**PREPARING FOR YOUR IN-HOME VIRTUALLY-DIRECTED SILENT RETREAT**

**WHY MAKE A SILENT RETREAT?**

We make a retreat to remove ourselves from the distractions of our world. The stress and tension of the world will go on without us. We are removing ourselves from it in order to focus on our inside journey.

In our world, silence is rare. So we enter our retreat filled with all kinds of internal and external distractions -- the noise of the world but also the crying needs within ourselves. We enter retreat to be alone with God in the quiet. Silence will bring us back to ourselves so we can be more fully present -- so we can more clearly hear God’s whisper in the centre of our hearts.

Silence is more than simply no-talking or no-noise. Silence is more than a nothingness from which sound pops up. Silence is a thing in itself—it has a texture, fullness, density, depth, spaciousness, character.

Meister Eckhart says “there is nothing like God so much as silence.” Silence is full of God’s presence, full of God’s compassion. It is what underlies everything, holding everything together.

We also need vacations from our habit of being productive and doing things. On retreat, our inner world is our priority. We need to take time with God in the silence to “just be”. "Be still and know that I am God," we read in the Psalms. Or, in the words of John Main, “Silence gives our spirit room to breathe, room to be.” So during our retreat, we need to allow some time just to be still and open – to be simply present to the Presence.

**HOW WILL WE BE SUPPORTING YOU?**

* One of us will support your preparation through a conversation based on this hand-out and any questions you might have. We will discuss how you wish to mark the beginning and end of your retreat and can offer suggestions for a ritual.
* We will set times for your spiritual direction sessions. Our spiritual directors are well trained and very experienced and routinely offer spiritual direction on behalf of the Sisters. (Sisters only rarely serve as spiritual directors on these retreats.) Some of them use telephone and some use Skype or Zoom.
* These roles might be provided by two different people, or all by the same person.

**IF YOUR RETREAT IS NOT ALREADY SCHEDULED FOR A PARTICULAR DAY AND LENGTH OF TIME:**

How long do you want your retreat to be? What time and day will it begin and end?Be realistic when deciding on the length of your retreat.

**CREATING AND PROTECTING YOUR SACRED SPACE**

You need space that will offer solitude and silence for the duration of your retreat.

* If “retreating” from work or loved ones will cause you anxiety at this time, or if there is a realistic possibility that an urgent situation will arise, you need to discern if this is truly the best time for you to be making a retreat.
* Let the people you love and work with know you won’t be available at all, for any reason, during your retreat. Bring only yourself into the retreat. The simple thought that you have “just one commitment” to take care of can spoil it.
* During your retreat, you need to disconnect from the world. You will be using your phone or computer only for spiritual direction and accessing on-line worship resources. So be prepared to turn them off and put them out of sight. You won’t be accessing TV, radio, or newspapers.
* Is there a place in nature nearby (such as a back yard or quiet park) you might like to access?

Plan ahead for order and harmony.

* You might want to set up an altar or place of focus, if that will help. (You might use a safe candle, fresh flowers, inspirational image, etc.)
* If clutter tends to grab your energy or attention, then tidy up before your retreat. Wash the laundry, pay your bills, and put some clean sheets on the bed.
* Plan your meals ahead. Have all the prepared food and groceries you will need. Fill your prescriptions. You will not be shopping during your retreat.
* Please do not use alcohol or substances.

**CLARIFY FOR YOURSELF WHAT YOU HOPE FOR FROM YOUR RETREAT**

Pray about what graces you hope to receive during your retreat. (eg: Are you struggling with some specific issue or choice? Has God become distant and you want to deepen your relationship with God? Do you want to know Jesus more intimately?) Keep it simple.

Let go of any particular expectations of yourself. Just let God give you this retreat.

**Commitment is important. Stick it out.**

**DECIDE ON A BASIC RHYTHM**

Is this your first retreat? If so, how much structure do you imagine you will need?

If this is not your first retreat, expect to follow the flow of your own desire and spontaneity. But at the same time, roughly know when you will formally pray and when you will eat.

Allow enough time to use the beginning of your retreat to start to decompress from the stress of your day-to-day life and to ease into “retreat mode.” Sleep as long as you need and want.

You might want to arrange these ingredients as tentative structure:

* Nourish yourself - sleep, more sleep, food, exercise, sunshine
* Spiritual reading - but please don’t plan to spend a lot of your time reading
* Prayerful activity – meditative walk, knitting, journaling, listening to suitable music, etc.
	+ Is there an on-line worship service or resource you’d like to use?
	+ You might want to include something creative – haiku, poetry, art, music, baking bread, gardening, etc.
	+ You might want to engage in some embodiment activity – yoga, prayer through gesture or dance, etc.
	+ Time in which to just be in silence with God
	+ Time in nature: a backyard, park.
* Formal prayer or meditation
* Two meetings with a spiritual director

**YOUR FORMAL PRAYER**

We will talk together before your retreat about scripture and other material you might desire as inspiration for your prayer as you enter into your retreat (prior to your first spiritual direction session.) We will discuss how you usually pray, and, if you wish, some new way you might like to pray on your retreat.

Your spiritual director will support you in your prayer and with whatever comes up for you during the silence. God speaks to you through all of yourself and all of your life.