughts.
Temptations are everywhere - the sights, the sounds, the smells,
my addictions to work, play and the smart phone and the computer.

When I am alone with the television remote, I tend to...

When the house is empty, or all the other workers have gone home,
I turn to my computer or my smart phone and...

When I see my neighbor’s beautiful car I ...

When the children are hard to handle and my spouse is demanding help I...

When my church asks for help I...

Today I will acknowledge my weakness but dwell on my goodness.
I will focus on the forgiveness that has been shown me
by my family, my friends and my employer.
How much greater than all of these is God’s love for me?

**Do people see me as someone they can approach and talk with?
Do I have healthy relationships with both men and women?**

Forgiving God, I acknowledge that I am a sinner. I long for your mercy and your embrace. The thought of your cross brings me to my knees as I contemplate the depth of love you have shown to the repentant sinner. I will praise you always. I promise to change. I will forgive others as you have forgiven me. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen+

Today - **Fast from dinner.** (Follow your doctor’s orders regarding diet and exercise.
Be sure to stay hydrated and have small, nutritional snacks.)
Set aside alms for the poor.
Deliver them to the parish’s poor box at the end of the retreat.
Enter into silence for 20 minutes in a place without interruptions or distractions.
Pray Psalm 36 twice; once slowly and once more slowly still.
Seek out a priest to receive from him the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Morning Meditation – Day Three

Remember your compassion and love, O Lord; for they are ages old. Psalm 25:6

One spring a homeowner of the shores of Lake Michigan woke up hearing the crashing of the waves against the sea wall. He grabbed his morning coffee and moved to the deck to watch the storm. In that moment he heard the sea wall buckle. The deck on which he was standing began to collapse. He barely had enough time to grab his dog and run out the front door. As he cleared the door, the churning waters ate his house. He had lost everything but was glad to be alive.

Jesus proclaims that the lack of forgiveness is as catastrophic in the spiritual realm as having our house destroyed or our land conquered. The true response to this inner spiritual darkness is forgiveness; forgiveness that is offered freely and often. Today, choose hope and forgiveness as the best responses to life.

Lord, you are the key to my life. Open my heart that I may forgive. Cast the darkness of hatreds, grudges and lack of forgiveness away from me, and give me a heart of loving and caring.

Paul Coury, C.S.S.R.

Evening Meditation – Day Three

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven.

Luke 6:36-37

We are all wounded people. Who wounds us? Often those whom we love and those who love us. When we feel rejected, abandoned, abused, manipulated or violated, it is mostly by people very close to us: our parents, our friends, our spouses, our lovers, our children, our neighbors, our teachers, our pastors. Those who love us wound us too. That's the tragedy of our lives. That is what makes forgiveness from the heart so difficult. It is precisely our hearts that are wounded. We cry out, "You, who I expected to be there for me, you have abandoned me. How can I ever forgive you for that?"

Forgiveness often seems impossible, but nothing is impossible for God. The God who lives within us will give us the grace to go beyond our wounded selves and say, "In the name of God, you are forgiven. Lord, help me to forgive all who have hurt me."

Henri Nouwen

Before Sleep - Day Three

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you. I detest all of my sins, not because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, but because they offend you, my God, who are all-deserving and worthy of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace, to confess my sins, to do penance and to amend my life.

Lord, now you let your servant go in peace. ... Luke 2:29-32

Hail holy queen, ...

May the all-powerful Lord grant us a restful night and a peaceful death. Amen+

Day Four – God Prepares the Way

God's patience is displayed in God's faithfulness over the long expanse of history which led to the incarnation.

Abram and Sarah left their homeland.

There were births and deaths.

Moses led slaves to freedom.

There were births and deaths.

Desert nomads became a covenanted people.

God send judges and prophets to challenge the people.

There was infidelity and divisions among the people and among the nations.

There were periods of rebuilding and relative peace.

Jesus brought turmoil, agitated people, caused them to think and make decisions.

Most importantly, Jesus brought the promise of the reign of God – joy and mission.

God is faithful and fulfilled the promise.

To me, God the Father is...

For me, Jesus is...

Within me, I am aware of the Spirit of God when...

I witness the Holy Spirit's work in the world when...

The invitation to boldly respond to God's call in some new way lies before me.

God has prepared me for this moment and will continue to prepare me for whatever lies ahead. It is up to me to make a decision to love and respond.

Do I enjoy life and people?

Do I have a sense of humor?

Can I work with people of all ages?

Jesus, it is hard to comprehend just how privileged I am. You have chosen me for a special purpose. My mind is becoming clearer. My heart is becoming more willing. I ask today for the gentle nudge of your Spirit. Please move me one step further on the path you have laid out for me. Guide me as I move along that path to follow your will. You live and reign forever and ever. Amen+

Today – **Extend your fast to more than one meal.**

(Follow your doctor's orders regarding diet and exercise.

Be sure to stay hydrated and have small, nutritional snacks.)

Set aside alms for the poor.

Deliver them to the parish's poor box at the end of the retreat.

Enter into silence for 25 minutes in a place without interruptions or distractions.

Pray Psalm 99 twice; once slowly and once more slowly still.

Morning Meditation – Day Four

All your works give you thanks O Lord and your faithful bless you. They speak of the glory of your reign and tell of your great works, making known to all your power, the glorious splendor of your rule.
Psalm 145:10-11

St. Paul must have been tough!

Stoned, flogged, ship-wrecked, imprisoned...and ridiculed.

But nothing stopped him from preaching the Good News.

Very few of us will suffer physical assaults for the sake of the Gospel,

but we often suffer misunderstanding, ridicule or worse yet, indifference for our faith.

We are dismissed as out-of-touch, unrealistic or irrelevant to the 21st century world.

This is why a strong faith community and a vibrant connection to that community is so essential for nurturing and supporting our faith.

This is why so many renewal programs in the Church emphasize the importance of being linked to a group of people who meet regularly to share faith and to pray.

The bonds of community nurture our relationship with God.

Robert Roddy, O.F.M. CONV

Evening Meditation – Day Four

Do to others as you would have them do to you. Luke 6:31

Here's the secret to true happiness, to deep and lasting peace.

This will solve, all at once, all the difficulties in your relationships and bring an end to all dissension.

Love people as Jesus loved them, to the point of self-sacrifice.

Don't bother with the bookkeeping of love. Love without keeping accounts.

If someone is decent and likable, love them. If someone else is very unlikable, love them just the same.

If someone greets you and smiles, greet them and smile back, but if someone snubs you, smile just the same.

If someone does you a good turn, thank the Lord for it, but if someone slanders you, persecutes you, curses you, strikes you, thank that person and carry on.

Do not say, "I'm right. They're wrong." Say, "I must love them as myself."

This is the kind of love Jesus taught: a love that transforms, vivifies, enriches, brings peace.

Carlo Carretto

Before Sleep - Day Four

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you. I detest all of my sins, not because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, but because they offend you, my God, who are all-deserving and worthy of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace, to confess my sins, to do penance and to amend my life.

Lord, now you let your servant go in peace. ... Luke 2:29-32

Hail holy queen, ...

May the all-powerful Lord grant us a restful night and a peaceful death. Amen+

Day Five – God Announces the Way

God has been with me this week.
I feel God's presence and the beginnings of a decision.
Discernment is on-going and does not occur overnight.
Remember what the angel said to Mary,
 "Nothing will be impossible for God." (Luke 1:37)
This moment cries out for simplicity and silence.
It begs for a humble person.
God rejoices at a committed heart.

Do I need to bring my thoughts about this to a spiritual director?
I need my pastor's input and support.
Should I get to know him better? Take him to dinner?
Is this the right time for me to begin study and formation?
My family's support and consent are necessary.
Are they 100% in favor of this?
Lay ministry? Ordained ministry? Faithfulness in the assembly?
All are good and holy.
I believe the Lord is asking me to...

My spontaneous prayer to Jesus at this time of decision is, "Lord,...

Am I willing to make a decision about a vocation?

Today – **I will close how and when to fast.**

(Follow your doctor's orders regarding diet and exercise.
Be sure to stay hydrated and have small, nutritional snacks.)

Set aside generous alms for the poor.

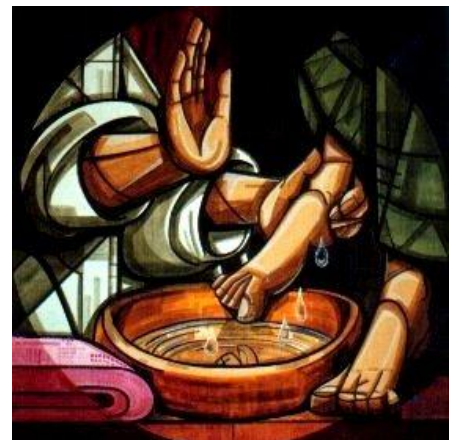
Deliver them to the parish's poor box.

Enter into silence for 30 minutes in a place without interruptions or distractions.

Pray Psalm 132 twice; once slowly and once more slowly still.

I will write a letter to God

expressing my desire to serve,
my openness to God's will,
the factors in my deliberation,
my humility –
and my decision.



Morning Meditation – Day Five

Go and proclaim the kingdom of God. Luke 9:60

The unity of the Church is not uniformity, but an organic blending of legitimate diversities. It is the reality of many members joined in a single body, the one Body of Christ (1 Cor.12:12). Therefore the Church of the Third Millennium will need to encourage all the baptized and confirmed to be aware of their active responsibility in the Church's life. Together with the ordained ministry, other ministries, whether formally instituted or simply recognized, can flourish for the good of the whole community, sustaining it in all its many needs: from catechesis to liturgy, from education of the young to the widest array of charitable works.

Blessed John Paul II – Novo Millennio Ineunte

By ordination, the deacon, who sacramentalizes the Church's service, is to exercise the Church's diakonia. Therefore, the diaconal ministries of the Word, the Liturgy and Charity and Justice, are not to be separated; the deacon is ordained for them all, and no one should be ordained who is not prepared to undertake each in some way... Fundamentally, there is an intrinsic unity in the deacon's ministry. In preaching the word, he is involved in every kind of missionary outreach. In sanctifying God's people through the liturgy, he infuses and elevates people with new meaning and with a Christian worldview. In bringing Christ's reign into every stratum of society, the deacon develops a Christian conscience among all people of good will, motivating their service and commitment to the sanctity of human life.

the National Directory

for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States.

Evening Meditation – Day Five

The fact that I am always searching for God, always struggling to discover the fullness of Love, always yearning for the complete truth, tells me that I have already been given a taste of God, of Love and of Truth. I can only look for something that I have, to some degree, already found. How can I search for beauty and truth unless that beauty and truth are already known to me in the depth of my heart? It seems that we have deep inner memories of the paradise that we have lost. Maybe the word 'innocence' is better than the word 'paradise.' We are innocent before we started feeling guilty; we were in the light before we entered the darkness; we were at home before we started to search for a home. Deep in the recesses of our minds and hearts lies hidden the treasure we seek. We know its preciousness, and we know that it holds the gift we most desire: a life stronger than death.

Henri Nouwen

Before Sleep - Day Five

These precious moments of retreat now come to their conclusion.
Return to the overview page and review the statements on successful discernment.
Open your heart.
Pray to make a decision blessed and encouraged by God.

Lord, thank you for forgiving me and enlightening me.

Lord, now you let your servant go in peace. ... Luke 2:29-32

Hail Mary,...

May the all-powerful Lord grant us a restful night and a peaceful death. Amen+

