

# The Ultimate Guide to Planning a Church Retreat





## Table of Contents

### ***SECTION 1: Why: This Might Be the Year for Your Church to Plan a Retreat***

Christian Retreat Centers: Places of Refuge  
The Christian Retreat Center: Find More Life by Stepping Out of Life  
A Retreat Center: A Place for Renewal  
Christian Camps: Some of the Best Experiences You Can Have

### ***SECTION 2: What, When, Where and How: Planning a Great Christian Retreat***

Ohio Church Retreats: Five Ways to Find the Right One for Your Group  
Christian Camp Centers: Steps to Selecting the Right Location  
Retreat Rentals: Three Basic Steps to Finding What Works for You  
Conference Retreats: A Checklist for All Event Planners  
Christian Retreat Planning on a Budget  
Retreat Centers: The Staff is There to Serve You  
Christian Retreat Ideas: The Finishing Touch

### ***SECTION 3: Who: Women's Retreats***

Christian Women's Retreats: Ministering to the Whole Woman  
Christian Women's Conferences: A Place for Renewed Hope  
Women's Retreat Planning: Four Steps to Creating a Great Theme  
One Woman Retreat: At Peace with Self  
Women's Conferences: Exploring Women's Issues  
Christian Women Retreat Preparations: A Recipe for Success  
Christian Women's Retreats: Questions to Answer Before Planning a Retreat  
One Woman's Retreat Experience

### ***SECTION 4: Who: Men's Retreats***

Men's Retreats: Done Right, They're Powerful  
An Ohio Cabins Retreat: Great for Mind, Body, and Spirit

### ***SECTION 5: Who: Youth Retreats***

Christian Youth Camps: A Great Way to Connect with God  
Christian Youth Retreats: A Great Place For Kids  
Christian Youth Retreats: Plan Ahead For a Great Experience  
Youth Group Retreats: Memories That Last a Lifetime

### ***SECTION 6: Who: Counseling Retreats for Individual or Couples***

Counseling Retreats: Hope for Healthy Relationships  
A Christian Spiritual Retreat: Observing a Day of Silence



## ***SECTION 1: Why: This Might Be the Year for Your Church to Plan a Retreat***

### **Christian Retreat Centers: Places of Refuge**

Much has been written in recent years about the modern spirit of consumerism, busyness, and the absence of healthy margins in the lives of many Americans. Our lives are so programmed, and consequently so full, that time for reflection, soulful rest, and relaxation is difficult to find. Because of this, many individuals, families, and churches are turning to Christian retreat centers for getaways that include healthy outdoor fun but also times of soul-refreshing solitude.

If you search for definitions for the word retreat, you will find that it commonly means a place of refuge or seclusion. Wow. Just reading the words, “a place of refuge or seclusion” can make you long to get away!

And if you are a parent, you probably have noticed that unstructured free-time that allows kids to simply be kids is also something of the past. Now, if your children want to play sports or spend time with other kids, you have to check the offerings, sign up, pay your fees, and have your kids watched by paid staff almost every hour of their week. Relaxed, open days of simple time spent together can be tough to get, and even when you want it, parks and other natural places can be crowded and far from relaxing.

But, if you do some searching, you can find Christian retreat centers that offer a variety of camps where there are available programs but also time intentionally built into each day for campers to find rest and solitude. Because of this, many adults and youth connect with friends each year at a Christian retreat center and consider it one of the most special weeks of their year.

Another great advantage to Christian retreat centers is the cost. Some summer camps are getting too expensive for a lot of families, but many retreat centers have a portion of their operating budgets underwritten by associations or donors, keeping camper fees relatively inexpensive. So, if you looking for a great place to host a wonderful retreat, or you would love to send your kids to a summer camp that will be both great fun and great for their hearts, Christian retreat centers are a wonderful option.



## **The Christian Retreat Center: Find More Life by Stepping Out of Life**

Many men, women, and youth are finding Christian retreat centers as the most enjoyable and enriching places to spend time getting away from it all. Ironically, many say they needed to step out of life to actually find more life!

Life has a way of draining all of us. We come home tired but we usually don't mean we are physically tired. What so many mean when they say "I'm tired" is that they feel drained, life feels kind of purposeless and all the frenzied activities of life have lost their meaning. They are with people, communicating with people, and around people, but they aren't really connecting with people in ways that matter. Emails, texting, social media, polite small talk and just trying to get things done don't bring the relational richness all of us need.

But, pulling out of our regular busyness and spending a long weekend or even a week at a Christian retreat center helps us unwind, re-focus our lives, and draw near to others in ways life usually doesn't allow. A Christian retreat center creates the time and space we need to find purpose again, strengthen the friendships we treasure and maybe even build new friendships with people that share some of our beliefs, values and dreams for life.

And Christian retreat centers can be really fun, and even adventurous, too. Long hikes in the woods, mountain biking, canoeing, rock climbing, and other physical sports are offered by many Christian retreat centers. Activities are age-appropriate, and the planned activities for youth, and even adults, are supervised by trained staff, so everyone has a good time.

Men's groups, women's groups, many youth groups, couples, and individuals plan annual events at Christian retreat centers, so find one that fits your needs, is close to home or in an area you would love to visit, and plan for your church to spend a few days finding more life by stepping out of life.



## Retreat Center: A Place for Spiritual Renewal

A retreat center can offer spiritual renewal for the individual who desires a time and place to explore his inner landscape. Because every person is unique, it is important to take some time to choose the correct spiritual retreat center for you and your group's needs. Consider the amenities and how these amenities work in harmony with your goals for your church's retreat.

Is your intent to create a retreat where attendees can best discover their personal journey in a warm cozy blanket beside a blazing fire, or do you yearn to let them explore their spiritual life while hiking in a forest, the wind whistling in their faces? These questions and others will guide you in selecting your perfect spiritual retreat center. Other things to keep in mind are the staff and the amenities that are offered by the various spiritual retreat centers.

The following is a list of amenities for which you may want to search when considering your options: grounds, guestrooms, suites, libraries, lounges, kitchen, dining halls, recreational facilities, and chapels. The basic necessity of food and sleep can make your retreat memorable or disappointing. Be sure to ask specific questions that pertain to you. If your group has special dietary needs, ask if that fare is available. Perhaps you need to know if the rooms are wheelchair accessible. Don't forget to ask about the furnishings in the room in which participants will be staying. Being comfortable is key to the renewal experience you are trying to create.

A spiritual retreat center will often make available to you staff members who can guide you in your personal journey. These staff can service you through planned nature excursions, exercises, meditation and prayer opportunities, personal counseling, etc. Determine what you may need in terms of staff and make arrangements for that prior to arriving at your spiritual retreat center.

Developing the interior life is something that no one can do alone. No one knows their needs better than you. If you allow a little time to plan your retreat, it may become the best gift you ever gave them. When you allow them to care for their interior life, they are becoming a more mature person, and everyone around them is touched by their life. Take the time to seek a spiritual retreat center where you can provide a tranquil environment, refresh the body, refresh the mind, and renew the spirit.



## Christian Camps – Some of the Best Experiences You Can Have

The Midwest has literally hundreds of exceptional Christian camp and retreat venues. In Ohio alone, there are 43 Christian Camp and Conference Association (CCCA) member camps. Many have served generations of families in healthy, fun, and deeply personal ways.

There are a variety of programs, formats, and types of groups that CCCA locations serve. There are Family Camps, Day Camps, Kids Camps, Group Camps, and Resident Camps. There are also camps specifically for athletes, those with disabilities, single parents, musicians, and other groups.

Christian Camps will also tailor programs centered around activities, too. Some of these include programs in Art, Sports, Whitewater Rafting, Music, Drama, and Writing. These are especially good because enthusiasts can spend a week receiving instruction and practicing their skills, and they can also meet others who share the same passion and interests – all in a Christian context.

Ohio also has some excellent Outdoor Education programs with eight CCCA member camps offering these kinds of outdoor experiences. Christian Camp Outdoor Education curriculum options include Animal Studies, Exploratory Science, Plant and Earth Studies, Wilderness Survival Training, and other specialized training. These programs utilize college-prepared staff members, many of whom are certified in the areas they teach.

Most Christian camps have their own websites which makes searching program options and registration really easy. Christian camp websites will include event calendars, program descriptions, age or other restrictions for groupings, the camp's philosophy and faith statement, and costs and special instructions for campers. Lodge and cabin rentals, group rates, holiday weekends or discounts, and other specials can also be found on camp websites, so if you want to plan your own group retreat or special get-away weekend, Christian camps are the way to go.

What makes Christian Camps unique, and very special, is their commitment to providing youth, adults, families and groups opportunities to unplug from the distractions of life, re-focus on what really matters, relax, grow from God's Word, and build great relationships. And these special experiences all take place in beautiful settings where campers can revel in God's amazing creation.

So, make plans with your Church or denomination to spend a really special week at a Christian Camp. Do a few web searches around the type of program you are looking for, the affiliation you may prefer, or the location you hope to visit. You can also visit the directory of Ohio Christian Camps, which allows the user to search for camps in a variety of ways.



## ***SECTION 2: How, What, When and Where: Planning a Great Church Retreat***

### **Ohio Church Retreats: Five Ways to Find the Right One for Your Group**

In the military, the word retreat can be defined as a strategic withdrawal. In the spiritual life of a person, strategically withdrawing from the activities and demands of daily life and to spend time with God renews hope and spiritual health. There are many opportunities throughout Ohio for church retreats, and using the following suggestions will help you find, or even plan, a church retreat that is right for you and your group.

1. Determine the group's profile. Will most of the attendees be singles that prefer to mingle with others? Or will the majority of the guests be middle-aged men that would rather have opportunity for long hikes and solitude?
2. Consider the venue. Many Ohio church retreats fall into one of three categories: lecture, guided, and private. Lecture retreats center around a keynote speaker with several sessions offered daily. Guided retreats suggest a topic with scriptures to read, questions to answer, and often includes small group discussion meetings. Private retreats have no speakers or group discussions, but rather, allow time for individual solitude and meditation. Each will be discussed in detail later in this book.
3. Pick an appropriate time. Pay attention to the obvious. Be careful not to schedule a retreat for men if the date falls on Mothers' Day weekend. Choose a time of year when the weather will cooperate with the activities you're planning. Ohio church retreats can be tricky to plan because the weather can be unpredictable.
4. Choose the best atmosphere for you. Some retreat guests want to "get away from it all." In Ohio, church retreats may take place at a retreat center with acres of forest. Other centers offer lakeside settings, perfect for restful times of prayer and rejuvenation. Still another option is a large building with many smaller rooms available for such activities as small group prayer time, etc.
5. Determine the main objectives of the retreat. Some retreats are geared toward emotional healing, and some focus on equipping people with strategies for dealing with difficult life situations. Most Ohio church retreats simply hope to bring spiritual refreshment and vision.



## Christian Camp Centers – Important Steps to Selecting the Right Location

If you are new to planning and creating retreats, the following five steps should help you. These steps will move you through a deliberate process, and they can prevent you from making short-sighted decisions and help you to get out of the box and think creatively.

Sometimes traditions are helpful for the right reasons. Other times, they are not. Many churches and other community organizations have been known to go to the same camp center year after year after year simply because “that’s the way we’ve always done it.” Again, sometimes this is a good decision if the camp center serves you in unique ways or offers scheduling preference or discounts because of your loyal patronage. Other times, going to the same place again and again is the choice simply because it is easy and doesn’t require much effort. This is when tradition can get in the way of providing the most enriching and memorable experience possible.

Whether you’ve planned many retreats or this is your first, follow these five important steps to selecting the right retreat center for your church:

1. Be creative, involve others, and develop a fresh experience.

Before you make any contact with possible camp centers, do a little work up front that will save you a lot of effort later and make your retreat unique.

Find out what needs, interests, or challenges your group members are facing right now. Do your planning with a creative team, and not alone. Bring in new members to your retreat planning team (every year, if possible) and then have a live, in person brainstorming session where every idea is allowed and considered. You will benefit from the excitement and synergy that only team work can bring.

2. Since God is living and active, pick a retreat theme that is living and active

This is far better than trying to resurrect an old theme from years ago just because you have pre-made notes or ideas, or better than picking a currently popular book and arbitrarily assigning a few people to speak from a chapter. Your participants always pick up on the genuine enthusiasm and involvement of leaders. What has been impactful or has spoken to the lives of your team members? What gets you excited or has passionately interested you lately? Usually what has been speaking to the lives of your own team members will also speak to others.

3. Be very clear on establishing your time requirements, your schedule, your accommodation and equipment needs, and your budget.

Knowing exactly what you want to occur, and when, during your retreat really helps you

select the best camp center for you, and it also helps the staff of the camp center get ready to serve you. Coming up with an estimate of how many will be in attendance, special dietary or sleeping arrangements, the specific types of media equipment you will need, and when your presentation sessions will take place are very important. There's a good chance the camp center will be hosting more than one group, so knowing exactly when you will need meeting rooms, recreation facilities, times of quiet and meals makes everything flow nicely.

4. Having prepared well allows you to then select the best camp center.

Now that you have put good effort into creating your event, and you are very clear on all that you require, looking at various camp center options will be easier and more effective. Camps will now be able to let you know when and how they can accommodate you, and before you even contact a camp center, you can now narrow your options by first visiting camp center websites. Since you know what you need and when you need it, making your selection should go much more smoothly.

5. Get the final contract in writing

If you are clear with your needs, the camp center staff can also be clear on total costs, which will help you set your budget. Make sure you have final arrangements communicated in writing, and try to negotiate and plan with the same camp center staff member. This minimizes the chances of miscommunication or last minute changes.



## Retreat Rentals – Three Basic Steps to Finding What Works for You

Apart from those directly involved in the ministry of Christian camping, the concept of “retreat rentals” can be a term that’s misunderstood. Retreat rentals simply mean you are renting a facility (room and board) so you can lead your group through your retreat schedule and content. The campground doesn’t provide “programming” in the rental situation.

Those with years of retreat experience, and those who hear the stories of many in non-profit work, realize it is important to find the best camp for retreat rentals you can find for your group. Professional camp directors often borrow from the world of real estate and emphatically state, “location, location, location!”

Many well intentioned people have had really disappointing experiences by having a great week or weekend’s worth of activities planned but absolutely the wrong place to have them. There are several things to consider when planning a retreat and finding a great location, the following first three steps are essential:

1. Always visit the camp in person. Meet the staff, tour the facilities, and get as much first-hand information as possible.

You can learn a lot from simply being with the people who will be serving you. Are they warm and friendly? Can you tell they are genuinely excited about what they do? Ask them what they love about their work. Ask them to tell you some stories from the past year. Do they dedicate most of their year to children’s camps, or adult retreats, or public school excursions? What are their specialties? Any camp can hire someone to make up beautiful brochures, but actually being there says a whole lot more. You could call this step, “getting the vibe of the place.” You’ll be glad you did.

2. While you are there ask honest questions about the food they serve.

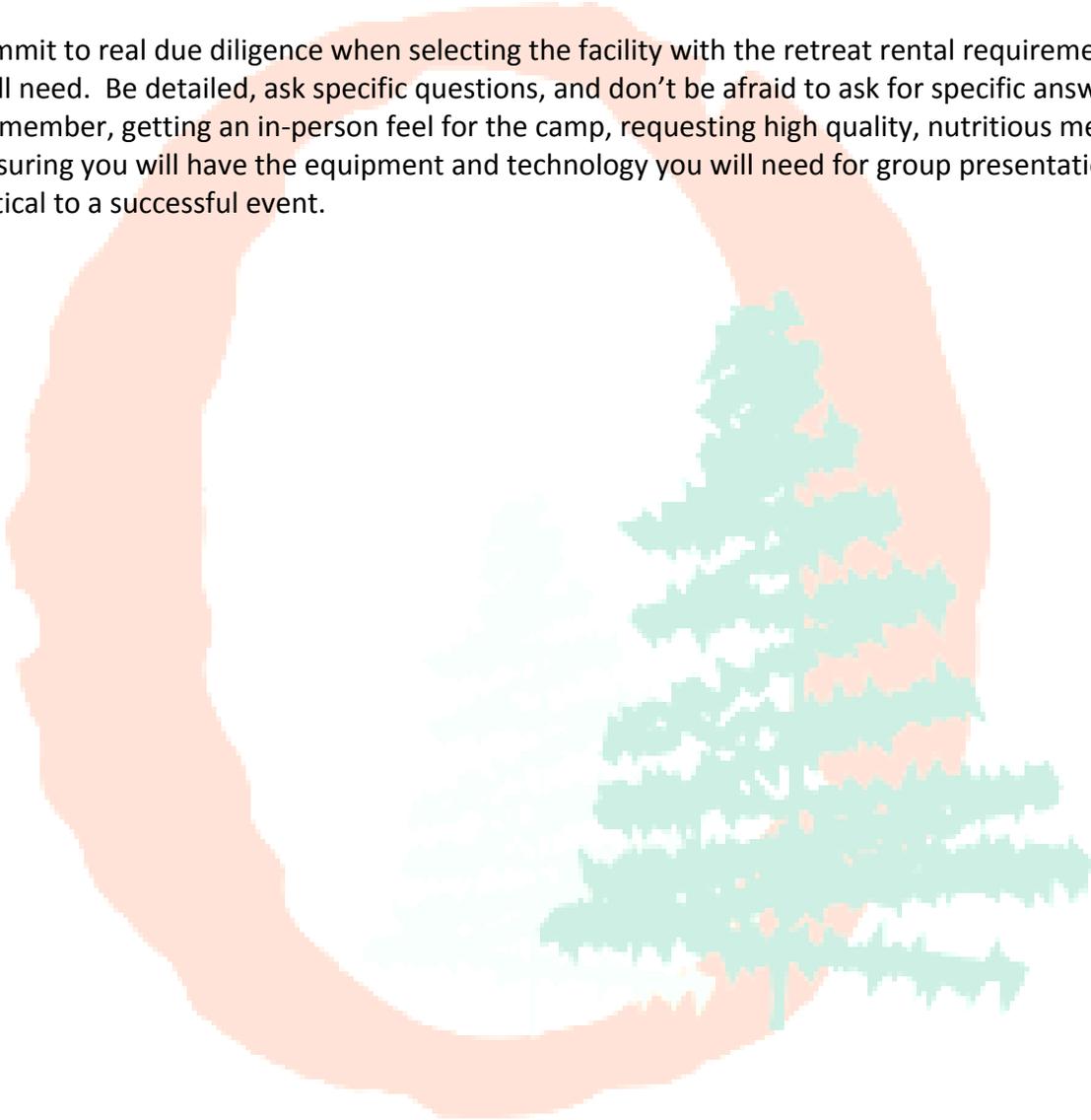
Everybody knows the stories of “camp food.” They can be really funny unless you’re actually living the story! Retreat rentals that serve beans and weenies can be okay for children, but even kids deserve fresh fruits and vegetables, and no one likes to eat canned or processed food for an entire week or weekend.

Thankfully, many camps now offer high quality, hand prepared dishes, fresh baked goods and salad bars, and fresh cuts of meats. Many also have professionally trained staff members that take pride in the menus they prepare for their guests. So, ask staff members to be very specific in what they serve for meals. General comments like, “oh, our food is great” or “you won’t be disappointed” aren’t helpful. And if you end up paying a premium for high quality meals, your guests will be really grateful you did.

3. If you will be using multi-media equipment, be very specific in what you need and in finding what the retreat facility has available to you.

It is amazing what “technology” can mean to different people. You can literally hear stories of retreat rentals facilities assuring their prospective guests of “state of the art” equipment, only to give them a 10 year old projector and pull up movie screen. And many times, staff members are not being dishonest, but they are simply speaking from what they know.

So, commit to real due diligence when selecting the facility with the retreat rental requirements you will need. Be detailed, ask specific questions, and don’t be afraid to ask for specific answers. And remember, getting an in-person feel for the camp, requesting high quality, nutritious meals and assuring you will have the equipment and technology you will need for group presentations are critical to a successful event.





## Conference Retreats: A Checklist for All Event Planners

Centers across the Midwest offer a wide variety of venues for hosting conference retreats. These destinations are capable of hosting groups of all sizes and types. Most centers are located near geographic features like woods, lakes, and rolling hills. All conference retreat sites are unique and are best suited to a place that fulfills the particular need of the group attending.

Common conference retreats are developed around the following interests: team development, couples' retreats, youth groups, artist workshops, spiritual retreats, weddings, counseling sessions, arts workshops, family reunions, and also retreats just for women or men.

It is essential to find a center that has specific amenities that are best suited for each of the particular interest groups. Obviously, conference retreats featuring men's recreational activities like wall climbing or skeet shooting would need to be located at a site known for its diversity of indoor and outdoor features. Artistic or counseling retreats would need to be removed from noisy traffic and distractions.

The following is a checklist for event planners when searching for the perfect center for its conference retreats:

- ✓ transportation available to and from the center,
- ✓ dining hall fare,
- ✓ equipment available for usage,
- ✓ climate,
- ✓ recreational opportunities,
- ✓ insurance requirements, and
- ✓ deposit information.

Other details to investigate are the policies on pets, alcoholic beverages, quiet hours, and smoking.

Conference retreats generally feature guest speakers who are experts in their field. Rooms should be comfortably filled to capacity, but not over crowded. The room should reflect the appropriate atmosphere for the topic. Meeting rooms can be set up in one of these four basic seating styles: theater style, banquet style, classroom style, or reception style.

Centers for conference retreats and their meeting rooms should include most of these items: sound system, lighting options, podium, stage, chairs, tables, and water service for guests. Speakers' needs must also be addressed. Equipment that is typically requested includes: audio systems, lighting, wired and wireless microphones, internet connectivity, projectors and screens, and TV/VCR/DVDs.



Conference retreats offer the attendees a place to withdraw from the daily routine. They also offer a time and place to focus on business, relationships, hobbies, or spiritual renewal. The trick is to find the place that best suits the needs.





## Christian Retreat Planning on a Budget

Planning a retreat for a Christian church group can easily be done on a tight budget -- with a little creativity and a bit of elbow grease. Follow the steps below in planning and you are sure to have a wonderful time.

1. Choose a setting that is close to home. Gasoline costs can be shared by carpools. There is no need to stop to buy a meal on the way. Have travelers pack a snack for the road trip.
2. Also choose a center that allows you to bring in your own food. Prepare meals in bulk prior to the retreat and bring them with you. Or ask everyone to bring some food for at least one potluck dinner.
3. Search for speakers that volunteer their time, or ask a nearby pastor to be your guest speaker.
4. If you need to purchase supplies like notebooks, decorations, or candles, make a list of all the supplies needed in planning your Christian retreat, and distribute the list to your church. Ask for donations, which can be tax deductible.
5. Rather than paying a band to play for your worship time, consider making a CD mix of favorite praise songs. Bring along a portable sound system.
6. If you are planning a Christian retreat with a theme, and you wish to have decorations, remember to check your church inventory for decorations that had been previously purchased and stored away.
7. If you are planning to have meals served at your Christian retreat, why not choose to skip the first evening's dinner and bring hot dogs to roast over the campfire. (This is a great ice breaker too!)
8. Work with the camp director to see where you can opt to cut costs. Christian charity is known to be extended for retreat planning on a budget. Perhaps you can opt out of the linen service that the camp customarily provides. Ask your retreat attendees to bring sleeping bags and their own pillows instead. Can your group volunteer one hour per day on work crew at camp, in order to offset the cost for your group? Find out if there are any "scholarship" funds available through the retreat center itself. Often these camps have yearly donors that support the camp.

Save money for your participants and your church's retreat budget by implementing a combination of these recommendations.



## **Retreat Centers: The Staff is There to Serve**

Just as pastors feel called to the ministry, so do most staff members at Christian Camps. Because of the daily opportunity to serve others in Christlike ways, retreat centers generally offer one of the most rewarding work environments. Make sure you search for a retreat center whose staff has adopted a servant-hearted model.

### **Director Positions**

Most camp directors hold a full-time position. They have experience with: fund raising, marketing, operations, reservations, guest relations, facilities maintenance, building and inventory management, bookkeeping and accounting. Sometimes, depending on the retreat center's needs, they will also be able to facilitate spiritual activities and events. Usually a college degree is required, in addition to excellent communication skills, event marketing, and management and computer skills. Often, directors of retreat centers have experience in event coordination, hospitality and ministry.

### **Program Director Positions**

Qualifications typically required for program staff include: staff experience in a resident camp, supervisory skills, management experience and the ability to evaluate the performance of camp counselors, and training/teaching experience. Retreat centers may also ask program directors to train and supervise program counselors, coordinate camp activities and special events, and provide primary backup of program counselors. These positions may be full-time or seasonal.

### **Camp Counselor Positions**

Camp counselors are usually hired seasonally to work at retreat centers. Required qualifications may focus on some of the following abilities: relating to one's peer group, accepting supervision and guidance, working with children, and assisting in teaching activities. Character traits most needed are: integrity, adaptability, and enthusiasm, a sense of humor, patience, and self-control.

For many Christians, the benefits of working at any one of the thousands of retreat centers across the country can offset a smaller salary. Most retreat centers have a mission statement that centers on renewal of body, mind, and spirit. Located in beautiful settings and staffed by harmonious people, the work experience may truly become a career path, and even, a way of life. Let them serve you as you plan and execute your church's retreat.



## Christian Retreat Ideas: The Finishing Touch

So you're planning a retreat for your church group. Now you need some new Christian retreat ideas. You can make your event a more enriching experience if you pay attention to the details and add some creativity.

If you have not yet defined a purpose for your retreat, this is the first thing you should do. Once you have defined the purpose of your event, you will want to pick a theme. Themes can center on a passage of scripture (i.e.: 1Corinthians 13). Some people choose a theme based on a subject (i.e.: faithfulness, joy, or intimacy). Still other event planners go with fun themes like country western or medieval times. There are many Christian retreat ideas that can be a catalyst to your theme.

As previously mentioned, a great suggestion is to recruit a group of volunteers to help in planning and executing the event. Initiate several brainstorming sessions during your planning meetings with this retreat planning team. Many creative Christian retreat ideas will originate from these brainstorming sessions.

The most obvious ways to incorporate your theme into your retreat are in the food, the music, the speaker's sessions, and the activities. Other Christian retreat ideas are unique, ranging from the idea of hanging posters on the walls of the dorm rooms, to playing games that teach the theme through interaction.

Don't forget to consider the comfort of your retreat attendees. Give them a preparation list so that they can pack to accommodate the weather, the setting, and the activities. Also include in the list additional items that may come in handy when they are at the retreat, such as a journal, flashlight, and insect repellent. These Christian retreat ideas make the difference between a good experience and a poor experience.

Another one of many favorite Christian retreat ideas is to gift each guest, upon arrival, with a small tote bag filled with items such as a water bottle, a package of crackers, a name tag, a highlighter, and best of all...earplugs. (A good night's sleep is imperative to a great retreat experience!) You may also choose to leave a mint on the pillow of each attendee. These small yet thoughtful gifts will make your guests feel comfortable and welcome. Paying attention to these small details will be well worth your time and effort and ensure a memorable retreat experience for all.



## ***SECTION 3: Who: Women's Retreats***

### **Christian Women's Retreats: Ministering to the Whole Woman**

Ask many Christian women how they feel, and the answer is pretty simple: they're tired. The many roles women play leaves little time for reflection and renewal. Many women have found themselves playing the role of not only wife and mother, but also as taxi driver, nurse, coach, and many times, as a stand-in for dad. Most women also hold down a steady job to pay the bills. Many of these harried ladies say of themselves that they don't even know who they are anymore. Too much stress and not enough down time can create a very unhappy woman, wife and mother. It is essential that these types of women go regularly to Christian women's retreats.

What kind of atmosphere is necessary for a woman to relax and rejuvenate? Typically Christian women's retreats include times of study, discussion, and prayer. It is imperative that a woman thinks about some of the deep longings of her heart. She should be able to consider things she wants to change in her life, and how she would like to deepen some of her relationships.

Not all Christian women's retreats follow the same agenda. Some retreats focus on unstructured conversation time, while others are geared toward lengthy silent meditation. There is a Christian women's retreat for every kind of Christian woman.

While there is no rule for how long a retreat should be, the most common Christian women's retreat takes place over a weekend, usually starting on Friday evening, and ending Sunday afternoon. Some churches may have the ability to allow an entire week for a retreat. Some individual ladies even take a sabbatical for a month or two.

Assuming your church decides on a weekend retreat, small details can really add to the atmosphere of Christian women's retreats. Meals, recreational choices, sleeping arrangements, and setting...all of these can greatly increase a woman's experience of spiritual refreshment. Because no two women are alike, not every retreat is helpful for every woman. There are hundreds of different Christian women's retreats offered in every city and state across the U.S. Tailor your retreat to your group's needs.



## **Christian Women's Conferences: A Place for Renewed Hope**

Conferences for Christian women have grown in popularity over recent years. Whether it is a conference that features nationally known speakers or a women's conference planned by a local group like a church, women are finding ways to get away, connect with other women, and find renewed hope.

Ohio has many beautiful Christian camps and retreat centers, so there is always a selection from which to choose for women's conferences. And a Christian women's retreat offers a unique opportunity for women to delve into the issues and challenges of being a woman, as well as time for solitude, enjoying small group discussions, and hearing helpful information from scheduled speakers.

Christian women's conferences can vary in the topics covered, length, size, and format, so it is good to find out as much as you can from church friends who may have planned something similar in the past. Past conferences will be featured on the sponsor's website or on the website of the camp or conference center that is hosting it, so it's usually easy to find out all the information you need.

Also, you may find that the cost of a Christian women's conference is relatively inexpensive when compared to other professional conferences. Churches and other non-profits usually try to keep the cost of conferences affordable, and many Christian camps and retreat centers are also very affordable. One other point to remember regarding cost is that sometimes there are scholarships available to either partially or fully cover the cost of a conference, so if finances are a concern, find out if there is any assistance available.

It is rare for a woman to get away from hectic schedules and responsibilities, primarily because of ongoing family and work commitments. If your church can help a woman arrange childcare or provide meals to her family in her absence, this will go a long way toward freeing her from her responsibilities that might otherwise keep her from attending a retreat. Given her rejuvenated spirit, she may return home from the week or weekend a refreshed woman, wife and/or mother.

So give your church members a valuable treat and either facilitate or help them find a Christian women's conference to attend. Women need to take to heart: it has been said that a way to be kind to the ones you love is to also be kind to yourself. So, allow the women in your church to enjoy the benefits of getting away, being rejuvenated, and having some fun, and they will have more to offer the ones they love the most and the Body of Christ at large.



## Women's Retreat Planning - Four Steps to Creating a Great Theme

Looking for a theme for a women's retreat? Many pastors or women's ministry leaders find themselves in the position of creating a new theme for the annual women's retreat. When choosing from the myriad of possible themes, there are several things to consider.

1. Know the needs of your group.

It is important to be in touch with the women being served. What issues are they facing? What topics of conversation have arisen over the past year? What concerns or difficulties do they face in their relationships, in their work, or in their community? The success of a women's retreat is sure hinge upon the topic of the retreat; make sure your retreat planning team chooses the topic well.

2. Discover what motivates your group.

Keep in mind the motivating factor behind why the ladies will be attending this women's retreat. Young mothers need time away from preschoolers, as well as some adult conversation. Working women generally gravitate toward times of recreation and a relaxed schedule. Empty-nesters will most likely want extended time for conversation.

3. Pick a simple theme around what motivates your group.

Simply choose one word to be the theme for the women's retreat. Simple words can be the springboard for many activities. For example, the topic may be "Freedom." From this word, there is direction as to what books to study. Discussion time can focus on areas of one's life that need to feel freedom. Meditation time may focus on getting free of the thoughts that do not bring life to the heart. Even decorating the retreat center can focus on freedom, with red, white, and blue colors. Once the topic is chosen and the audience is identified, the rest of the women's retreat plans will come to life. Choose a word and let the ideas flow.

4. Plan well and keep the schedule simple.

Accommodating this vast audience may seem overwhelming, but with a well-planned women's retreat schedule, it is possible to meet the needs of most of these ladies. The best recipe for success includes times of study, discussion, prayer, worship, meditation, recreation, free time, and of course, some great snacks available throughout the retreat.



## One Woman Retreat: At Peace with Self

Ask any women's retreat attendee what she liked most from her retreat and she will most likely answer that she enjoyed the refreshment of time alone. This answer seems to be what a woman on retreat desires: solitude and spiritual refreshment. Unfortunately most every group retreat invites women into community, but rarely into solitude with the Lord. Very few women at a retreat will carve away the time for taking a personal, private retreat with God. Though it takes effort and determination to set aside time for this kind of get-away in the midst of the group, it is well worth the effort.

A woman must meet the needs of so many others in her life. Quite often she carries the burden of managing the home and children. Many women also work full time or part time outside of the home. The emotional pressure can escalate and cause women to feel anxious and even depressed. However, if a woman retreats to a quiet, peaceful setting, she can take some time to unwind and rejuvenate in body, soul, and spirit.

A church can even plan a one woman retreat. Although a large group of women may attend, each woman has full control in choosing the prayer topics and the Scripture she reads. Each woman's retreat is as individual as she is. Perhaps the woman retreats to her cabin bedroom. Another option is the camp's dining hall. Still another option is hiking throughout the retreat center's wooded grounds.

Many pastors plan morning group activities, then create an entire unstructured afternoon so their attendees can have a one woman retreat. While one woman may choose to bring books to sit and read, another may choose to bring hiking gear to wander the grounds. The most important aspect to consider in determining the activity she will do is this: Does the activity enhance her feeling of rest and rejuvenation? Does it allow her to individually hear from God?

A final thought: give the women several questions to ponder. These questions can relate to the overall retreat theme. They should be open-ended questions that the women can personally take to God in prayer. Give them time to take the questions to God, hear His answers, and the one woman retreat can be an essential part of your church's overall women's retreat.



## Women's Conferences: Exploring Women's Issues

Hundreds of women's conferences are held each year across the U.S. Most of these gatherings for women aim to educate, inspire, and provide opportunities to network with other women. While many conferences are organized by a group of sponsors, other women's conferences are sponsored by a single organization like a church.

Topics range from personal concerns to global issues. The most popular women's conferences center on spiritual renewal. These can be small retreats or may average several thousand in attendance. Speakers for the larger venues generally are chosen for their outstanding literary accomplishments. Oftentimes, breakout sessions are offered for smaller group discussion.

Women's conferences focusing on the topics of business and leadership are also very popular events. The sessions generally cover the issues of finance, opportunity, management, team building, and entrepreneurial endeavors. The speakers chosen for these events have a proven track record in successful business ventures. Attendees glean helpful information to apply at the workplace.

There is also a wide variety of women's conferences geared toward the following topics: women's health, relationships and marriage, social transformation, and political and social issues. Whatever the topic of the women's conference, these gatherings offer a few things in common. They all have engaging speakers. They offer advice and information that is helpful in improving the topic of concern. And most importantly, any women's conference provides a place for women to connect with other women who have the same interests.

The cost of attending a women's conference obviously depends on several factors. The retreat centers and the organizers initially determine that cost. Quite often, organizations and businesses off-set the conference cost to attendees by donating items and services. Many sponsors simply donate funds. Not only is this a tax benefit for the business or organization, it also promotes the entity, by way of free advertising. I know one retreat to which a local Chick-Fil-A franchisee donated lunch. This is a win-win situation for both the sponsors and the women's conferences attendees.

Obviously, churches and smaller Christian ministries organize smaller retreats for women. Since women are social creatures, they work well within a community. At smaller women's conferences, attendees use networking to enhance that community, resulting in richer, fuller lives for the women who attend. When a woman changes her life, she changes her world. Women's conferences and local retreats are where that growth can begin.



## Christian Women Retreat Preparations– A Recipe for Success

When Christian women retreat for a weekend of renewal, they hope to come back refreshed and rejuvenated. Unfortunately, many problems can arise -- before and during the retreat -- which can negatively affect the impact of the retreat. However, many of these problems can be avoided and prevented. With a little forethought, the Christian women's retreat can be a very positive experience. The following are five preparation tips to ensure a very rewarding Christian women retreat. By helping attendees think through these tips, you can set their minds at ease for their weekend or week away from their daily routines.

1. If your attendees have small children, arrange for childcare well in advance. Sometimes a household budget does not take into account a large sum for an extended babysitter fee. If this is the case, encourage bartering with another mother. Moms can swap childcare for a service such as housecleaning. Or, perhaps they can swap a few homemade casseroles in exchange for babysitting.
2. Encourage women to prepare some meals that their family can reheat while Mom is away at the Christian women's retreat. A few great suggestions are meatloaf, mashed potatoes, spaghetti, tuna noodle casserole, a large tossed salad, and as a bonus, cookies in the cookie jar. Be sure to also stock the refrigerator with some fresh fruit. Prepackaged snacks are a favorite for the little ones. Suggest that women take a few of those snacks for themselves on the retreat.
3. When packing, have them bring along a small amount of various over-the-counter medicines. Essential medicines include pain reliever, cough medicine, cough drops, allergy medicine, antacids, and anti-diarrheal medicine. Also suggest a few band aids and tissues, and don't let them forget the earplugs to insure their comfort.
4. Check the weather forecast for the area for the Christian retreat site. Encourage that women pack a jacket, a warm hat, a scarf and a pair of gloves. Sunglasses, sunscreen, and insect repellent should also be packed.
5. Ask attendees to leave emergency phone numbers at home for their family's use. While at the Christian women's retreat, they will rest more easily if preparations are in place for minor incidences that occur at home. Ask them to turn off their cell phones for portions of the weekend, checking-in only now and then.



## Christian Women's Retreats – Questions to Answer Before Planning a Retreat

Christian women's retreats come in all sizes and shapes. Some are exciting with music, speakers, dance, pageantry, and games. Still others are quiet, intimate, or very personal. There is a myriad of retreat schedules from which to choose. As the retreat planner, you get to set the tone based on what suits the spiritual needs of your group. It is worthwhile to invest a little time and effort to research the Christian women's retreat offerings.

First of all, determine what your needs are, and what you'd like to offer in a retreat. Are your ladies in need of inner peace? Or they long for deep interpersonal connection with other ladies? Perhaps you want to offer some guidance for a particular issue in their lives. Ask your retreat planning team if they know what the women are searching for. The answer is of utmost importance when planning a Christian women's retreat.

Once you have identified the group's desires, you will want to research the many venues that are available in your area. Consider doing an internet search for "Christian retreat centers." You can also contact local churches for information on their previous retreat locations. Investigate the many nonprofit organizations that focus on women's issues. Often, they sponsor annual retreats which feature highly esteemed female leaders; they may be interested in co-sponsoring a getaway. If you do the planning and the marketing, they may be willing to provide the speakers and offer financial underwriting.

"A friend in need is a friend in deed." If the women in your church are experiencing particularly difficult inner turmoils, you may want to consider asking them to each invite a friend to attend the Christian women's retreat with them. Sometimes a friend can bring vision and hope to them as they process the issues that arise at the retreat. If they have a small circle of close friends, it can be very rewarding to experience a retreat together. This can lay the groundwork for follow-up discussion groups or small groups to form after the retreat. Think of the boost to your church and the spiritual growth of its members!



## One Woman's Retreat Experience

I know a woman who went on a retreat designed for a woman's heart. It was one of the highlights of her life. Now, as a Christian woman, she had been on many a retreat. But this particular retreat far surpassed them all. Every aspect of the retreat was geared toward a woman's heart. The setting was sublime and the food surprisingly wonderful. The speakers reached into places she said she had long forgotten. There was healing. There was restoration. There was freedom. She felt more alive than she had ever felt.

It took place in a valley surrounded by the great Rocky Mountains. The lodging was comfortably rustic yet welcoming, as were the staff members. About 400 ladies had come to this place with anticipation and the retreat center did not disappoint them. Hot tubs, ball courts, and hiking trails were available to everyone, but the setting is not what made this particular woman's retreat experience different from the others.

Nor was the difference found in the dining hall with all its bounty. She shared that they were waited on by smiling servers who lavished them with savory bacon and eggs in the mornings and fresh bread and fine entrees in the evenings. They indulged in a full salad bar at lunchtime. The desserts, especially the warm chocolate chip cookie smothered in hot fudge and ice cream, were to die for. But again, this was not the reason that this woman's retreat experience was exceptional.

What made this woman's retreat so unique were the amazing messages that the speakers shared. With much candor and passion, the five speakers shared about the core desires of every woman's heart. A retreat like that is a rare thing in this world of pretense and women's rights. Women could relate so closely to what they had to say. The speakers shared honestly and openly about the painful things in their lives. They also spoke about the healing that was available through faith. But most importantly, they ushered women into a place of spiritual freedom through Christ. That is what made this woman's retreat an experience she will never forget as long as she lives.

In all, the setting, the food, and the retreat center's amenities are important to a retreat's overall impact in someone's life. But they will never be as important as the message being proclaimed. When you plan a women's retreat, offer words of Life and Truth, and those who attend your church's retreat – whether women, men, or youth – will come away changed.



## ***SECTION 4: Who: Men's Retreats***

### **Christian Men's Retreat: Great for Mind, Body, and Spirit**

Across the nation, Christian men's retreats are growing in popularity, and Ohio has some of the best venues in the Midwest. Many faith-based camps feature cabin retreats for all ages, featuring beautiful lakes, soul-refreshing beauty, abundant recreational opportunities, and the space for solitude so men can truly connect to God and to each other.

Specifically in the Mohican River Valley region, Ohio's faith-based retreat centers offer not only the quiet and seclusion needed for successful retreats, but they also include great dining options and an assortment of recreation options for fun and relaxation. Many offer the recreational options men prefer: canoeing, rock-wall climbing, hiking, fishing, skeet shooting, paintball, Frisbee golf, volleyball, and indoor gym facilities for such things as basketball and game rooms. In the evenings men get the privacy of their own cabin, but by day they get the great accommodations of a professionally run camp.

Most retreat arrangements will be inclusive, so men's cabin accommodations, dining and recreation are all included in the price to attend. Many churches and men's organizations plan retreats throughout the year, with Summer and Fall being the most popular.

A unique difference to faith-based retreats is that, along with the chance to enjoy a cozy cabin and relaxed days of outdoor fun, most retreats will feature speakers, discussion groups, and times for worship, prayer and meditation. This brings a special depth that regular vacation times may not offer. In a world of busy schedules and hectic days, retreating for a week or weekend nurtures men's hearts and allows them to focus on God.

Cabins, lakes, personal times of study, group and individual times of fellowship, and heartfelt conversations during beautiful hikes in the woods are all part of the retreat experiences that can be found with faith-based camps of the Mohican area of Ohio. And, the best way to find out what is scheduled in the coming months is to contact local camps, search the internet for retreat centers in Ohio that fit your particular needs, or ask friends and fellow pastors for the places they love to hold their retreats.

As men look back on their stay in a rustic cabin along with great times with friends and times of fellowship, they will probably consider their stay as one of the best memories of their year.



## Christian Men's Retreats – Done Right, They're Powerful

There's a stereotype about men that, if true, is only partly true. In a recent children's film, the main male character tells his wife, "For guys, a punch in the shoulder is like six months of therapy." In other words, men don't know how, nor do they really need, to talk honestly and openly with each other. A "hey buddy," with a brotherly jab in the shoulder is about as close as we will ever get to connecting with another man and trying to be his ally.

Well, sadly, the stereotype can be true at times, but it's not because men don't have the ability or the need to speak honestly about their lives, their challenges, or their problems. It's that many men have simply never had this modeled or taught. And, when a person lacks the vision or the know-how for something, it's easier to fake their way through things so they can avoid what feels awkward or foreign. But, a well planned and well executed men's retreat can provide a forum and environment for men to unplug from the demands of life and experience a level of honesty with themselves, with other men, and even with God.

Several things need to be considered and then put into place at a men's retreat, but if retreat leaders take the following three suggestions to heart, they will be off to a great start in creating a men's retreat experience that will foster positive change in the lives of men.

1. Find a location for your men's retreat that has as much wilderness and natural beauty as possible.

Not everyone lives near the mountains or the sea, but every corner of Ohio is near natural, rugged, unspoiled places. And having a men's retreat in the conference room or basement of your local church doesn't do much to open a man's soul.

You don't have to have men rappelling off a cliff or rafting through whitewater to help them get out of the ordinary and be open to the unexpected, but giving them wide open fields, wooded trails, or lakeshores to explore just does something to a man... and it's good.

2. If you have men speaking or facilitating at your men's retreat, make sure they are men that have sincerely journeyed in their message and not just studied a book.

When a church or other group chooses some popular book, tells a team of men to read it and then assigns a chapter to each, there is little strength and power to the message. It ends up being a "staged" or "scripted" program, and there will be little that is authentic. If you let men hear from other men who are genuine, tell the truth about their lives, and let the power of their lives speak for them, then you may very well help other men do the same.

Ask men and most will tell you they want to be in the company of a man who has become



someone rather than one who simply knows something. Who the speaker is is much more powerful than what the speaker knows.

3. Don't plan guided or structured activities for every hour of the retreat, and honor a man's privacy. The way many men's retreats are planned and structured, it seems like the leadership doesn't believe a man can go out and experience much that is deep or spiritual on his own.

Sadly, men go from large sessions where speakers teach... to assigned discussion groups that are also led in some way... to recreation times... to meal times... and back to large sessions, with little, if any unstructured time to be alone and decide what they need on their own. Retreats can almost feel like elementary schools where bells ring, as the participants are watched and led along all day long.

Trust a man to be out on his own for an hour, or for a number of hours, without his blackberry, laptop, cell phone, and you may be amazed at what can happen. So, be intentional to have your retreat planning team create long periods of time when men do not need to be led, taught, assigned to a discussion group, or counseled. They just get to be alone and do what they feel is the best thing to do. God will cause good things will happen.



## ***SECTION 5: Who: Youth Retreats***

### **Christian Youth Camps: A Great Way to Connect with God**

For many, Christian youth camps have played a very special part in their lives. Some of the best memories of growing up are often made at summer camp, and many Christian young people have drawn closer to God because a camp counselor or youth pastor spoke life-giving words and offered genuine friendship.

If you have ever worked with young people, you know the power of getting them away from the stress of school and busyness. It's always amazing to watch how a young person can change within a week, if they unplug, and let their hearts connect with God.

One way to find the right Christian youth camp is to ask friends and families for their recommendations and their own experiences. People who have great memories of summer camp love to tell their stories and even send their own children to the same camp they loved as a kid. Ask them why they loved it and find out why their kids loved it, too. Though Christian youth camp websites and brochures are really helpful, getting first hand recommendations from the people you trust says a lot.

Another good way to choose the right youth camp is to check with your own church board or churches in your community to find out what youth retreats they hold during the year. Many churches put on really fun and enriching retreats for children and teens, and since they are local, they usually use a youth camp that's not too far away or provide the transportation needed to get the campers there. Even the bus ride to camp can be quite an adventure!

Finally, knowing that a Christian youth camp is accredited with a reputable association tells you they are committed to excellence by upholding standards above state licensing. Search online for Christian camping associations to find Christian youth camps in your area and to find out if the camp you are considering is affiliated.



## **Christian Youth Retreats: A Great Place for Kids to Hear Truth**

Looking for an alternative to the typical summer camp? Looking for a setting that will not only be enjoyable for your kids but also help them grow in their walk with God? Then check out the various Christian Youth Retreats available in Ohio and other Midwestern states.

Today's youth are continually hearing messages from those around them and from the media about who they should be. Sadly, in many cases, these messages are not positive but they can still be formative. But, wouldn't be great for your youth to get away and retreat to hear what God says about them? What He thinks about them?

Spending a week away from all the busyness and pressure, and having the opportunity to hear and experience the great news of God's amazing love for us, is good for anybody. It can be especially powerful in the life of a young person.

Christian youth retreats can be really fun, too. Swimming, water balloon fights, bonfires, canoeing, hiking, rock-climbing walls and a lot of other great activities are all part of the week. And many young people treasure the friendships they make with other youth and the camp staff that work with them. Most camp counselors are college age, and young people look up to them and can be influenced by them in some very special ways.

Every summer young people will say that their Christian youth retreat was one of the best weeks of their life lives. Others say that their retreat week even changed their life. Sure, having a week of archery, good food, and summer fun is really great, but when a parent hears that a retreat changed their child's life and impacted them as a Christian, it doesn't get much better than that!

An internet search is a great way to locate Christian youth retreats near you. Many Christian youth organizations and churches will put on great retreats, so check with your friends, contact local churches, and do a little internet research to find an option that will serve you well. Either plan your own weeklong youth retreat, or encourage your students to attend a residential Christian camp near you. You'll be glad you did!



## Youth Group Retreats: Memories that Last a Lifetime

Some adults say their best memories growing up were of their church youth group. Many loved their Youth Pastor, and each week they saw friends that they didn't see at school since they lived in different parts of our city. Youth group give a chance to get out of the "cliques" of one's own school, get involved in service activities that really matter, and to learn more about God with kids of one's own age and with older kids that you can look to.

And, some of the best times with youth group can be the Fall and Summer retreats. Annually you can we travel to beautiful camps, bunk up in an old and rustic cabin, eat a ton of food, and spend countless hours talking about life and about God. God's Word comes alive during youth group retreats, and retreats give a chance to talk to God in honest and very personal ways. These youth group retreats can change life forever.

It's encouraging to hear other adults talk about their friendships, encounters with God and His word, and all the fun found at Christian youth retreats. Even being a parent volunteer gives the chance to "become like a child" again, which is what Jesus said would be one of the secrets to understanding His Kingdom.

Young people ask so many great questions! They are honest, unedited, and many times, uninhibited with the ways they seek after God. And it's always refreshing, and it helps adults to be honest and simple again in their faith.

Parents know it's good to have their children get away from the normal peer pressures and busyness of crazy schedules, but if you are a Christian, parents also long for their kids to take time for their own soul and spirit. Youth group retreats are a way for kids to get the best of both worlds. They will enjoy all the benefits of getting away, and just like many adults, they may very possibly have their lives changed forever.



## **Christian Youth Retreats: Overcome the Financial Burdens with Great Planning**

Christian youth retreats are said to be some of the most significant events in a teen's life. When teens are taken out of their typical environment and put into a different one, the atmosphere is conducive to reflection, decision-making, and significant personal growth. Unfortunately, not all Christian youths can afford to go to retreats. However, with a bit of creativity and a little elbow grease, a teen can find a way to earn his way to camp.

Many Christian youth retreats take place over a weekend. This section, however, will focus on the week-long Christian youth retreats -- the very ones that teens and their families find "too expensive." The first thing to do is determine the actual cost to the camper. Remember to keep in mind incidentals, like meals and fuel costs. Once you have the bottom line, check the calendar to see how many weeks there are till the payment due date. Divide the total due by the number of weeks, and calculate how much cash must be earned or raised each week. This helps the students saving for Christian youth retreats see the goal as reachable. The old adage says you eat an elephant one bite at a time.

Christian youth retreats often offer three ways to help a camper afford the cost. These options include: fund-raisers, reduced fees, and scholarships. Fund raisers can take the form of the typical door to door product sales, coupon book sales, or raffles. Still other fund raisers are turned into large events, where the campers volunteer their time to serve at the event, in order to earn money toward Christian youth retreats. Examples of these fund raisers include car washes, yard work days for members of the church, and serving on post-event cleaning crews for community events such as concerts and festivals.

Some families have asked Christian youth retreats and their directors if there is an option for a reduced fee. Sometimes the camp will accept volunteer work hours at the retreat center as barter for all or part of the week's stay a Christian camp for the youth retreat. It is not uncommon that Christian youth retreats offer scholarships to students because they have financial support from donors.

Obviously, the sure way to earn fees for Christian youth retreats is by good old elbow grease. Teens are able to do many odd jobs. The typical odd jobs for teens include babysitting, yard work, pet sitting, car washing, and snow shoveling. But with a little creativity, there is a job for everyone. It is very rewarding for teens to know that they can earn their own way to any one of many the Christian youth retreats available today.



## ***SECTION 6: Who: Counseling Retreats for Individual or Couples***

### **Christian Counseling Retreats – Hope for Healthy Relationships**

Traditional counseling has helped thousands over the years. Recently, however, clients are reporting that intensive counseling retreats have yielded greater, more powerful effects than their traditional weekly counseling format. An intensive Christian counseling retreat generally occurs over the period of about three full days, spent at a place designed specifically for this type of encounter. Marriage counseling is particularly effective in this type of atmosphere. Couples can get counseling in such areas as intimacy, mid-life crisis, empty-nest syndrome, financial freedom, improved communication, sexuality, and divorce prevention.

Counseling retreats are often lead by clergy, social work professionals, financial counselors, mature Christian couples, and licensed therapists. The format of the retreat can include, but is not limited to: seminars, workshops, individual sessions, and marriage encounters. With the help of a professional, many marriages have been restored and healed at intensive weekends like this. Couples are able to avoid common pitfalls while enhancing communication. When intimacy is restored within marriage, it is proven that the entire family unit is healthier and happier.

Why would a three day retreat be more effective than traditional weekly counseling sessions? The main benefit is due to the continuous, concentrated time available. Often when counseling sessions reach a pivotal point in a traditional delivery model, the time allotted is expired; the client and therapist must table the discussion until the next appointment. Within intensive counseling retreats, clients and therapists have the luxury of virtually unlimited time in which to delve deeply into these issues.

Another advantage of counseling retreats is the removal of things familiar. This environment fosters a fresh perspective on life. There are no peripheral duties or distractions that hinder the task at hand. Freedom from responsibilities allows a client to unplug from the everydayness of life. It is the perfect situation for taking inventory of the heart. It absolutely invites reflection. The client is able to discern the difference between the urgent things in life and the truly important things. Counseling retreats offer a setting that is peaceful, confidential, and secure. They promote personal and relational growth.

Counseling retreats can benefit any couple at any point in their relationship. Whether the couple is engaged, newlywed, encountering difficulties, longing for deeper intimacy, newly empty-nested, on the verge of bankruptcy, or at some other crossroads, an intensive weekend together with a professional guide can enhance the marriage in innumerable ways.

Ask your church's retreat planning team to consider the best ways to facilitate your couple's weekend. Ask God to provide the right Christian camp facility for the couples He knows will be attending.



## A Personal Spiritual Retreat: Observing a Day of Silence

Few people have ever found the hidden treasure of observing a special kind of Christian spiritual retreat called a retreat of silence. Like prophets of the Old Testament and Jesus himself, this retreat focuses on individual time with God. Some have other ways to describe this type of retreat: meditation, listening to the inner self, or hearing the voice of God. Whatever you prefer to call it, a day of silence gives breath to the soul. For Christians, this kind of retreat can be truly spiritual. The traditional retreat format includes games, activities, and lectures, which can unfortunately take the place of actually communicating with God. The day of silence is just the opposite. The only things you do all day are talk to God and listen for His voice.

We are inundated with sound everywhere we go. The car radio blasts on when I turn the key. The grocery store is playing Aerosmith in “musak! “ And you can learn how to speak Italian when visiting the rest room in your favorite restaurant, as they play language tapes over the speaker system! Planes zoom. Trains screech. Cell phones beep and ping. The TV blares with commercials. Did you ever notice that you can virtually never escape the noise? Just as a body needs rest, so does the spirit. A quiet place is one anecdote to our stress.

As a Christian, it is good to connect in spirit with God. Some Christians commit to taking a personal spiritual retreat at least once a year, almost like they were planning an annual vacation. The idea is very simple. They find the most quiet, peaceful place they can. If you choose to offer your church members this type of retreat, select a Christian camp center which has single rooms available for their guests. Some retreat centers can provide housing for limited numbers in a lodge, making it more like a hotel stay. Apart from private housing and food, a personal spiritual retreat for any Christian does not have to be an expensive retreat.

Most people who plan a day of silence prefer to use an outdoor setting. Some prefer to hike, others to sit. If this sounds like the kind of spiritual retreat that fits your church members, be sure to have them bring along several things to make their experience more enjoyable. Have them bring the following: cushion, journal, pen, portable alarm clock, snacks, insect repellent, hat, sunscreen, hat, warm jacket, hiking shoes, and water bottle. The day is theirs ...indulge in the solitude and listen for the Father’s voice!



## ***About the Author***



Mark Dubler has been a leader, host, and participant in camps and retreats for the last twenty years. He holds an M.A. in Educational Ministries from Wheaton College and is the Executive Director of Otyokwah Camp and Retreat Center, a Christian facility with a rich history of providing personal, life-changing experiences.

## ***About Otyokwah Camp & Retreat Center***



Otyokwah Camp and Retreat Center began in June 1947 under the foresight and leadership of the Churches of God, General Conference.

Its purpose has been to provide the setting and facility for fellowship, nurture, and ministry to people of all ages.

Over the years at Otyokwah Camp and Retreat Center, many people have come to know Christ, been baptized, made friends, had enjoyable times, and made many memories.

With a program based on biblical principles, many campers have been led to a relationship with God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Summer camping ministry has consistently been an instrument to reach young lives with the importance of personal relationship with Jesus Christ.