

# United Methodist Women Retreats Manual



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Updated 2013

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## Retreats and Mission: The Connection

United Methodist Women members put our souls into following Christ as we participate in the total mission program of the church through our Mission Giving. Many of us also participate in hands-on mission through making kits, attending rallies, volunteering at a National Mission Institution, reading **response** and writing letters to officials to shape national and international policies, among other activities. Conferences are forming United Methodist Women units in prisons, where inmate members say, “There are lots of Bible study groups that come into the prison, but United Methodist Women is the only group in which we feel we are reaching out the make a difference in the world.”

United Methodist Women are Christian activists. Our programs affect women and children throughout the world. We do not let go of these important mission projects when we go to retreat. What we need is time for restoration without feeling as though our world is totally split between social action and spirituality. We need to experience the connection between body and spirit.

When Jesus broke the bread at the last supper, he didn’t say, “This is my spirit, broken for you.” He said, “This is my body, broken for you.” When he described the last judgment, Jesus did not ask, “When did you visit me in prison? When did you clothe me? When did you feed me?” He equated humble bodies with his own: “When you did it to them, you did it to me.”

Every time Jesus healed a woman, man or child, he was communicating that bodies matter, because they are a reflection of God’s image. It is not just the soul that needs tending. If we ignore the commonality of spirit and body, we may lose one or the other. In retreat, we want to say that both our spirits and our bodies matter.

Quite literally our bodies are healed when we spend time singing, praying, meditating and reflecting. And God’s love can bring us that inner peace that nurtures faith, hope and love the size of a mustard seed, a seed that can grow into a sturdy, giant tree that gives shade to many and houses hundreds of birds, squirrels and more.

When we go apart to experience God, it is not to retreat as in to pull back, but we can use it more literally to say we “re-treat” life. We treat our life again with the love of God so that we can re-treat daily life with the hands-on love of service and justice. That is the ministry to which Jesus calls us.

Our lives are not neatly divided into spiritual practices and social action practices. If we do not pray our way through a political demonstration in support of the rights of women and children, then we may lose courage when we find ourselves outside the enthusiasm of the mass demonstration. If we do not read our scriptures, we may find ourselves confused when someone quotes scripture that tells women to be silent in church. Spiritual practices help us both survive and thrive in a world that wants us to believe that greed determines the fate of the world. We know differently, and our spiritual grounding gives us the strength to live differently.

Our heritage from John Wesley teaches us that we must be balanced between “works of piety” and “works of mercy.”<sup>1</sup> Wesley described this as “practical Christianity.” He was less concerned about the details of a person’s beliefs than the day-to-day practices of prayer, Bible study, communion, fasting and worship—in combination with feeding the hungry, freeing the enslaved, visiting the imprisoned, teaching orphans and assisting widows.

So when we come together in retreat, we are not coming to do the real work of spirituality. We are gathering to nurture ourselves as part of a total real life of love, service and faithfulness. As United Methodist Women members, we are part of a long line of stalwart women who refused to give up in the face of criticism for being women in leadership managing our own mission monies. We have refused to be defeated by the seemingly impossible task of resisting racism, sexism and economic exploitation of women and children. We know that in Christ all things are possible! Alone we succumb to despair; together we offer our humble gifts to God so that God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

The everyday woman who shows up at a United Methodist Women’s event holds the hand of the woman in prayer next to her, and the woman next to her holds another’s hand until almost a million women hold the hand of someone else who prays that her hands, heart and life can be put to use in the service of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Yrigoyen Jr., with study guide by Ruth A. Daugherty, *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart and Life* (New York: Women’s Division, the General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church, 1996)

# Getting Started

Are you planning a retreat? Are you in need of a retreat? Do you want to lead a retreat? This manual can help. Retreats can be very simple if you are planning for yourself or a small, tightknit prayer group. Retreats can be much more complex if they are larger events that involve securing a site, arranging transportation and lining up a leader, musician, menus and so on. Ideally, even for a larger event, the planning is so excellent that participants think planning a retreat is easy.

## **Say a Little Prayer**

From the very beginning, know that you are not planning by yourself. Many of the women coming to the retreat are praying for it in advance. Your team members are working with you and bringing their own prayers. When you first learned of your responsibility to plan a retreat, you probably said a quick prayer: “God, help me on this one!” God really does come through in wonderful ways—even when we are not looking. That quick prayer is remembered at a soul level. God is with you. Your job is to work hard, take care of as many details as possible and then trust that the Holy Spirit will make this a meaningful experience for the seekers who come.

## **What Gift Do You Bring?**

You may think of yourself as a spiritually disciplined, prayerful person to whom many turn as spiritual guide. Or you may think of yourself as an overburdened Christian activist with little interest in quiet spiritual practice. All kinds of people end up being asked to plan a spiritual growth retreat. We have to remember that we bring ourselves to the task, although the retreat is not about us but about God and the people who come. God will use us if we let our gifts be put to work.

## **Planning Is Like Life**

Planning a retreat is a metaphor for life. If we think a retreat will just happen without good planning, we are going to get mediocre results and may be tempted to blame God. If we put our best efforts into making everything work, God often goes the second mile to harmonize elements in ways we could not have predicted. Of course life (and retreats) can be unpredictable. There are no guarantees that everything will go perfectly, even if we do everything well.

## **Give It All to God**

On the second retreat I planned for United Methodist Women, the retreat leaders walked out on the first morning after a racist remark has been made by one of the participants in the opening gathering. The group knew her, but no one challenged the remark. We were left to our own devices and could not effectively salvage the retreat. I learned more from that experience than from four days of mountaintop experiences. Weather, illness, disasters and who knows what else can throw a wrench into your plans. Give it all to God and pray that some thing will be gleaned by you and the others from the challenges.

## **Let's Get Going!**

What kind of retreat are you planning? Retreats can be small-group or large-group experiences. They can be silent or filled with celebration and inspirational messages. They can last an afternoon, a day, three days, 10 days or even months. A retreat that lasts for months usually emerges out of an individual's choice to be part of a spiritual community for a period of time. Some people think a retreat cannot be complete without silence. Others will not attend a retreat that has silence. In this manual we will embrace all of these possibilities under the umbrella of "retreats." It will be up to you to know your audience. You will have to balance the comforts of the familiar with the breakthrough possibilities offered by a new approach. "New" might be the ancient practice of shared silence. Be open to inspiration, start planning early, take one step at a time and take every step in God's grace.

# Planning a Group Retreat

## **Form a Committee**

Committee development can be done several ways. If you have a predetermined date for your retreat, you will need to think about how many meetings it will take to finish planning it. Otherwise, you will need to convene your group and determine a date. Think about what skills you will need to implement your retreat. Invite specific people to be on the committee and inform them of the particular tasks you want them to focus on. Confirm dates of the retreat and planning meetings. Then develop a general schedule of when tasks need to be complete. This prevents placing unnecessary pressure on people to have things done too far in advance, and it helps procrastinators see how their behaviors will cause problems for others if they are not prompt.

## **Make a List of Tasks**

Develop as complete a list as possible of everything that must be done before the retreat begins, then ask for volunteers or form subcommittees to handle each task. The remainder of this list covers most tasks. You might have one person handle one of these items.

## **Secure Facilities**

- Contact someone at the location.
- Negotiate a contract regarding meals, rooms, transportation, snacks, etc.
- Guarantee the presence of facility staff during the retreat and get emergency phone numbers.
- Organize a welcoming team familiar with the facility.
- Work with facility staff to ensure deliveries of food, heat, etc.
- Negotiate a cancellation agreement in case of a major storm or other disaster.

## **Organize the Registration Process**

- Create a registration form. Include name, address, home phone number, work phone, fax, cell phone, e-mail, special needs, etc. Set a deadline. If you have the capacity, online registration (using services such as Event Rebels or Eventbrite) can streamline the process and save paper and postage.
- Receive advance registrations
- Compile a mailing list, preferably in a format that can be merged electronically.
- Assign roommates.
- Handle on-site registration.
- Work with the finance person to receive fees.

## **Work Out the Finances**

- Develop a budget.
- Write checks (co-sign with chair).
- Provide financial reports at each meeting.
- Work with the registrar to receive fees.



## **Plan the Workshop Services and Program**

- Invite a retreat leader far in advance (in writing, not just by e-mail).
- Invite a musician as needed (likewise put the official invitation in writing).
- Meet with the retreat leader and musician in person or by conference call to discuss expectations.
- Develop a theme in communication with the leader.
- Create altar settings, banners, etc.
- Develop a program book containing any worship resources you might need.

## **Arrange for Publicity and Needed Resources**

- Identify all media that can be used for publicity.
- Develop articles, notices, brochures, fliers, etc.
- Create a website. The United Methodist Women online community offers free Web space for this purpose at [www.umwonline.org](http://www.umwonline.org), and you can create an event on Facebook where you can post information and updates. A blog may also be appropriate. Work with the worship and program groups to identify any related print resources.
- If you expect potential members, order *Membership Joys* (brochure), *Join United Methodist Women* (brochure), *United Methodist Women: Faith. Hope. Love in Action* (DVD) and other related materials from United Methodist Women Mission Resources:  
[www.umwmissionresources.org](http://www.umwmissionresources.org) or call 800-305-9857.

## **Make Good Use of Technology**

- Work with the facilities team on sound systems and lighting needs.
- Work with the publicity group to create a website and use social networking (Facebook, Twitter, blog, etc.).
- Work with the registration group to create a mailing list and an e-mail list of registrants.
- Send a welcome e-mail and a follow-up e-mail to express appreciation for attendance.
- Create a means to use the e-mail list for publicizing your next retreat.
- Work with the retreat leader on any CD, cassette, DVD, VHS, PowerPoint, LCD or related needs.

## **Considerations**

### Participants

Think about whom you want to invite to this event. Is this retreat targeted at a specific population, such as young women or retired women? If you are inviting your general membership, think of ways to attract both long-standing members and members who have not been very active or people who have never participated. Personal invitations are crucial, as are repeated announcements. Reach out! People enjoy being included and are waiting for an invitation.

## **Budgeting**

Make a list of expenses:

- Facility (rooms and food).
- Planning committee meeting expenses.
- Honoraria for the leader and the musician.
- Publicity costs—fliers, mailings, articles.
- Resources.
- Worship center materials.
- Banners.
- Web designer (if you'd like an original site that offers more than umwonline.org or Facebook).
- Scholarships.

### Sources of Income

- Budgeted funds from conference, district or local church.
- Registration fees.
- Other.

Divide the expenses by the minimum number of expected registrations to determine the registration fee. Determine the minimum number of registrations at which you can implement the retreat without losing money. Stick to your cutoff point. Do not have a retreat that puts your organization in debt, unless you have planned to subsidize the event.

## **Publicity**

The quality of your promotional material can make or break your retreat. Establish a publicity team that will determine what print products to make and how you will use the Internet (especially social media) to advertise. Create a brochure or flier that describes the retreat. You can find Microsoft Word templates within your Microsoft Office software or at [officeupdate.microsoft.com/templategallery](http://officeupdate.microsoft.com/templategallery). United Methodist Women logos, letterhead and PowerPoint template are available at [www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/resources/logo](http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/resources/logo). Advance notices in your conference, district and local church newsletters can include leader, location, dates, times, cost, registration deadline, website address(es) and contact information.

If you are sending out a brochure with a registration form, ask for name, address, phone/fax/cell and e-mail. You may also want to ask about affiliations, background and talents. Include information about payment methods, whom to pay, questions about food allergies or special dietary needs, roommates, accessibility needs and travel plans.

For private medical information, create a form that participants can complete and insert behind their nametags. Important medical emergency information such as health insurance plan, whom to call, and current treatments must be accessible to leaders without compromising privacy. In an emergency, you would not have to go through a file to find relevant information.

## **Registration**

As registrations are received, acknowledge them in writing with a generous “Welcome!” Provide any additional information needed, such as travel directions, site address, Web page(s), phone numbers, what to bring and what to expect. You may want to ask participants to bring:

- Bibles.
- Hymnals.
- Clothing appropriate for site or weather.
- Emergency medical information.

## On-site Retreat Implementation

One unfortunate reality of planning a retreat is that it will probably not meet your own needs for a retreat. You may find yourself up in the middle of the night dealing with an illness, or be on the phone trying to find out why a participant did not show up after having registered and paid. Mostly you want to make sure she is safe. Enjoy the moments when you can open yourself to the presence of God, but your leadership is mostly about making it possible for others to let go and let God!

After you arrive on-site, the tasks will keep you busy. By that time, you will have paid your location managers part or all of the cost of the site. If at all possible, have your treasurer prepared to reimburse any travel expenses and pay for honoraria on-site. People can estimate the return costs of travel. This prevents delay and helps everyone feel more comfortable. If you can pay the balance of your bill for the facility before leaving, wait to do so until the end of the event. As well-intentioned as the site management may be, reserving your final payment is your only leverage to make sure you will get what you paid for. The site management may also need a few days to figure out the final bill, in which case you can pay promptly by mail.

Set up a welcoming table for registration. You may have a cloth banner maker, or large banners can be created at copy shops. Again, United Methodist Women logos are located at [www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/resources](http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/resources). The organization's brand book is also available on this page, so be sure to use it to help you create your resources. United Methodist Women retractable banners (tabletop and floor-length) and tablecloths are available via Enhance a Colour Corp. by calling 203-748-5111. You may want to have people assigned just to welcome and direct new arrivals where they need to go for rooms, registration, food and restrooms. Some registrants will have traveled a long way and may be tired and a little disoriented.

Alphabetize the registrations and create a separate location for on-site registration. Once registration is confirmed and checks are written, registrants must complete an emergency form. Make the receipt of a nametag contingent on completing the emergency information and having it ready to put in the holder. Do not let registrants leave the table without filling out their form. Many will not do it on their own and you will be left to hunt for information if they have an emergency.

Nurture your retreat leaders and musicians. Either assign an assistant or play the assistant's role yourself. The assistant should be available throughout the retreat to make the leaders' lives easier and make sure any last-minute preparations are accommodated. If a problem arises that is the fault of the retreat leader or the musician, your job is to take care of the problem, not to criticize the leader in the moment. Critique can happen after the event. In the moment, the problem is the focus, not the person.

Participants will need to hear announcements, but announcements can get in the way of the retreat experience. The more you can put in writing, the less you will have to repeat yourself. Even if you have everything in writing, however, people will need to have some verbal announcements to help them feel secure. Make a list of possible announcements, such as:

- Welcome.
- Location of bathrooms.
- Times of meals.
- Public telephones.
- Cell phone policy.
- Linens.
- Heating and cooling details.
- Outdoor activities.
- Schedule details.

Identify which of these will need to be announced out loud and which can be put in writing either on a flier in a packet or posted on newsprint on the wall.

You may want to create a way for people to express anonymously how things are going, such as a suggestion box or a graffiti wall. The advantage to a graffiti wall is that it can include positive feedback and written prayers.

# Meditation

Meditation is a type of prayer whose meaning is expanding in our times. Just as a prayer is common to all the world's major religions, meditation is also represented in all traditions. Oddly, meditation is sometimes viewed suspiciously as a kind of New Age practice. Meditation is used in many religions, and it is a rich tradition in Christianity as well. Gregorian chant and all the monastic practices were expressions of mediation. Perhaps the Protestant emphasis on the written word may have diminished the role of meditation. The Renaissance, the Enlightenment and modern eras prioritize logic, science and intellect over spirit, aesthetics and intuition. Little room is left for insights of experiential meditation.

Roman Catholics have maintained the tradition of meditation over the centuries, and many Protestants are crossing ecumenical lines to experience the deep spiritual well of meditating on God. In addition, the gap between the world of intellect and the world of spirit is being bridged. The medical establishment has turned to meditation to enhance physical health. Science has noticed the spiritual world and found its own world of waves and particles far more mysterious than they ever expected.

Dr. Herbert Benson and colleagues at Harvard University have studied the effects of meditation for more than 30 years. They have found that meditation deeply relaxes the body and contributes to a person's health. High blood pressure irregular heart rhythms, depression, irritability, chronic pain and side effects of treatment can all be modified by meditation.<sup>2</sup>

A basic form of meditation begins with focusing on a repeated short phrase such as "God is love," "God forgive them," "Let the children come," or "I am created in the image of God." After you select a meaningful phrase, meditation requires getting comfortable in a place where there will be few disruptions. Begin breathing deeply and allowing the body to relax. Mentally relax each part of the body, thank your body for all it does.

Focus on your phrase and begin to repeat it. Open our heart to God's love. When you get distracted, gently bring your thoughts back to repeating your phrase with God's love in your heart. The love comes, and, like John Wesley's, your heart will be "strangely warmed."

Meditation can be used in daily devotions and in a retreat setting. For groups that are not accustomed to the practice of meditation, gentle music can be played in the background, and a group leader can guide the group through each step. Be sure to leave at least five minutes of silence or just background music during which the participants experience the depth of meditation.

In case there is someone in your group who is not comfortable with the process of meditation, let participants know that they are free to sit quietly and read their Bibles or pray in the way they feel most comfortable.

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<sup>2</sup> Some books by Benson: Herbert Benson, with Miriam Z. Clipper, *The Relaxation Response* (New York: HarperTorch, 1976); Herbert Benson, with William Proctor, *Your Maximum Mind* (New York: Avon Books, 1991).

# Silence

The practice of silence in retreat settings is increasingly valued among Protestants. Silence is an ancient Christian monastic practice that allows a person to concentrate on the still, small voice of God within us that a noisy life can cover up. Silence by itself is not necessarily meditation, but it does provide a beginning point for shifting one's attention inward.

Many United Methodist Women members spend a lot of time in silence because they live by themselves. Imposed silence can feel punitive when a retreat offers time together but does not allow conversation. You need to be the judge of the right balance for your members. My experience is that participants highly value fairly short periods of silence. Even one hour of concentrated silence can be very inspirational, and one meal plus a morning or afternoon is usually very meaningful.

Still, don't be afraid to program an entire weekend of silence. If you go this route, you'll want to be sure to advertise it as a weekend of sacred silence. You will still need to shape the weekend. Silence needs to be guided. Silence does not mean free time for participants or planners.

For example, you might select several scriptures on a theme or particular person in the Bible. Create meditative worship times when you convene, go apart for individual reflection, then come back together to pray and sing together. Modified silence would incorporate quiet sharing about the insights inspired by the silence. You can guide people to find an object that symbolizes something meaningful or write a poem that they would like to share with the group.

Guidance and examples for how to host a silent retreat can be found in the section "Silent Retreats."

# Worship

Worship at retreats can be developed and led by your retreat leader, or it can be assigned to various participants. Inviting people to take on responsibility may make the difference in whether they attend. Get as many people involved as possible without losing control of the details or the content. In any case, review drafts of the worship ahead of time with the retreat leader. Time each service in advance by reading it out loud. Sing one verse of each song and multiply how long that takes by the number of verses.

Be sure to get permission to reproduce any copyrighted music. You even need permission to project the words or write them on newsprint. The only way you don't need permission for copyrighted music is if the accompanist has a purchased copy of the hymn and the group is taught the words by rote or knows them by memory. The next section provides guidelines on how to handle copyright permissions for hymns.

Work to coordinate your worship and your worship centers with the theme you have selected. You don't have to do it by yourself; get others involved. People sometimes have mixed feeling about a retreat. It is a place where you are asked to be vulnerable to God and to one another. Some task-oriented people will be more comfortable if they can attend with a task in mind, even if it is a small task. After they get there, they usually find that they are glad they showed up!



# Copyright

*“Help! I have to do a worship service tomorrow, and I don’t have permission to copy songs!”*

What do you do?

- A. Make copies and tell people to hand them back to you so that no one will sue the church for thousands of dollars.
- B. Make copies and pretend nothing is wrong.
- C. Make copies and write on the copies that permission has been granted, even though it has not.
- D. None of the above.

You guessed it: *None of the above* is the correct answer.

*“I have to do a worship service tomorrow and make copies of hymns for everyone. I can get them copied in time, but can I get the copyright permission in time?”*

What should you do?

- A. Find out if there will be copies of *The United Methodist Hymnal* there before making copies.
- B. Look for a hymn that has a no copyright sign © at the bottom of the page. That means it is in public domain and can be copied by anyone.
- C. Include the copyright notice in your reproduction and acknowledge *The United Methodist Hymnal* as the source.
- D. Look for the address of the publisher that holds the copyright in the Acknowledgments section, pages 906-913 in the hymnal. Look it up online or call information in the city of the publisher and get the phone number. Call and ask for permission. You may be asked to fax your request, or they may simply give you the permission statement over the phone and tell you if there is a fee.
- E. Any of the above.

Answer: Any of the above. Yeah!

## **Two Copyrights: Music and Lyrics**

Be vigilant: Songs may have two copyrights. You must get permission for words and music if they have different copyright holders. Copyright holders are sometimes difficult to track down, and you may have to pick a different hymn.

Whereas you can copy brief excerpts of articles or classroom study without breaking copyright laws, you cannot make any copies of copyrighted music without getting permission. Putting words on an overhead projector requires permission. You can sing a chorus that everyone knows by memory as long as the accompanist has an original of the music (hymnal, sheet music or publication).

Copyright permissions are important for the artists, publishers and United Methodist Women. Getting permission is the right thing to do. The wrong thing can result in expensive lawsuits and bad publicity. The right thing supports publishers and artists as they share the gospel in music.

### **Definition of Copyright**

The exclusive rights of creators are protected under the U.S. Copyright Law. These rights include:

- The right to reproduction.
- The right to public performance.
- The right to translations into other languages or adaptation.

This means that whenever you wish to reprint someone else's copyrighted works you must ask permission from the creator or the owner of the work. Many creative works protected by copyright require considerable expense to market and distribute (such as publications, sound recordings and films); hence, creators often sell the rights to their works to individuals or companies best able to market the works in return for payment.

Copyright laws protect both the economic rights and the moral rights of copyrighted work. Economic right means that the creator and his or her heirs may benefit financially for a reasonable period of time. Moral rights involve the right to claim authorship of a work and the right to oppose changes to it that could harm the creator's reputation.

### **Duration of Copyright and Public Domain**

Assume the work is under copyright unless it is published before 1923. For most works, copyright lasts for the life of an author plus an additional 70 years. A good resource for checking if a work is under public domain is [copyright.cornell.com/resources/publicdomain.cfm](http://copyright.cornell.com/resources/publicdomain.cfm).

### **How to Read a Copyright Notice**

Example: Words and music © 1988 General Board of Global Ministries, GBGMusic. A simple notice such as the example contains the symbol © and is the international symbol for the word *copyright* and is recognized by any nation. This indicates that the work is protected by copyright, the year in which copyright is claimed and the name of the copyright owner.

The absence of the copyright symbol does not mean the work is not under copyright. Today the U.S. Copyright Office does not require that published works carry the copyright symbol. However, it is still necessary to ask permission to reproduce the work, and research may be needed to find the owner of the copyrighted work.

## **Permission Letter**

Once you have established the owner of the copyrighted work, the next step is to write a letter or send a fax or e-mail requesting permission to use the copyrighted work. When submitting a permission request, the following information needs to be included:

- Name of song/article/poem/stanzas quoted.
- If it is a song, specify if the request is to reprint the words or words and music.
- Name of composer, author and/or arranger
- Your name and contact information.
- Number of copies needed.
- Brief description of the intended use of the copyrighted work: worship booklet, single copies, CD, etc.
- Number of copies being produced, reprinted or photocopied.
- Sale price, if applicable.
- Date and place of event.

It may take three to four weeks before you receive a response. Time may be lost if your letter is sent to the wrong person or incorrect address. Always confirm your address and name of the contact person before sending the letter and follow up with a phone call after you have sent the letter.

Music publishers are inundated with requests to use the copyrighted work they own or represent, and it is not always possible to respond in a timely fashion. To expedite the process, a licensing system has been set up online.

## **OneLicense.net**

OneLicense is a convenient online licensing system to request permissions to reproduce words or music for worship services and events such as annual conference meetings and retreats. It was created to simplify the permission process. It saves time for both you and the owner/publisher of copyrighted work. OneLicense, whether it is an annual or event license, covers multiple publishers. That means you do not need to contact individual publishers and pay separate licensing fees. Your event is covered under one license. For more information, visit [www.onelicense.net](http://www.onelicense.net).

## Expansive Language

Use of inclusive language for persons and expansive language and metaphors for God should be encouraged. Some samples of use of expansive language for God are provided here.

### Nonsexist Names, Titles and Phrases Applied to God<sup>3</sup>

All-powerful God	Fountain of all holiness
Almighty giver of good	Fountain of everlasting light
Answer to all mysteries	Fountain of life
Awesome God	Fountain of light and truth
Awesome One	Fountain of wisdom
	Friend of the poor
Binder of wounds	
Brightness of faithful souls	Generous provider of all gifts
	Giver of all good things
Comfort of sufferers	Giver of every good and
Companion of the lonely	perfect gift
Compassionate One	Giver of health and salvation
Creative source of all being	Giver of life and health
Creator and preserver of all humankind	Giver of love
Creator of all	Giver of peace
Creator of goodness and beauty	God arrayed in justice
Creator of the light	God at ages past and future
	God of all being
Desire of all nations	God of all comfort
	God of compassion
Eternal father-mother-God	God of all creatures
Eternal God our answer	God of all flesh
Eternal keeper	God of all generations
Eternal One	God of all goodness
Eternal ruler	God of all power
Eternal source of knowledge	God of all the world
Eternal source of peace	God of all times and places
Eternal spirit of the universe	God of earth and air, height
Ever-living God	and depth
Ever-loving God	God of earthquake, wind and fire
	God of eternal might
Faithful God	God of forgiveness and under-
The first and the last	standing

<sup>3</sup> Compiled by Davelyn Vignaud-Monti for the General Board of Discipleship of The United Methodist Church in a booklet "Names, Titles, Phrases Applied to God (non-sexist)." See also the General Council on Ministries of The United Methodist Church's *Words That Hurt, Words That Heal* (Nashville, Graded Press, 1985)

God of freedom and right	Healer of the sick
God of grace and glory	Heart that inspires in us a vision of justice and love
God of heavenly powers	Heart's delight
God of holiness	Helper of all persons
God of holy love	Helper of the weak
God of hope and joy	Hidden God
God of Israel's past	High and Holy One
God of life and death	Hope of all the end of the earth
God of light and sun	
God of many deliverances	
God of peace	Incognito God
God of power and splendor	Infinite God
God of prophets and apostles	Inspiration of goodness
God of all righteousness	Israel's shield
God of steadfastness and encouragement	Judge of all humankind
God of the beginning, God of the end	Judge eternal
God of the loving heart	Keeper of (the) covenant(s)
God of the morning, noon and evening of life	Keeper of our souls
God of the spirits of all flesh	Life of all who live
God of this day	Life of mortals
God of truth	Life of the universe
God of unchangeable power	Life of the world
God of wonders	Light of all seeing
God our companion	Light of the faithful
God our helper	Light of the minds that know thee
God surrounded by glory	
God who art perfect love	Lover of concord
Gracious giver of knowledge	Lover of peace
Gracious God	Lover of souls
Great God (of power)	
Great God our hope	Maker of all things
Great healer of body and soul	Maker of heaven and earth
Great ruler of the world	Maker of light
Guardian of our lives	Maker of man and woman in your own likeness
Guide of humanity	Mighty forever God
Guide and inspiration of humanity	Mighty God
Guide of the meek	

Mighty redeemer	Shining glory
Mind of the universe	Source of all existence
Mind that unifies all creation	Source of all health
Most merciful God	Source of all life
	Source of all power
One and eternal God of time and space	Source of all that we have and are
Only One	Source of all true joy
Our creator and our teacher	Source of blessing
Our refuge and our strength	Source of creation
Our source and our end	Source of deliverance and help
	Source of eternal light
	Source of freedom
Power that brings healing to the sick	Source of good
Power that saves	Source of health and strength
Power that shields	Source of life
Proclaimer of justice	Source of mercy
Protector of all who trust	Source of peace
Pure and upright One	Source of salvation
	Source of strength
	Source of truth and law
Radiance of faithful souls	Sovereign God
Radiant and glorious God	Sovereign of peace
Redeemer and deliverer	Staff and support of the righteous
Redeemer of Israel	Steadfast and loving One
Redeemer of the oppressed	Strength of our life
Redeeming God	Strength of the weak
Refuge of those who put their trust in you	Strength of those who labor
Repose of the dead	Strong God in truth
Righteous God	Support of the innocent
Righteous One of all generations	Sustainer of all the worlds that are
Rock of all creation	
Rock of Jacob	Teacher of peace
Rock of our life	True and only light
Ruler of all creation	True sun of the world
Ruler of all people on earth	
Ruler of the universe	Upholder of the failing
Searcher of hearts	Watchful and caring God
Shelter from the storm	Will that gives us power
Shield of Abraham	World's light
Shield of our fathers and mothers	Wondrous fashioner and sustainer of life

# Individual Retreats

After you have planned a major retreat or just lived another day of life with all its challenges, you may be very interested in a retreat just for you. Individual retreats can take many different forms. Retreat centers offer a good context in which to structure a day set apart for meditation, reflection and simply being with God. Check the Yellow Pages, the Internet, or with your pastor to find out if there is a retreat center in your area.

But you don't have to go to a retreat center. You can spend a day out in nature or stay home. You can do some combination of praying, fasting, reading, walking, meditation, listening to music, writing, painting, etc. The list stops only when your imagination tires.

The key elements to meaningful individual retreats are:

- Creating a sacred space to be with God.
- Engaging in spiritual activities you enjoy.
- Making the connection between your life, the world and your spiritual journey.

To create a sacred space, you can use candles, incense, music, a special cloth or rug laid out, or simply a closed door with a "do not disturb" sign on it. Creating a sacred space lets other people know that you are choosing to be alone with God. It also reminds you that you are alone with God. Sacred space is created in the world of our senses to reflect spiritual realities.

Unfortunately, many traditions have called the senses sinful. But the more we understand that we are created in the image of God, the more our very bodies become a metaphor for God. The senses can become avenues through which we learn about God.

Even so, there are times when senses can be distracting. But instead of trying to shut out your senses, give each one a focus for the day. Give your vision a candle, an icon, a flower, your favorite painting or a color. Choose something of beauty. Hearing can be blessed with peaceful music, taped (or real) sounds of nature or luscious silence. Give your nose a scent that you will always associate with the peace you find. Use scented oil, incense, a fresh herb or a spice. Try to find a scent that you won't smell elsewhere very often but that is pleasant and easily found when you want it. Give your hands something to touch or hold—a special rock, a soft piece of cloth, a picture that makes you feel love. Prayer beads are common in many religions, including Christianity. They keep the hands focused on God as prayers are offered. Any of these can bring back the experience of your retreat like a sweet memory.

For the sense of taste, either eat with consciousness or consider fasting. If you eat, select simple fare and savor each bite with gratitude. Before you fast, check with your doctor first. You can do a partial fast by giving up one kind of food, such as sugar or meat, or you can eat lightly all day. If your doctor says you can fast, try drinking only water for a day. Bodies appreciate the rest from constant digesting. When you get hungry, don't panic. Just thank your body and tell it, "We'll eat tomorrow." Bodies are amazingly responsive to thought suggestions. Drink a lot of water when you get hungry. It will dilute the gastric acids that add to your hunger pangs.

By now you have created your sacred space and are well into the second element of engaging in spiritual activities that you enjoy. One enjoyable activity is meditation. Each of the sensory activities identified can become a focus for mediation. In addition, an ancient form of Christian mediation is the prayer of the heart, a meaningful short phrase such as “God is love” or “Lord have mercy” that is repeated over and over. This form of meditation has been documented to have significant health benefits along with the benefit of deepening our spiritual awareness.

Guided meditations can be purchased or created on your own MP3 or music player or cassette recorder. If you purchase one, listen to it first before meditating on it. Meditation goes deep into your being. Make a conscious choice about what you put there. Flora Slosson Wuellner has been publishing helpful books in this area through Upper Room publications.

You can meditate by praying the scriptures. Select in advance passages into which you would like to gain insight. You might try opening yourself to the scriptural text by using the prayer of the heart for 15 minutes before you look at the text. This will move you from studying the text to praying the text. This is called *lectio divina*.

Begin to make connections between your life, the world and your spiritual retreat. Use the United Methodist Women Prayer Calendar to support mission personnel and organizations through your prayer. **response** magazine can provide perspective on how prayers affect the global community. Be bold! Pray for the world and for understanding of the world’s issues. You may even want to bring a newspaper and pray for each global need. If you go this route, keep your thoughts positive. God’s love is available for every situation. Picture conflict being resolved, each problem solved and every need met.

Throughout your retreat, you might find it helpful to write down reflections about your prayers and time with God. Even if you find journaling unappealing, write a couple of sentences once every hour or so. When you read your notes in the future you’ll be amazed at how they bring back the experience.

Before you begin your individual retreat, develop a schedule for yourself. You don’t have to follow it exactly, but if you find yourself going off in another direction during the day, it can be used to remind your whole being what your agenda is for the day.

The following is a sample schedule that you can modify to meet your needs.



## Sample Schedule for an Individual Retreat

### Morning

- 6:30 Wake, shower and dress.
- 7:00 Stretching for 10 minutes, then silent meditation for 20 minutes.
- 7:30 Breakfast—drink hot water with lemon if you are fasting.
- 8:00 Prayer through service. Do breakfast cleanup.
- 8:30 Walking meditation. Let the rhythm of walking become a prayer.
- 9:30 Music meditation. Select an hour of music, such as Gregorian chant, Peruvian flute, gospel, Indian ragas or classical guitar. Get comfortable. Focus on music.
- 10:30 Break.
- 10:45 Written reflections.
- 11:00 Scripture prayer. (Select texts in advance.)
- 12:00 Lunch—if you eat, pray for the hungry with each bite.

### Afternoon

- 1:00 Rest
- 2:00 Intercessory prayers. (Use the Prayer Calendar or pray for people in your life and the world as reflected in **response** or the newspaper.
- 3:00 Written reflections.
- 3:15 Break.
- 3:30 Movement prayer. This can be another walk, or you can do a gentle dance of praise to music, or even go for a drive in the country. The key is to move and observe everything with an attitude of prayer.
- 4:30 Meditation and prayer.
- 5:30 Dinner.

### Evening

- 6:30 Prayer through service. Do dinner cleanup.
- 7:00 Optional time. Engage in your favorite activity from the day or other activity that promotes your spiritual growth. Enjoy!
- 8:00 Selected reflective reading.
- 9:00 Meditation and prayer. Close your day with prayers of gratitude, praise and awe. Incorporate the Psalms and sing a hymn.
- 10:00 Sleep.

# Silent Retreats

A fully silent retreat for a group needs structure. Silence is a fast from words, and many of us need assistance to move through the discomfort and into the comfort of silence. Key elements you want to develop are hospitality, beauty, simplicity, internal quiet, vocal silence, solitude and community.

In a sense, this list is such that one can lead to another. Being silent together can be an experience of vulnerability. Wordy defenses are gone. All apologies and explanations are gone. When you begin to gather, smiles, body language and attitude are a primary way of communicating. These signs of hospitality will help people feel at home. If your group is new to silence, you can incorporate some recorded music and perhaps some nonverbal communication. Help people stay in the community of silence where they enjoy nonverbal ways of being together.

Simple beauty in your environment helps people focus. Simple food gives participants another opportunity to say thank-you. Be sure to check out any food needs ahead of time and tell people with allergies to carry a card with them with their needs written on it so they don't have to break their silence. A buffet arrangement helps people make choices without asking a lot of questions. Advise people that when they have a question that seems urgent, they should ask themselves if they can manage without asking the questions. Generally, they can.

Physical discomforts can be distracting for participants, so select a site that is conducive to silence. If the management is unaccustomed to silent retreats, have a sit-down conversation about potential sources of noise and distractions. A retreat house with single rooms is preferable. Floor coverings and comfortable chairs can make a difference. In advance, explore the level of sound produced by heating or cooling units.

Inevitably, there will be distractions of one sort or another, so encourage retreat participants to focus on their inner world rather than the distractions. Use meditation as an example of how to deal with distractions. When you are meditating and get distracted, it is most effective simply to notice that your mind has wandered and gently bring your focus back to your breathing and your repeated prayer. Likewise during a silent retreat, when distractions occur or the silence is broken in some way, there is no need to get upset. Simply bring your attention gently back to the practice of silence. There can always be inner quiet, even if the world is making quite a din.

Recognize that keeping silent and going inward is not escaping the world but another way to be in the world. So it is a good idea to incorporate some service into your retreat. Participants can help stuff envelopes or clean the facility while maintaining silence. Organizers will have to work with the retreat center to identify a project or projects that can be undertaken. A project can be done individually or together. The discipline of keeping silent while working can be a real experience of living with unanswered questions.

Silence carries its own value. You do not need to worry that “nothing will happen.” When people go within, something always happens. They are face to face with themselves and God. Do not panic if a participant experiences strong emotion. If someone expresses sadness, be there for her and offer comfort. Preferably do this without words. If someone needs counseling, be ready to take her aside so as not to disturb others in their silence, but don’t move too quickly to “help” someone who is working through her feelings.

The beauty of scripture read effectively or a Taizé chorus sung in a meditative repetition can take the group to a deep place. Although the group is silent, the silence is framed by scripture and music. Moreover, there is a rhythm of coming together and then going apart to reflect alone. The community moves into solitude, and solitude is supported by the community of love.

Solitude can be shaped by giving participants a scripture or story on which to meditate. You can ask people to search for a symbolic object, or do a walking meditation during which they stroll slowly and observe their steps and breathing. They can be encouraged to write a psalm that can be posted on a “psalm board.” It might have a lament side and a praise side. The group could be asked to write a lament first and then during another period write a psalm of praise. Many of the group activities you might create for a spoken retreat can be modified for a silent retreat.

### **Example Structure for a Time of Gathering<sup>4</sup>**

Gathered silence  
 Unison prayer for purity  
 Hymn of praise  
 Psalm  
 Alleluia  
 Scripture  
 Silent meditation on scripture  
 Intercessory prayer (“Lord have mercy” or “Let us pray to the Lord” response)  
 Unison prayer  
 The Lord’s Prayer  
 Blessing  
 Hymn

### **Preparing Worship for a Silent Retreat**

The service may be held in silence or as quietly read reflection. Do not rush. Instructions may be written or shared before the service begins. Hymns may be read silently rather than sung. A clergy person should be present or should consecrate the communion elements in advance. If the elements are consecrated in advance, this should be noted on the printed handout.

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4. Adapted from *Praise God: Common Prayer at Taizé* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

After everyone is present, the two leaders prepare the altar, making it holy ground by spreading a cloth on a table or on the ground if the service is held outside. They might bring in wildflowers and wheat shocks, grapes or other symbols of plenty, and the communion meal. The cross and finally the bread and cup are placed on the altar. Leaders begin to read the rest of the program in silence. Ushers and leaders direct participants to come to the table. Communion by intinction (dipping the bread in the juice) is recommended.

It is meaningful to share in communion during your time together. The following “Silent Communion” by Mary Baldrige is taken from *Ceremonies IV: A Collection of Worship Resources for United Methodist Women* (New York: Women’s Division, the General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church, 2003). The readings can be either printed for silent reading or read out loud in a meditative style with silence in between.

## **Silent Communion: For a Day Apart**

by Mary Balridge

Director, United Methodist Women 1996-2004

### **Call to Worship**

LEADER: This is the place and this is the time. O God, fill us with hope, joy and confidence in the future.

### **Hymn**

“Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God,” *The United Methodist Hymnal* #405

“Seek Ye First,” *The Korean-English United Methodist Hymnal* #136

“Busca primero,” *Himnario Metodista* #201

### **Prayer of Confession**

Caring and compassionate Creator, we enter this place set apart for your worship, knowing that we have failed to see you in other places. We have ignored your beauty around us, in earth and sky, in plants and creatures, in the people who surround us. We have chosen to live more by our fears than by our faith, to be weighed down by what we do not have rather than rejoicing in your gifts to us. In these moments together, draw us so close that we cannot help but know every day that you are with us, wherever we go. Enlarge our capacity to care, so we may see you in everyone we meet. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Prayer by Ruth C. Duck, *Flames of the Spirit* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1985), p.74.

### **Words of Assurance**

When three or four gather in the Spirit, God is present—hearing, receiving, and responding. Jesus said: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6:51).

### **The Lord’s Prayer**

“Our Father in heaven, help us to honor your name. Come and set up your kingdom so that everyone on earth will obey you, as you are obeyed in heaven. Give us our food for today. Forgive us for doing wrong, as we forgive others. Keep us from being tempted, and protect us from evil” (Matthew 6:9-13, CEV).

### **Scripture**

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15, Matthew 5:1-12, John 3:16, 1 Timothy 1:15, 1 John 1:9

### **Hymn**

“Jesus, Remember Me,” *The United Methodist Hymnal* #488

“Remember Me,” *The Korean-English United Methodist Hymnal* #234

“Jesus, Jesus,” *Himnario Metodista* #288

### **Silent Meditation**

## **Affirmation of Faith**

I believe in the One who gave order to the chaos and breathed life into the universe. I believe that One remains fully committed to and involved with the world. I believe in the One who entered into the day-to-day life of the universe. I believe that One lived and walked the earth as a healer, a guide, a liberator from the limitations of life, even the limitation called death. I believe in the One who dwells in me, as a source of calm, strength and wisdom. I believe in the One who dwells in each of us, drawing us closer to the reign of God. I believe in the church as the host of creation, inviting all into the pattern of God's patchwork plan. Amen.

Affirmation by Christine Nees and V. Elaine Straw, *More Services for Special Days* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), p. 37.

## **Celebration of the Holy Meal**

### Invitation

On this day, God invites us to join together at this holy banquet table.

### Prayer of Consecration

Author of all life, in whose image each of us is made, hear our prayer of thanks for all your good gifts. Out of all the people on earth, you took ordinary people of the past and made them your people. In the deserts of our lives, you have been with us. You meet us on the mountains and go with us through the valleys. You supply our every need.

In Jesus Christ, your love for all was made evident. He ate with outcasts, strengthened the weary, walked with the lonely. He offered his life on our behalf; was crucified, died, and rose victorious even over death.

On the night Jesus was to be betrayed, he gathered his friends from all walks of life, wishing to share his last meal with those he loved. He took a common loaf of bread and made it into the extra-ordinary Bread of Life. He broke it and shared it with them, saying (in effect), "Whenever you eat this, it will bless you. This bread represents my body, which is broken for you. Take some and eat it." Then he poured ordinary drink and blessed it. He said, "Drink this, all of you. It represents my blood offered for you. Remember that your sins are forgiven." (See Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, Luke 22:17-20.)

Spirit, send your power upon these gifts: your bread and your cup. Bless them and your people all around the world. As we eat of these common elements, unite our spirits in love for you and our hearts in love for one another. In the name of the Creator, the Redeemer, the Sustainer. Amen.

Prayer by Christine Nees and V. Elaine Strawn, *More Services for Special Days* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), p. 37.

### Invitation

Come and eat the extraordinary Bread of Life and drink from this cup of salvation given for you.

### Hymn

“One Bread, One Body,” *The United Methodist Hymnal* #620

“One Bred, One Body,” *The Korean-English United Methodist Hymnal* #237

“Un pan, un cuerpo,” *Mil Voces Para Celebrar: Himnario Metodista* #324

*The cup and bread are raised during the silent reading of the prayer of consecration if a clergy person is present. Now everyone is invited to come as they are led. When all have returned to their seats, they will silently read the Prayer After Communion, silently pass the peace and then depart in silence.*

### **Prayer After Communion**

Loving God, we have shared in your sacred covenant-renewing meal; let us now also share in your sacred work on earth. As we have received sustenance for our bodies, minds and spirits, may we share our transformed selves with other persons and families in our local and global communities. We dedicate our lives to your service, through One who came to model a life of service.

Prayer by Ruth C. Duck, *Bread for the Journey* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1981), p. 68.

### **Benediction**

Go in peace and take peace into the world of human need. Amen.

*Greet your neighbor with signs of peace and goodwill.*

# Large Retreats

Among various groups of United Methodist Women, some have very large numbers of women participate in their retreats. There is a bit of tension around some of these large retreats. Some would argue that you cannot have a retreat with a large number of people. And some people feel that if it is not silent, it is not a retreat.

Gwen White, a beloved retreat leader among United Methodists, revealed in a personal conversation that she has changed her opinion on the subject. Whereas once she would have said that retreats can happen effectively with only fairly small groups, she has since experienced very effective retreats implemented with large groups in a variety of settings.

For example, the Virginia, Rocky Mountain and North Carolina Conferences have traditionally had large events. Virginia Conference women have used Blackstone Conference Center, where they often have had so many participants that they must schedule two or three back-to-back retreats to rotate the participants in. This helps women who would prefer a weekend schedule or a weekday framework. Well-known inspirational personalities who can draw a large group are invited to lead the retreats. Participation levels seem to vary based on the choice of retreat leader.

Rocky Mountain Conference women have had an event for about 700 women each year at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, Co. Participants have arrived for a Friday evening opening or have come in early on Saturday for a day event or stayed over for the closing Sunday morning session. Both conferences attract large numbers of participants by using an attractive location and well-known leader.

Although breaking into smaller groups is sometimes difficult with such large attendance, small-group conversations can occur by turning to neighbors and forming clusters of two, three or four. Silent reflection is quite feasible in the large-group setting. With guidance, a group will take time to be present to God while sitting together in an auditorium. Meditative music can help.

If the group is there for a weekend, you can provide a variety of activities for people who like to be more active, such as painting murals, moving creatively with music, dramatizing scripture, creating body sculptures or “tableaus” for the whole group to respond to, or preparing choral numbers to perform.



# Themes for Group Retreats

When you select a theme for your event, think about the visuals and scriptures that you might ask a retreat leader to use. At the end of this manual is a complete retreat based on the biblical image of “rock.” There are a multiple stories in the Bible that have rocks as a theme, so selections can be made. On [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) or [bible.oremus.org](http://bible.oremus.org) for NRSV (United Methodist Women’s preferred version of the Bible) you can insert a word like “rock” and get all the scriptures that include the word. You can put in the words “water,” “river,” “mountain,” “tree” or some other visual image as well as theological concepts such as “forgiveness,” “spirit” or “prayer.”

Here are some things to consider as you develop a theme:

- What key word(s) in your theme are being considered? List scriptures that come to mind.
- Brainstorm possible visuals the words or theme suggest.
- Name hymns or songs that might relate. Use the scripture and topic indexes in back of *The United Methodist Hymnal*.

Explore resources such as children’s tales or traditional stories that might relate. Call or visit a children’s bookstore and ask for recommendations of stories related to your theme. Adults gain insights through these stories, and they can also use them to communicate their experience with grandchildren or other young people in their lives. A really helpful children’s bookstore is Bank Street Bookstore in New York City at 212-678-1654 or [bankstreet-books.com](http://bankstreet-books.com). Give them your theme and see what they come up with. They will ship books to you for a small fee.

## **Example: Wind**

As an example of completing this process, let’s select a word and work it through. As you will see, there is no guarantee that an idea will come out in a simple way. Often a metaphor will be used in a variety of ways requiring that you deal with both the positive and negative implications—or at least that you select how you want to use the metaphor.

### Scripture

Dried the path across the Red Sea for the Hebrews (Exodus 14:21-22)

God creates the wind (Amos 4:13)

Jesus quiets the wind (Mark 4:36-41)

A reed shaken by the wind (Luke 7:24-25)

The wind blows where it chooses (John 3:8)

Blown about by every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14)

It turns out that wind is mostly portrayed as being destructive and uncontrollable. You can work with this to create some dramatic moments, but you may want to contrast it with the “breath” of God. Genesis, Job and Psalms use the metaphor but not without an element of the power to destroy. Isaiah emphasizes the destructive power of God’s “breath” much the same way “wind” is described as a destructive force.

For the sake of the example, let's go ahead and select the image of God making a path using the wind as well as Jesus describing the spirit as wind that goes where it will.

### Visuals

You could paint a cartoonish cloud with puffed cheeks blowing a great wind. (Remember, we are brainstorming—even corny ideas can stimulate other “better” ideas.) Recorded sounds of wind could be used. In a large, inspirational event, billowing lengths of silk could be used over an entrance or draped from a frame as a backdrop with quiet fans making them wave in the breeze. You might incorporate a video with a stormy sea segment in it. Turn down the sound on the video and replace it with a reading of the scripture about the storm tossing the boat and Jesus finally quieting the sea.

### Hymns (from *The United Methodist Hymnal*)

“Wind Who Makes All Winds That Blow,” #538

“Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud,” #113 (especially verse 3)

“O Spirit of the Living God,” #539 (especially verse 2)

“O Breath of Life,” #543

### Stories

*The King of Capri* by Jeanette Winterson (New York: Bloomsbury, 2003). A tempest blows in and picks up all the king's belongings, dropping them into the backyard of a washerwoman who distributes everything to those with needs. The king learns that possessions aren't that important.

## **Example: Water**

This is a much easier example with multiple images from the Bible and other sources. Your challenge will be to narrow down your ideas.

### Scripture

Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3)

Woman at the well (John 4)

Tree by the river of life (Revelation 22)

Moses retrieves water from a rock in the desert (Exodus 17)

### Visuals

Self-pumping waterfall on the altar

Cardboard well with water jar

Pitcher with water and bowl

Water brought by all participants (advance notice needed)

Love feast with water and bread

Hymns (from *The United Methodist Hymnal*)

“Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters,” #605

“When Jesus Came to Jordan,” #252

“Shall We Gather at the River,” #723

“It Is Well with My Soul,” #377

**Stories**

*Happy Birthday, Dear Duck* by Eve Bunting (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990). Duck lives in a desert, and all his friends bring water toys for his birthday. His last friend brings a pool so he can use the toys.

**Activities for Themes**

Ideas like the ones presented can be developed in a group setting, put on paper, then reworked in the group to add any final ideas.

If you are going to be leading the retreat, you will need to brainstorm activity ideas. For some developers of retreats, the word *active* may form an oxymoron with the word *retreat*. Still, even if your retreat is totally silent (besides shared scripture and singing), the rhythm of “activity” can flow liturgically from:

- Thanksgiving for all God’s gifts.
- Confession of roadblocks to God.
- Listening to the still, small voice of God—willingness to be silent.
- Hospitality to both God and neighbors—time to be alone together.
- Commitment to do what you are being called to do.

Even if you are planning an inspirational event for 300, people will expect to be engaged in activities in which they can interact, create, play, worship and chat. These liturgical elements will need to be kept in mind. If there are no inner reflections that lead to confession, your retreat can end up being shallow. If there is no commitment at the end, it can be anticlimactic. If we don’t spend some time listening, we may end up totally off base. With this in mind, all of these theological components can be incorporated into a wide range of activities.

Here is a list of activities, any of which could be shaped to respond to the theological categories listed previously. What can you add to the list?

- Private Bible study.
- Find an object that relates to the theme.
- Write a poem. Example formula: Line 1—write a noun. Line 2—write three adjectives describing the noun. Line 3—write four adverbs related to the noun-adjective combinations. Line 4—write a synonym for the noun.
- Listen to music while meditating on the theme.
- Create a tableau of bodies: Select a scripture or word. Have one person strike a pose inspired by the word/scripture. Each person (without words) adds her body to the “sculpture” to express a new thought. Half the group watches and then takes a turn. Observers either write or speak their thoughts before the “sculpting” group speaks. Later they can share what they felt and were trying to communicate.

- Toss a ball of yarn and sharing a thought or word when the yarn comes to you. The web created reminds us of our connectedness.
- Sharing in a group circle, using a talking stick that lets one person have the floor at a time when it is passed.
- For longer retreats that need a night of fun, incorporate a talent show. You may want to give advance notification for this.

Keep in mind the following suggestions to make the most of your retreat:

- Time apart for quiet reflection is important in our multimedia world.
- Carefully selected recorded music can enhance the reflective moments.
- Skilled use of PowerPoint can be inspirational, but you need to be strongly image-oriented rather than word-oriented.
- Movements that go along with hymns often take the words to a new level of meaning.
- Collages can be created that speak from the heart.
- A graffiti wall can help the group express itself.
- A small group interested in movement can be asked to interpret a recorded song.
- Creating journals can deepen the experience.

In the following section, a retreat is fully developed into a script using the metaphor of “rock.” It can be followed step-by-step by a leader. In this case, you may not need to secure an outside leader. Even so, it is a good idea either to assign someone in your group to lead the retreat or assign different parts to different people.

## **The Rock That Bore You: A Weekend Retreat for Birthing a New Generation of United Methodist Women**

### **Final Checklist For “The Rock That Bore You” Retreat**

Location  
Food  
Leader  
Piano tuned  
Musicians  
Resources from Mission Resources  
Children’s books  
Copies of participants’ agenda  
Copies of closing worship  
Registration table  
Nametags and markers  
Pebble taped to each nametag  
Rock for each participant (fist-size)  
Copies of Bible study of selected and texts for participants  
Hymnals  
*Resurrection Road* DVD (available from [www.umwmissionresources.org](http://www.umwmissionresources.org))  
DVD player and television/projector  
Worship center  
Coffee, tea and snacks

## Schedule

### Friday

#### Evening

5:00 Registration

6:30 Dinner

During dinner, introduce yourselves to one another and talk about historic events, fashions, songs, etc. of your era. Try to mix with people from different decades.

7:30 Singing

8:00 Welcome, announcements and introductions

8:15 Getting to know the generations

9:30 Evening prayers

### Saturday

#### Morning

8:45 Singing

9:00 Bible study

10:15 Break

10:30 Everybody Needs a Rock

10:45 Choosing a rock

11:20 Sharing with a partner

11:45 Sharing with the group

#### Afternoon

12:00 Lunch

1:15 Singing

1:30 The Pebble

1:45 Role-playing

2:15 Sharing

2:30 The Pebble of Invisibility

3:15 Break

3:30 Meditation

#### Evening

5:30 Sharing

6:00 Dinner

7:00 Singing

7:15 Storytelling

8:45 Evening prayers

9:00 Social time

### Sunday

#### Morning

9:00 Singing

9:15 Bible Study

10:15 Break

10:30 Closing worship

11:30 Evaluation

11:45 Departure

## **Leader's Script: Friday**

### Evening

7:30 Singing

8:00 Welcome, announcements and introductions

Welcome to “The Rock That Bore You: A Retreat for Birthing a New Generation of United Methodist Women.” The name of the retreat comes from Deuteronomy 32:1-18, in which the writer of the song of Moses tells the story of how God helped the Hebrews survive the desert. God brought forth honey and oil from rocks. God nurtured them like a mother eagle that lifts her young ones in the air as they learn to fly. Yet the people forgot the Rock.

We tell our stories of United Methodist Women in mission so we do not forget the Rock. If we are new to United Methodist Women, there are many stories to hear. If we have been here for years, we may think that everyone knows our story—or that our story isn't as important as someone else's story.

Being a witness is part of our Christian journey. We must tell the story so that we do not forget whom it is we serve, who it is who gave us birth. As we tell the story, new generations begin to live the story and we are all revived for service to God.

Tonight, we have a brief time to begin reflecting together on our story of being in mission—where we have come from and where we are going. Through it all, we remember that we do not recruit women to an organization; we call women to walk the extra mile by being part of mission work in the name of Jesus the Christ.

8:15 Getting to know the generations

For this getting acquainted exercise, please line up by decades. Find your decade. If you are the only person from your decade, join a group near your decade. In your decade groups, name the most noted/notorious reminders of your young adulthood. Was there a popular dance or song that expressed the mood? What political event and what United Methodist Women activity or action do you remember from that time? After five or 10 minutes of discussion, we will share with the total group.

Now, mix yourselves up into groups with four or five people from different decades. Based on your life experiences, what would you like to say to the younger generation? To the older generation? Discuss in small groups and then share in the larger group. What would you rather not hear from the younger generation? The older generation? Again, we will share highlights in the total group.

9:30 Evening prayers

## Friday Evening Prayers

### **Unison Invocation**

Creating, loving God, you are already here, yet we ask your merciful presence at the end of our day. Give our endings as much life as our beginnings. Fill us with hope to ease our anxieties as we fall into the arms of the dark night for the healing rest that soothes us like your mother/father love.

### **Hymn\***

"Hymn of Promise," *The United Methodist Hymnal* #707

### **Confessions**

The future makes me anxious because ...

### **Words of Assurance**

I feel hope for the future because ...

### **Circle Prayers\***

Stand in a circle holding hands and offer prayers as you feel moved.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

### **DVD**

*Resurrection Road*

### **Hymn\***

"Dona Nobis Pacem," *The United Methodist Hymnal* #376

### **Benediction**

Sleep in the arms of the vast universe. Know that every hair on your head, every grain of sand, every star in the universe is counted and beloved by God. Rest in the knowledge of that love. Amen.

*\*Stand as you are able.*



## **Leader's Script: Saturday**

### Morning

8:45 Opening singing (announcements)

9:00 Bible study: Deuteronomy 32:1-18

*Read text out loud from the New Revised Standard Version. You may copy up to 500 verses of the text without getting written permission as long as it is not a whole book of the Bible. Include the following notice on the copies:*

All biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible, copyright © 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

*Divide the group into two and threes to discuss the following questions.*

### **Reflection Questions**

What is the structure of the text?

What are the images of God used in the text?

How are maleness and femaleness portrayed?

What are the references to rocks and crags—how are they used?

How do you think this text functioned in the community?

*After about 20 minutes, reconvene the group and get feedback on each question. Point out that there are many biblical images used to describe God, who is ultimately indescribable.*

### **Discussion**

The point of this Bible study is to familiarize you with the vast number of images used to describe God. Different people use different images. The more we can vary our imagery, the more people will feel included. Idolatry happens when one image is used to the exclusion of all others, thus narrowing our idea of God to a human-controlled definition.

Reaching out to new members will require us to think in new ways. Drawing on the Bible to help us expand rather than shrink our understanding of God's nature will help us when we are trying to expand our understanding of who belongs in United Methodist Women.

10:15 Break

10:30 Everybody Needs a Rock

*Read Everybody Needs a Rock by Byrd Baylor, illustrated by Peter Pounelle (New York: Aladdin, 1985).*

10:45 Choosing a rock

Outdoors is ideal. Otherwise, bring a pile of unique rocks and let people choose one.

### **Directions**

Go forth and find a rock with character that speaks to you of God—remembering the admonition of neither too big nor too small.

Find a quiet place. Spend a half hour with your rock, looking at it and letting it reflect God and yourself to you. Make notes that you can share with the group.

### **Reflection Questions**

- What do you see in the rock—shapes, faces, things, feelings, ideas, places?
- Are there images of God in the rock? Describe them.
- Does your rock may inspire poetry, drawings, music, prayer? Make notes about these.
- What do you see of yourself in the rock—shapes, faces, places, ideas, feelings, things? Make notes in whatever form you are inspired to.

11:20 Sharing

Come back together. Pair off quickly and quietly. Share with your partner some of the your insights and reflections. *Allow about 25 minutes for sharing in pairs, then reconvene the whole group.*

Come together as a total group and share for about 10 or 15 minutes insights from your rock. Keep your rock during the weekend.

12:00 Lunch

1:15 Singing

1:30 The Pebble

*Read Sylvester and the Magic Pebble by William Steig (New York: Aladdin, 1969). Put pebbles together with buttons or wrapped candy or something that can be hidden in the hand so that half are pebbles and half are the other item. Have each person select one from a basket or hat without disclosing to the others which one they have.*

*Before getting started, you might write the following list on newsprint and ask if the group wants to add any other roles to the list. Have people with pebbles choose a role to play from the following list.*

## **Roles**

- Single mother with infant on welfare.
- Woman who speaks little English.
- Working woman with hobbies.
- Racially oppressed woman.
- Young woman seeker into astrology who thinks Christianity is OK.
- Wealthy older woman.
- Ethnic-minority woman who doesn't feel oppressed.
- Working woman with children.
- Young college woman.
- Woman holding two jobs and living on the edge of poverty.
- Homeless woman.

*People with the other item will play/be themselves—United Methodist Women members interested in reaching out to other women to encourage their participation. Ask pebble people to become the person they have selected and not to change midstream. Give them the following scenario:*

## **Scenario**

You have come to church and stayed late for the special lunch for women of the church to get to know United Methodist Women. You have serious reservations about joining United Methodist Women. Everyone has just arrived and is getting to know one another. By diplomatic interaction, find out something about the people around you. You don't know all the other United Methodist Women members because this is a very big church, so don't assume that someone is not already a member. You can begin to work one on one or cluster in groups to talk about people's challenges and the benefits of being a United Methodist Women member.

1:45 Role-playing

*Have the pebble people and the others interact in character. After role-playing for about 15 to 20 minutes, have the small group break from their characters and make a list of ideas that might get their particular person or people interested and able to participate in United Methodist Women.*

2:15 Sharing

*Have the group come back together and list the following:*

- Feelings in your respective parts.
- Problems encountered/experienced.
- Solutions and ideas about how to move forward.

2:30 The Pebble of Invisibility

Feel the pebble or token in your hand. It is magical. It is reminding you of a time when you seemed to turn into a rock. One minute you thought you were a human being, and the next minute you realized that you might as well be a rock, or thin air, for you were treated as if you were invisible. (5 minutes)

### **Tasks**

- Take a few minutes and share that experience with someone near you in a group of two or three. (5 minutes)
- Now the pebble is helping you remember when you watched others being treated as if they were invisible. (5 minutes)
- Turn to your neighbor and share that experience. What happened? What could have happened? (5 minutes)
- How can we make the generations in United Methodist Women more visible to one another rather than invisible? (10 minutes)

*Have the group move around the room affirming each other nonverbally. End in a circle and sing "We Shall Overcome." (10 minutes)*

3:15 Break

3:30 Meditation: A Rock and a Soft Place

*Provide gentle meditation music. If a microphone is available, use it so that you can speak gently and still be heard. If not, speak clearly and slowly, projecting your voice but keeping a gentle tone.*

These experiences of invisibility remind us that in God's eyes we are always visible. God is always present with us, seeing us and loving us. The next few minutes we will be present to God through meditation. Afterward, for about an hour, we will have a time of silence. You can stay in this room and listen to the music or go elsewhere. We will meet at 5:30 to reflect on our meditation experience. Know that God dwells within you through the Holy Spirit. It is your voice God uses to speak out, your hands God uses to serve and your heart God uses to love. You are part of the rock.

Get comfortable, close your eyes, and uncross your arms and legs. Breathe deeply several times, and then let your breathing seek its natural rhythm. Relax each part of your body.

*Slowly name each part of the body.* Relax your feet, legs, hips, lower back, middle back, shoulders, hands, arms, neck, head, face, eyes, forehead, cheeks, mouth. [*Pause.*]

Now go back to your breathing. Relax your heart. Relax your thoughts—let them drift away. Whenever they show up, focus on your relaxed breathing. Feel the chair supporting you; all is at rest, yet you are alert and focused on a sense of well-being and the presence of God. You are a child of God. God is love and has filled you with the Holy Spirit who is love. [*Pause 10 seconds.*]

This is not something that can be debated or denied. God is love and God loves you. This is the Rock of Love that is the cornerstone of our faith. Our Rock has given us water for the journey, oil to sooth our brow and honey to sweeten our days. Our Rock might be viewed as hard and un giving, but it comes to us as life itself, even giving us birth. Continue to breathe deeply. [*Pause 20 seconds.*]

Imagine looking out from the viewpoint of a rock and seeing the fleeting, passionate lives of the family of humanity. Feel the compassion of Jesus, our Rock. Time is eternal for the Rock. Feel the generations stream by, each one seeking a new way to touch the love at the center of the Rock of Salvation. Each generation is loved as quickly as they are born and die. Breathe in love. [*Pause 30 seconds.*]

Take some time to talk with Jesus, the Rock of Salvation, about your life. Ask for help in areas of concern. [*Pause 10 seconds.*] Ask about the way to go for United Methodist Women in our birthing of the next generation. [*Pause 10 seconds.*]

Take several minutes to ask the questions on your heart. Be sure to listen for the responses of the Rock of Love. You'll have about five minutes of silence to ask and listen. [*Allow 5 minutes of silence.*]

Now give thanks for all that you have received today and throughout your life. [*Pause 20 seconds.*] Feel all the compassion and love that has brought you thus far. Bring that compassion back with you into this moment. [*Pause 20 seconds.*] Begin to bring your awareness back into this room, knowing that the solid Rock of the ancient love of God, which lived before any real rock or any human generation existed, is always with you and can be remembered as easily as picturing your rock. Begin to wiggle your fingers and toes. Open your eyes when you are comfortable. [*Pause as people open their eyes and stretch.*]

4:00 Time of silence

From here we are going to go into a time of silence to reflect on our experiences in this meditation and our experiences in life.

During the first part of your time of silence, make some notes about your feelings and observations during the guided meditation. Make note of what you felt and saw and any insights you might have gained. You can sit quietly or write your reflections.

During the second part of your silence, spend some time thinking about how being a disciple of Jesus has changed your life. In particular, how has that expression through United Methodist Women changed your life?

Tonight, we will be doing storytelling about how United Methodist Women has changed our lives. Give this serious consideration and be ready to tell your story in five minutes or less. The point of this storytelling is to inform and inspire other people about United Methodist Women as followers of Jesus' message of good news to the poor, to women, to children, to outcasts. If you are just getting started in United Methodist women, you can talk about a program, project or even a book from the Reading Program you might know something about. Or you can talk about what you want to contribute or what you expect to receive.

So you have two tasks in this time of silence. One is to reflect and write on your experience of the meditation. The second is to develop your inspirational story. We will come back together at 5:30 to share our reflection on our meditation experience. Tonight at 7:15 we will gather to sing and share our stories.

Keep your feeling of meditation—even though you have tasks. Let the center of the Rock of Love be the well-spring for our reflections and your story. This time of silence is the continuation of the meditation.

You're on your own until 5:30, when we'll meet back in this room for one-half hour before dinner.

Evening

5:30 Large group sharing

Focus on the experience of meditation. What did you see? Did you get answers to any questions? Share with one neighbor for five minutes and then share with whole group. Share only what is comfortable.

6:00 Dinner

7:00 Singing

*Make announcements about departure logistics for the next morning and thank those who helped make the retreat happen.*

7:15 Storytelling

*Have the group line up by years of participation in United Methodist Women. Then count off to create groups of six people of varied years of experience. Have people tell their stories to one another. The focus: United Methodist Women has shaped me. Encourage more experienced women to talk about what the organization has done locally, nationally, etc. What keeps them there? What moves them? What do they want to know? What would they like to do? Each group will select one or two brief stories to be shared with the total group. Less experienced women can share what they are looking for in this laywomen's mission organization.*

8:45 Evening prayers

9:00 Social time

*Share snacks and popcorn.*

## **Saturday Evening Prayers**

### **Unison Invocation\***

O God, our Rock in ages past, our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home! A thousand ages, in our sight, are like an evening gone; short as the watch that ends the night, before the rising sun. Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all who breathe away; they fly forgotten, as a dream dies at the opening day. O God, our rock, we know you come to guide us in the way, so when our humble lives are done your justice wins the day.

Adapted from "O God, Help in Ages Past," *The United Methodist Hymnal* #117.

### **Hymn\***

"Seek Ye First," *The United Methodist Hymnal* #405

### **Prayers of Intercession**

God's mercy is needed for ...

### **Prayers of Thanksgiving**

God's signs of hope are ...

### **Unison Profession of Faith\***

O Christ, you who lived among us and were both God and human, we are your followers. We believe that you are with us guiding us and that we are not doing the work of mercy and justice alone. We believe that God requires that we love mercy, do justice and walk humbly with you. We believe that what we have done for the least of these, we have done for you. We believe, we love, we act. Amen!

### **Hymn\***

"The Care the Eagle Gives Her Young," *The United Methodist Hymnal* #118

### **Benediction**

Rest easy in the bosom of the Rock that gave you birth. Rest easy in the memory of water and honey from a rock. Rest easy in the knowledge that even though much is asked of you, much is given. You are not alone. We have each other and we have the Rock. Amen.

*\*Stand as you are able.*



## Leader's Script: Sunday

### Morning

9:00 Singing

9:15 Bible study: Luke 19:29-48, Habakkuk 2:8-14

*You might start with two minutes of brainstorming references in the Bible to stones, rocks, stumbling blocks, etc. Then read Luke 19: 36-38 and Habbakkuk 2:9-14. Hand out copies with copyright information on page.*

### **Small-group discussion**

What was the relationship of people to stones in Jesus' day (from your knowledge)? Describe the references to stones in these texts. How do they relate to each other? By quoting Habakkuk, what do you think Jesus was saying?

*Remind the group that the stones were used for throwing and that the mood in Jerusalem was very tense. Jesus may have been warning the religious leaders that if you try to quiet the crowd, they might start throwing stones. Also, the Gospels were all written after the destruction of the temple, which could account for the second reference to stones.*

*At the end have women think about what programs of United Methodist Women address the issues in Habakkuk related to the issues confronted by Habakkuk. Quickly have participants name about three or four issues in the large group. What would the stones cry out today? If you have time, have people in pairs write a statement that a stone would cry out today. Make a circle, then go around the circle having each duo lift their stones and read their "cry out" statement.*

10:15 Break

10:30 Closing worship

11:30 Evaluation

11:45 Departure

Closing Worship: The Rock That Bore You

by Twick Morrison

Former vice president of United Methodist Women and racial justice advocate

## Call to Worship

Leader: The stone was rolled away!

**ALL: If we are silent, even the stones will cry out!**

Leader: The cornerstone was rejected by the builders.

**ALL: If we are silent, even the stones will cry out!**

Leader: Build your house on solid rock.

**ALL: If we are silent, even the stones will cry out!**

## Hymn of Praise

“How Firm a Foundation,” *The United Methodist Hymnal* #529 (verses 1, 4, and 5)

## Unison Prayer

Rock of justice, rock that gushes water, honey, oil—inspire us to go beyond ourselves to live for your justice. Be the Rock for us. Help us beyond what seems to be lifeless matter. Open our eyes to life, hope and justice. Amen.

## Gospel Reading

Matthew 16:13-18

Jesus called Peter a rock. The name Peter means “rock” or “stone.” Peter is a rock on which Jesus builds a new and transforming community. Each of us can be co-worker with Jesus in building the church. United Methodist Women members have put our prayer and our actions together to help make a difference in the world. We are builders with Jesus.

Watch the DVD *Resurrection Road* and see how United Methodist Women has made a difference in the world.

Listen to the stories. They are our stories—the stories of women throughout the world. This DVD is about 30 minutes long. It tells the stories of United Methodist Women organized for mission.

## DVD

*Resurrection Road*

## Hymn of Response

“Jesu, Jesu,” *The United Methodist Hymnal* #432

## **Commitment Ceremony**

All rise. As we sing our closing song, bring your rock to the altar and pile it with all the others. Each one represents a commitment to mission and to God. Say your commitment out loud when your turn comes to lay your rock on the altar. Bring the words to the song with you so that you can sing while you are waiting your turn.

## **Sending Forth**

In ancient times, people would pass by their rock altar and remember their sacred moment of commitment. Today we move farther and quicker, so take a rock with you. Place it where you will see it as a remainder of your commitment to God and the mission work of Jesus Christ. Go in peace to struggle for justice.

## **Unison Response**

We are a covenant people. We agree that what is required of us is to do justice and to walk humbly with our God. We reach out to touch, to heal, to liberate. We open our hearts to be touched, healed, liberated. We are children of God, called to be alive in the love and justice of God. Amen.

## **Hymn**

“Here I AM, Lord,” *The United Methodist Hymnal* #593

## **Dismissal**

Go forth! Remember the Rock that bore you! Amen.

## **Chorus**

On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand. All other ground is sinking sand,  
All other ground is sinking sand.

### **About the Author**

J. Ann Craig is former executive for spiritual development for United Methodist Women. Craig began her work in mission right after she graduated from Nebraska Wesleyan University. She served as a US-2 young adult missionary for The United Methodist Church and studied liberation theologies at Yale Divinity School.