

Presenter's Manual:

Workshop for SSC

Small Group Leaders
and Assistants



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Session 1

Friday Evening

NOTE ON PROCESS: This manual is meant to be used as a guide for presenters of the workshop preparing small group leaders and assistants for the SSC Retreat. The structure envisioned here is that of a three-day (Friday evening to Sunday noon) program held in a prayerful retreat house environment. While circumstances may dictate another format, it would be important to find as quiet and prayerful a setting as possible.

The material that follows is meant as a guide and resource for presenters in their preparation for the workshop. Ideally, these will be led by a team of two or three people with experience of the SSC retreat. It is expected that they will design their presentations in light of their own experience and the particular needs of their audience. Some of this material may be helpful as hand-outs for participants. Each participant should have a copy of the SSC retreat in hand as they begin the workshop.

Introduction

[Welcome]

[Practical Exercise:
Ice Breaker]¹

The Role of the Small Group Leader

The SSC retreat represents an attempt to bring an experience of Christian spirituality to mature and committed Catholics who may not have had the opportunity to explore the riches of the Church's spiritual tradition. In trying to reach a broad range of individuals at the parish level, this approach cannot possibly offer material that will always speak to everyone. We recognize too that the amount of material offered in this retreat might be daunting for some and that, in their case, less may be more.

These are some of the reasons why the role of the small group leader and assistant is vitally important in this model of retreat. They represent the "interpretive key" that allows the material to be presented in a way that responds to the particular needs of their small group members. Leaders

¹ Choose one of the ice breaker exercises included in the Supplementary Material on p. 25.

are not expected to simply repeat this material, but to prayerfully appropriate it for themselves and present those aspects that they feel most resonate with what the Spirit is doing in the lives of those under their care.

The purpose of this workshop is to present small group leaders and their assistants with an overview of the structure and process of the retreat, an in-depth review of its central themes, and practical help in facilitating small groups.

The Structure of the Retreat

NOTE ON PROCESS: In the section that follows, we suggest walking participants through the “Overview of the Retreat”² and introducing them to the basic structure of the group meeting which they will be asked to lead. A fuller treatment of group leadership will be given in Session 4. We also include introductory material on Ignatian spirituality.

1. An Overview of the Retreat

- a. The SSC Retreat material aims at providing small group leaders with a road map and supporting materials with which to guide those in their care. It can be thought of as a “cookbook” to which the group leader brings his or her life and faith experience. Our intent is to provide the beginning group leader with sufficient direction to feel comfortable in his or her role, and the more experienced group leader with enough flexibility to adapt the retreat in whatever way seems most helpful.
- b. Each retreat participant will have in hand a copy of the SSC Retreat from which to follow the basic flow of the meeting and find prayer materials for the coming week. They are also provided with the guided meditations and “Contexts of Prayer”, but these have been placed in the appendices along with supplementary material. In doing so, we hope to make clear that these latter materials are for reference purposes and not to be read during the meeting.

2. The Structure of a Group Meeting:³

- a. Welcome/Weather Report
- b. Ice-breakers
- c. Anima Christi
- d. Guided Meditation
- e. Faith Sharing
- f. The Context of Prayer
- g. Closing Prayer

² See attached Overview of the Retreat, pp. 32-33. We suggest distributing this to the workshop participants as a useful handout.

³ It might be helpful to review with the leaders and assistants the introductory materials to the SSC Retreat found on pages 3-8, including the section entitled “Group Meeting”.

Ignatian Spirituality

NOTE ON PROCESS: Rather than presenting this material in a straight lecture format, we suggest eliciting from participants what they know of the Ignatian tradition. Helpful starting points might include events in the life of Ignatius, the historical context in which he lived and worked, and contrasting his spirituality with that of other more monastic traditions. You may also wish to clarify your use of terms like “spirituality” and “images of God” depending on your audience. Here follows points you might wish to touch upon in your presentation.⁴

The SSC retreat draws much of its inspiration from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. While it makes no claim to being an experience of the full Exercises, it will be important for you as group leaders and assistants to be familiar with some of the main characteristics of Ignatian spirituality.

1. Principle Themes:

- a. God is at work in the world, laboring to draw all of creation into loving communion and transforming each one of us into the very image of God. Ignatian spirituality is directed at helping us take our place as disciples in this plan of God for the world.
- b. Sin is at work in the world inhibiting the transformation willed by the Father. Ignatian spirituality will emphasize personal awareness and cultivating the ability to determine and always choose what is of God.
- c. We freely participate in the work of the Trinity, responding in deep gratitude to God's unconditional love for us even in our sin. Ignatius stressed the importance of our deepest most loving desires as reflective of God's will.
- d. God is revealed more intimately in the a-conceptual (heart *and* mind) rather than in the realm of the intellect and concepts, the realm of pure and distinct ideas.
- e. God communicates and works directly with each one of us. The role of the group leader and assistant is to help create an environment in which group members can be more open to the workings of the Spirit.

⁴ For additional material see “A Spirituality of Choosing” and “Discernment of Spirits” on pp. 16-17 in the supplementary material section.

2. The Four “Weeks” of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius and their accompanying “graces”:⁵

Week	Theme	Grace
First Week	Jesus is Savior	<i>To know oneself as a loved sinner</i>
Second Week	Jesus, the Way to the Father	<i>To know, love, and follow Jesus</i>
Third Week	Jesus, the Revelation of the Father’s Compassionate Love.	<i>Sorrow, regret, and confusion, because the Lord is going to his Passion for my sins.</i>
Fourth Week	Jesus, the Lord of History	<i>To rejoice because of the great glory and joy of Christ risen.</i>

[Closing Prayer]⁶

⁵ The SSC retreat draws its structure from the four “weeks” of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. These “weeks” do not correspond to fixed periods of time but to sequences of desiring. The process of the Spiritual Exercises is basically a record of the thresholds that Ignatius crossed – the sequence of desires he experienced as he grew in intimacy with Christ. They are not to be understood as a linear progression but cyclical, like a spiral that goes deeper and deeper.

⁶ Consider using the *Examination of Consciousness* as a closing prayer to help participants reflect on where they find themselves as they begin this workshop. Begin with a brief introduction and then take them through the five steps as a guided meditation. Adapt your language to the specific circumstances of the workshop. What were the movements of their heart as they approached the start of this workshop? Are they fully here yet? Is there anything they need to let go of in order to be fully present?

Session 2

Saturday Morning

Introduction

[Weather Report]

[Practical Exercise: *Lectio Divina*]

[Brief Sharing]

Prayer

NOTE ON PROCESS: We suggest that this introduction to prayer take the experience of the participants as its starting point. One possibility might be to draw on the group's experience of the exercise in Lectio Divina with which you began this session, with its progressive engagement of the affect and movement towards simplicity. Here follows some points on prayer that you may wish to consider in preparing your presentation.

1. Prayer is about staying in relationship.
 - a. The importance of listening.
 - b. The importance of paying attention to desires.
 - c. The importance of simply being faithful rather than “successful”.
2. Why Silence?
 - a. Silence as the school of intimacy.
 - b. Growth in self awareness.
 - c. What to do with distractions.
3. Some Practical Suggestions.⁷
4. Journaling⁸

⁷ See “Notes on Prayer” in Appendix B, pp. 132-4 of the SSC retreat.

⁸ Refer participants to the resource material on “Journaling Your Prayer” in Appendix B of the SCC Retreat, pp. 138.

The Prayer Forms

NOTE ON PROCESS: Here only a simple note of the major prayer forms need be made, as leaders and assistants have a chance to experience them at various points during this workshop. The place and purpose of the guided meditations should be noted. If the workshop presenter wishes to discuss the additional prayer forms, these should be made available to the participants in the form of handouts.

Major Prayer Forms:⁹

1. The Examination of Consciousness
2. Lectio Divina
3. Imaginative Prayer
4. The Prayer of Quiet Presence

The Guided Meditations:

1. The purpose:
 - a. To slow people down
 - b. To help group members prepare for faith sharing
 - c. As an exercise in imaginative prayer.
2. Practical Suggestions:
 - a. Adapting the content for your particular group.
 - b. The use of music.

Additional Prayer Forms:¹⁰

1. Heart Meditation
2. Healing Prayer
3. Time Line

⁹ Supplementary materials on the *Examen*, *Lectio Divina*, and Imaginative prayer can be found in Appendix B of the SSC retreat. See pp. 77-78 of the SSC retreat for a description of the Prayer of Quiet Presence.

¹⁰ Supplemental material on the Heart Meditation and Healing Prayer can be found on pp. 19-24. See pp. 11-12 of the SSC Retreat for a description of the "Time Line".

[Closing Prayer]

NOTE ON PROCESS: Saturday afternoon is left free for leaders and assistants to prayerfully read through the "Contexts for Prayer" to be reviewed on Saturday evening.

Another option would be to hold an afternoon session during which the workshop presenter(s) begin going through the "Context of Prayer" for each week. The evening session would be used to complete the review of this material and focus on areas participants found difficult. If this option is chosen, use the "introduction" material in Session 3 to begin the afternoon session.

Session 3

Saturday Evening

Introduction

[Welcome and Weather Report]

[Practical Exercise: *Imaginative Prayer*]¹¹

[Brief Sharing]

The Content of the Retreat

NOTE ON PROCESS: The group leaders and assistants have had an opportunity to go through the "Context for Prayer" material during the course of the afternoon. We suggest beginning this session by eliciting their response to what they have read. Having a copy of the "Overview of the Retreat" in hand might be helpful here. In the context of the discussion that follows, here are some points that you may wish to address:

1. Introduction:

- a. As group leaders, you will be the ones to gauge how much and in what depth to present the "Context of Prayer" material in Appendix A of the SSC Retreat. We would expect you to stay with the themes of the retreat, but there is no expectation that you be bound by the wording or that all the material provided will be used. Individual group members can read through the material on their own, but during the meeting we would hope they would give you their full attention.
- b. We suggest making an effort to relate your presentation of the "Context of Prayer" to the grace for the week.

¹¹ The workshop presenter can adapt one of the Imaginative Prayer exercises from the SSC Retreat or craft one of their own.

- c. It will be important not to overwhelm people with material. As mentioned above, Ignatius was very clear that it is what moves both heart and mind that is most helpful to spiritual growth.
- d. The group leader and assistant will want to pay attention to other resources that may be supportive of the graces asked for during this time of retreat. There may be parish activities, the sacraments, or special liturgical services that may offer further ways in which group members can deepen their retreat experience.

2. The Context of Prayer:

NOTE ON PROCESS: If participants have read through the material on their own, you will want to begin by eliciting their questions and comments. In addition to clarifying difficulties, you may also wish to make note of the following:

- a. *The way in which the Ignatian themes discussed in Session 1 are reflected in this material.*
- b. *The relationship between the Ignatian graces, the graces for each week of the retreat, and the Context of Prayer.*
- c. *Discuss ways in which group leaders can present this material in a manner appropriate both to their group and in keeping with their own experience of the faith.*

Ignatian Week	Retreat Week	Grace	Context of Prayer
Week 1	Week 1	Experience God’s loving presence	God is known in relationship The Living God Mysticism of the ordinary Note: Principle and Foundation
	Week 2	Experience of being loved even in my sin.	On being a loved sinner The goal of human life is communion
	Week 3	Attentiveness to the Father’s call	The early life of Jesus A new vision of what God intends The pattern of Jesus life and ministry

Ignatian Week	Retreat Week	Grace	Context of Prayer
Week 2	Week 4	Know Jesus more intimately, love him more intensely, and follow him more closely.	Wilderness as sacred space Merton's true and false self The Beatitudes
	Week 5	Know Jesus more intimately, love him more ardently, so as to be formed into his likeness.	God's rules for eating May they all be one A new consciousness
Week 3	Week 6	Sorrow, regret, and confusion because the Lord is going to his Passion for my sins.	Mystery of suffering and dying The Paschal Mystery
Week 4	Week 7	Experience the joy and power of Jesus' resurrection in the ordinary circumstances of my life.	On the road to Emmaus The risen life Mysticism for today
	Week 8	The grace of gratitude	Contemplation to attain love

[Closing Night Prayer]¹²

¹² We suggest the model for this night prayer be based on the *Prayer of Quiet Presence*. See pp. 77-78 of the SSC retreat for a description of this prayer form. One possibility might be to adapt this prayer form within the context of the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

Session 4

Sunday Morning

Introduction

[Weather Report]

[Brief Opening Prayer]

Facilitating A Small Group

NOTE: We suggest that this portion of the workshop be done as a role play involving all the participants. One of the workshop presenters would assume the role of the small group leader and choose an assistant. If there are more than 12 participants and you have a co-workshop presenter, form two groups. Here are some suggested adaptations you may wish to consider:

1. **The Guided Meditation:** *Adapt the meditation by asking them to reflect back on their experience since Friday evening. You may wish to use the framework of the Examen for this.*
2. **Faith Sharing:** *Ask the group to share their experience of Night Prayer on the previous evening or where they have found God in their experience of this workshop.*
3. **Context of Prayer:** *Present one of the weekly "Contexts of Prayer" that the group had difficulty understanding in Session 3.*

The presenters will want to make sure to have thought out the meeting carefully, including the preparation of readings and music. Every effort should be made to make this as realistic as possible.

[Role Play of a Small Group Meeting]

Follow-Up Discussion Material I

NOTE ON PROCESS: Following the conclusion of the role play, de-brief the group on their experience and answer any questions they might have. Here follows some theoretical points that you may wish to draw on in your response:

1. There are two important dimensions of group life that it is helpful to be aware of:
 - a. The *content*: what the group is talking about.
 - b. The *process*: the meaning of what is being said and done. People's actions, for instance, may be giving a different message than what they are saying.¹³
2. When people first gather together in a group there are two primary concerns that you will need to be attentive to if the group is to function well. Group members will be asking themselves:
 - a. How are people experiencing me? Will I be accepted and valued as a group member? People's approach to group life will depend on such factors as their level of self-acceptance and experience of groups in the past.
 - b. Who are these other people in the group and is this environment safe? The clearer the group's format and way of interacting (see below), and the more encouragement and support they receive, the easier people will find it to trust and enter into the work of the retreat.
3. In light of the above, one of your main roles as group leader is to help maintain a safe and prayerful environment in which people can trust enough to open themselves to one another and to the Holy Spirit. In order to do so, it will be important to set clear rules about the life of the group:
 - a. In as much as is reasonably possible, begin and end on time. Don't get into the habit of waiting for latecomers for instance. If you find that you consistently need more time to meet, negotiate with the group on lengthening your meeting time.

¹³ Notice the atmosphere in the group. Are group members prayerful, anxious, or distracted? Are there people who are always coming late? What is going on inside of you as a group leader?

- b. As a courtesy to the group, ask members to call to let the assistant know that they will be late or are not able to come to the meeting.
- c. Review the Guidelines for “Group Sharing”¹⁴ as often as you think necessary. Issues of confidentiality, respectful listening, using “I” language, etc. are all a vital element in helping people feel they are in a safe environment.
- d. Stay clearly in your role as leader or assistant. You may want to find ways of collaborating, with the assistant occasionally doing a guided meditation or closing prayer for instance. Our suggestion, given the short time frame of the retreat, is that this should be limited. What you are basically doing is introducing another agenda (however worthy), and it runs the risk of taking away from the continuity and stability that clear leadership brings.

Follow-up Discussion Material II

*NOTE ON PROCESS: Here follow more practical suggestions on how to address situations that commonly arise during a small group meeting:*¹⁵

1. It is important to **try never to leave anyone feeling alone in the group**. For example, if everyone else shares wonderful experiences of prayer and there is one person who seems to have had a very difficult time, you might ask if anyone in the group has had similar difficulties in prayer. If not, then you should share difficulties that you have had. This helps “universalize” the person’s experience, allowing them to see that this is a common and even necessary part of the spiritual life.
2. **For those who remain silent in a group**, you might consider what is called “bridging”. Once people have shared, ask the silent person if there was anything said by others during the sharing that they can relate to. The person may find this easier because the group has already welcomed the previous comments.
3. **If someone gets emotional** and, for instance, starts to cry, stop and make sure they feel heard and cared for. Once you have done your best to console, the leader needs to gently move the group forward. It is not helpful, in this kind of

¹⁴ See the “Directives for Small Group Sharing” in the SSC retreat introductory materials, pp. 5-6.

¹⁵ Note the “Suggestions for Group Interventions”, “Tips for Group Leaders”, and “Holding a Prayerful Group Meeting” found in the supplementary material. These may provide additional resources to use here or as handouts.

- retreat setting, to have one person's sharing take up the whole meeting. If the issue needs further action, the leader can follow-up privately after the meeting.
4. When people share a problem they are having, **resist the temptation to try and solve** it for them. Problem solving is often a reflection of our own anxieties when faced with another's pain. During a meeting, our role is primarily that of a compassionate listener, trusting in God's loving presence to guide and heal.
 5. In larger groups of more than 8 or 10 it is normal to see "sub-grouping", as when two or more individuals begin to have **private conversations**. It's important to gently call them back to membership in the larger group. You might look for an appropriate time to address the whole group and remind them that attentive listening is one of the greatest gifts we can give to one another.
 6. You may find **participants who tend to intellectualize the material** and have difficulty getting in touch with how they feel. In some cases this may be an unconscious way of avoiding deeper memories and feelings. You can remind the group of Ignatius' concern that there are limits to simply gaining more knowledge, and that the aim of the retreat is to grow in intimacy. In the end however, it is important to be gentle and accepting of where people find themselves.
 7. If you find **members who are not coming regularly or not participating**, you may want to address this with them privately. On the one hand we need to understand that this retreat can be very new and even scary for some. On the other hand there has to be concern for the whole group – coming and going or simply coming as a spectator are harmful to a group's ability to form the bonds of trust that make sharing possible. Try to understand a person's situation as best you can, pray it through, and trust your judgment.

NOTE: Before ending the workshop, you may wish to review the relevant items on the "Retreat Check List" found in the Supplementary Materials on page 30-31.

[Closing Prayer]

Supplementary Material

A Spirituality of Choosing in the World

1. Ignatian spirituality is essentially a spirituality of choosing that which will be most conducive to the fulfillment of the purpose for which we are created.
2. Ignatius states the foundational attitude for one engaged in the Spiritual Exercises in the consideration of the Principle and Foundation [23]. Here we find a faith based vision of life that places God at the center of everything.¹⁶
3. Ignatius speaks about “discernment of spirits” by which he means an understanding of the movement of the Spirit within my self and in the world so that I may better strive for interior freedom and service to God. Discernment is about sifting through the movements of my heart to determine which are from God and which are from another source. Which lead me to God and which lead elsewhere? How do the feelings, emotions, stimuli, sentiments, mental states and tendencies within me influence and shape the direction of my life?
4. There are two basic dispositions that will govern the application of St. Ignatius’ teachings on discernment:
 - a. If the general orientation is a movement away from God then one will want to counsel the person to see through the illusion of the false “pleasures” that are leading him or her. Often these are dynamics that keep repeating and if one can discern the pattern this can be enormously helpful. The person begins to realize that, however “good” it seems, this attitude/behavior/inclination never brings peace and joy.
 - b. If the general orientation is toward trying to align oneself with the intentions of God, then we can discern that an experience is of God if it leads us forward, gives us hope and vigor, moves us towards freedom, indeed helps us to move at all. The effect of the evil spirit is to fill us with doubt, make us lose hope, forget the graces we have been given – in short, turn us away from God and our deepest God given desires.¹⁷

¹⁶ See *The Principle and Foundation* on page 20 of the SSC retreat.

¹⁷ See supplementary material on the Discernment of Spirits on page 17-18.

The Discernment of Spirits

Signs of the Good Spirit	Signs of the Bad Spirit
<p>There is a real sense of our own worth – a renewed confidence.</p>	<p>Loss of the sense of our own worth. We are down on ourselves and think and even speak of ourselves in ways we would never dream of speaking about anyone else.</p>
<p>Hope comes alive; we believe Jesus is with us, no matter what. There is a genuine feeling of movement; 'It hasn't got to be like this. I want to do something about it, and I <i>can</i> do something about it.'</p>	<p>Hope is blighted and fades away; the light goes out and the world seems dark. There is a feeling of being stuck or trapped, of having nowhere to go or going around in circles, of being down a big, black hole.</p>
<p>Something lifts from us; we feel lighter, liberated. Our perspective broadens beyond self-preoccupation and we grow in compassion and sensitivity to the needs of others.</p>	<p>There is a pervasive sense of heaviness; we feel burdened. We degenerate into cynicism (can't see any good in anyone), or self-pity.</p>
<p>A questioning that is accompanied by clarity and conviction. We are led to bring our concerns into our relationship with Jesus, and focus on the relationship rather than on the issue. We tell Jesus (even repeatedly) how the issue affects us.</p>	<p>A questioning that creates anxiety and ends in confusion. We find ourselves constantly mulling over incidents, or giving all our attention to resolving some issue and end up more fragmented and de-energized than when we started.</p>
<p>"(It) is necessary to suppose that every good Christian is more ready to put a good interpretation on another's statement than to condemn it as false" (Sp. Ex. 22). (None of us has a monopoly on truth.) We are led to let go of our hurts, and are able to pray – "Jesus, give me the attitude to this person You want me to have."</p>	<p>We are easily led into negative interpretations of others that degenerate into mutual recriminations, and an "I'm right you're wrong" attitude. Some people carry in their hearts the corpses of past relationships, and become addicted to hurt as a confirmation of their identity (not moving beyond victimization).</p>
<p>Awareness of sin always tinged with hope that leads us back into our relationship with Jesus, and others.</p>	<p>When we think of our sins and failings, we feel bad about ourselves and wallow in our bad feelings.</p>

Three Additional remarks

1. The way of the Bad Spirit is to lead us away from wholesome relationship; the way of the Good Spirit is to lead us more deeply into wholesome relationship.

2. What we give our attention to colors all the other areas of our life. If we focus on negativity, the negativity will spread; if we focus on “grace” (which is life giving), the grace will spread.

3. When I am open to the Good Spirit, I see many possibilities. When I am not open to the Good Spirit, I close down and see no way out.

Based on material by Patrick O’Sullivan, sj

Heart Prayer¹⁸

NOTE: You will need some color pencils, markers, or crayons and paper for this exercise.

There are times when non-cognitive exercises can be of great help in opening up new dimensions of our experience of God and moving us from the “head” to the “heart”. Here is a prayer form that you might consider using with your group or with a particular individual:

Step 1

Rests your mind for a moment, and do your best to be still and open.

Be present to where you are, fully attentive to your body and your mind.

Now offer this prayer period to God.

Step 2

Consider how the language of the heart is a metaphor for many states and emotions. Consider the words and phrases given below, and pay attention to the thoughts and feelings they stir within you.

Beating heart	Heart on fire	Hearty
Big-hearted	Heart song	Heavy heart
Black heart	Heart beat	Hungry heart
Empty heart	Heartless	Lighthearted
Happy heart	Heart-rending	Open hearted
Heartfelt	Heart-sick	Pure-hearted
Heart of gold	Heart warming	Sad heart

Step 3

Which of the above best describes your heart at this moment? Take out a piece of paper and some colored markers or pencils and follow the guided meditation below. Be creative and open to the movement of the Spirit.

Imagine your heart at the center of yourself.

¹⁸ Adapted from Nancy Azara's, *Spirit Taking Form* (Red Wheel/Weiser, York Beach ME, 2002) pp. 109-10.

Take a mental picture of your heart.

This picture can be a literal one or a metaphorical/imaginative.

Draw your heart on a sheet of clean paper.

NOTE: there is no need to worry about the quality of your art work – this is not about your artistic skills.

Step 4

Resting quietly in silence, get in touch with the thoughts and feelings that this exercise has stirred within you.

What is my art work inviting me to see, to own about myself?

What most impresses me about my drawing?

What is it that I most want to share with God?

Step 5

Bring your prayer to a close.

Group Healing Prayer: Introductory Reference Material¹⁹

We know in faith that God loves us and is with us during every step of our journey. What to make then of our experiences of brokenness –of separateness, of being rejected and hurt, experiences of evil, of being sinned against and experiences of bondage which flow from these? As we reflect over our lives we may discover places in our heart that are so hard to look at that we wonder how God can love us through and through when we experience so much in ourselves that is unlovable.

Each of us is born into a world that is broken and into an environment in which something has gone wrong. However loving and caring our family and friends have been, we are inevitably touched by the dysfunction of a world that can leave us feeling hurt, rejected, resentful, and anxious. But if one thing is clear from the gospels it is that Jesus came to bring reconciliation and healing. In Jesus we see God's deep desire to help us deal with our brokenness – by coming to accept what has been and becoming freer of the ways in which our painful experiences still burden our lives.

This exercise is meant to help us bring together our experiences of brokenness and the experience of God's love. It is a prayer to allow God's love to penetrate every nook and cranny of our hearts. It involves two "moments":

1. Gently opening ourselves to those painful memories and feelings in my life, and recognizing my need for God's healing.

2. Naming my need for healing as accurately and in as focused a way as I can.²⁰ To actually tell someone the story of our pain in a caring environment can often bring a large measure of healing. It can also help us to name our need for healing more accurately.

Below is an outline of an optional group healing prayer which we suggest leaders adapt creatively to the needs of their small group.

NOTE: You will need a large candle and one small candle for each participant for the prayer that follows.

¹⁹ This introductory material is adapted from an article by Fr. John Veltrie, SJ. See www.spiritualorientations.com, "Brokenness and Inner Healing".

²⁰ For example, I may be coming to terms with my fear towards a parent that began when I was very young; as I look for greater understanding I discover my so-called fear needs to be renamed as anger. Perhaps this anger has to be embraced and acknowledged and somehow expressed to someone before I can be healed. If the first moment of healing is to admit one's need, the second moment is to name the need more accurately.

Healing Prayer

☞ **Leader:** In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

The Lord be with you!

☞ **All:** And also with you.

☞ **Leader:** We begin by lighting this candle, symbol of God's light and God's love present in our midst.²¹

[Light Large Candle]

[Meditative Music]

*Find a comfortable posture, one that allows you to remain both attentive and relaxed,
and in which your breath flows easily.*

(Pause)

*Notice your breathing.
The coolness of the in-breath, and the warmth of the out-breath.
Feel your body growing quieter with each breath.*

(Pause)

Recall that God is present here in our midst.

*God who loved you into existence and whose love sustains you in each moment and with each
breath.*

God who knows and has shared each moment of your life.

(Pause)

Conscious of God's love, now ask the Spirit's help in recalling

²¹ The group leader can add opening comments specific to the group's needs, making use of whatever may be helpful from the introductory reference material presented above (p. 21).

any painful experiences of the past which still affect you now.

Experiences of loss, of pain, of betrayal, of not being accepted or respected.

Stay quiet, and let those memories come into your awareness.

(Pause)

Let's listen together to the following story as Jesus heals a woman crippled for eighteen years.

Notice the setting, the people, the sounds and colors.

Most of all, notice Jesus and how he relates to this woman in her pain.

[Read the Scripture Passage]²²

He was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath. And a woman was there who for eighteen years had been crippled by a spirit; she was bent over, completely incapable of standing erect. When Jesus saw her, he called to her and said, "Woman, you are set free of your infirmity." He laid his hands on her, and she at once stood up straight and glorified God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant that Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, said to the crowd in reply, "There are six days when work should be done. Come on those days to be cured, not on the Sabbath day." The Lord said to him in reply, "Hypocrites! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his ass from the manger and lead it out for watering? This daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound for eighteen years now, ought she not to have been set free on the Sabbath day from this bondage?" When he said this, all his adversaries were humiliated; and the whole crowd rejoiced at all the splendid deeds done by him.

(Pause)

Where did you find yourself in the story?

Where was Jesus?

Can you picture him now in your imagination?

Bring any painful memories you are conscious of to Jesus now, and speak with him of whatever is in your heart.

²² The following is taken from Luke 13: 10-17. Given the needs of your small group, you could substitute other healing stories: Mark 8: 22-26 (Jesus heals a blind person), Mark 1: 40-45 (a leper), Mark 5: 1-20 (someone possessed), John 11: 1-44 (Lazarus), Mark 2: 1-12 (paralytic), Mark 7: 31-37 (a deaf person), Luke 13: 10-17 (physically disabled), Luke 7: 36-50 (a prostitute).

(Longer Pause)

When you are ready, light one of the small candles and place it beside the larger candle.

As you do so, bring whatever is in your heart to Jesus,

trusting in his gentle and loving care for you.

NOTE: Once everyone has had a chance to light their candles and place them around the large candle, the group leader may wish to invite those who feel comfortable to share something of their story.

[Optional Sharing]

✞ **Leader:** *(Leader's own prayer or)* Gracious and Loving God, we come to you with our sadness and our pain. At times we feel overwhelmed by what life brings to us and to those we love. But we trust in your care for each one of us, and ask that you transform our pain the way you transformed the pain of your Son Jesus. May we, like him, be bearers of your Word, and carry your healing touch to all our brothers and sisters. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Our Father]

[Concluding Song]

Ice Breakers

Here are three possible ways in which you might help put people at ease as you begin the first week small group meeting (see SSC retreat, page 9):

1. Ask everyone to write down three things they are comfortable sharing about themselves on a small piece of paper. Put the pieces of paper in a bowl or basket and, one by one, pull them out asking the group to guess to whom each one belongs.
2. Ask each person to think of three things about themselves, one of which is not true. Begin asking each group member to share these, and the group to guess which one is false.
3. Ask the group to share a bit about themselves. Starting points might include the following:
 - a. Share personal details to the extent you feel comfortable (e.g. hometown, married or single, children, present work, etc.)
 - b. What draws you to this parish community?
 - c. What brought you to make this retreat? What do you hope to get from this experience? What do you hope we will get as a group?

Facilitating a Small Group

Do's	Don'ts
Create an atmosphere of welcome and hospitality.	Do not allow any one person to take over the group.
Consider using symbols, reflecting the nature of the group and style of the meeting. A lighted candle, flowers, or open Bible, for instance, can draw members into the experience and set the tone.	Do not change the direction of the whole group to take care of the needs of one member.
Be prepared as a group leader/assistant. Look and pray over the material before the meeting.	Do not treat the group as an adult education class, where you are the teacher.
Help the group members be clear about the ground rules and their commitment to one another.	Do not ask questions that elicit only "yes" or "no" responses.
Keep members connected to the life of the parish and the liturgy.	Be open to regular feedback from others. You have a built-in partner in this endeavor: check with your leader/assistant.
Keep members on topic. If someone gets off the subject, gently bring him or her back.	Do not be afraid of a little conflict in the group.
Find ways to invite the quiet or shy members to speak, without pressuring them in any way.	Do not allude to anything a member of the group may have shared with you privately.
Be a good listener	Do not talk too much.
Stay in touch with other group leaders and assistants, encouraging one another and sharing information and resources.	Do not always speak or offer your own opinion first.
Pray for each member of the group everyday.	Do not let the meeting end on a "downer"
Have a sense of humor and try to help everyone to take themselves seriously, but not too seriously.	Do not forget to smile!

Suggestions for Group Interventions:

1. For those of you whose group members have less experience and education, your role will be more heavily weighted towards teaching. A couple of sample interventions might be:
 - a. “It sounds like that experience was very important for you. Can you tell me where you experienced *God* in it?” [*To focus people on faith experience*]
 - b. “I wonder if you could tell us a bit more about what that *felt* like.” [*To help people go deeper*]
 - c. “It was a great act of love for you to just *be* there with God in silence without seeming to get anything out of the experience.” [*For someone who is finding prayer difficult*]
 - d. “Has that been your experience of God to be so punishing and hard?” [*Reflecting back to someone a distorted image of God*]

2. Here are a couple of sample interventions that might be helpful during the course of sharing if people still haven't gotten the feel of how to share:
 - a. “Could we pause here for just a moment? Thank you. What you are saying is very interesting, but could you tell us a bit about where God touched *you* this week? Can you tell us of an experience that moved *your* heart?” [*For someone who gets off the subject or into lecturing*]
 - b. “Could I stop you for a moment? I wish so much that we could hear the whole story but I'm worried we are not going to get to everyone. Can you give us the one thing that moved you most in that experience? [*For the person who is taking up a great deal of time.*]
 - c. “I'd like to suggest that we consider a rule in the group that only one person speaks at a time. I know that's hard sometimes, but I feel it's so important that we show a reverence for each person when they speak. Does that sound OK to everyone?” [*When people comment out of turn or talk with a neighbor while someone is sharing*].

Tips for Group Leaders

1. Listen attentively to the needs of your small group members and adapt the material of the retreat in whatever way best helps them grow in the life of faith.
2. Keep in mind God's perfect love for each person exactly as they are.
3. Listen for the desires that emerge in the sharing of group members. How is God calling the group or this person to deeper intimacy?
4. Ask yourself what is the image of God that lies behind a person's sharing, being careful to be open to the unique ways in which God works with each individual.
5. If a person is consistently feeling "dry" in prayer, you may want to explore with them how, where, and when they are praying. Are there adjustments that might help?
6. Believe that God is present and working in the group meeting in both you and your group members.
7. Be comfortable with silences.
8. Pray daily for your group members by name, and never tire in encouraging them.

Holding a Prayerful Group Meeting

1. Prepare well for the meeting. The more familiar you are with the material, the more prayerful and present you will be.
2. Try not to rush through the material. Allow for pauses and silences.
3. Music can be a great help to setting a prayerful atmosphere. Choose your musical selections carefully, and be sure to avoid jarring starts and stops.
4. Try as best you can to make the meeting space one that invites prayer. Placing a candle in the center of the room or using an icon can be helpful.
5. Consistency in terms of time and place helps the group to take ownership of the meeting space as their own.

Retreat Check-List

1. Will there be an overall coordinator? If not, who will be responsible for those functions (e.g. coordinating with the pastor, setting up the final meeting of all groups, etc.)?
2. What will be the time frame for the retreat (beginning and ending dates)? Have you checked the calendar to see that the retreat will not conflict with major parish activities?
3. How will the progression of the retreat match the Church's liturgical season?
4. Who will be in charge of gathering and managing a master list of contact numbers and email for group participants?
5. How many copies of the retreat manual and in what language(s) will you need?
6. Who will be responsible for photocopying the retreat material and placing it in binders?
7. Have participants been reminded to buy a small journal for prayer?
8. How do you plan to present the introductory retreat materials (pp. 3-8)? This should be done at least one week before the first weekly meeting, either in a presentation to all participants, or via mail/email.
9. Will the group leaders be missioned by the pastor at one of the parish liturgies? If so, who will be responsible for setting this up?
10. Have you invited the pastor (or some other priest) to preside at the final liturgy for the retreat?
11. Are there a few priests to whom you can refer group members for the sacrament of reconciliation?
12. Where will your group meeting be held? What do you need to do to gain access to the meeting space every week?
13. Have you, as a group leader, spoken to your assistant about how you will collaboratively assist one another? How do you plan to support and give constructive feed-back to one another during the retreat?

14. Have you reviewed the music you plan to use? Do you have a CD player?
15. What kind of support might be made available to group leaders and assistants during the course of the retreat?

Overview of the Retreat

	Ignatian Week 1		Ignatian Week 2			Ignatian Week 3	Ignatian Week 4	
SSC Retreat Week	<u>Week 1</u> <i>The God of My Experience</i>	<u>Week 2</u> <i>The Plan of God and my Response</i>	<u>Week 3</u> <i>The Early Life of Jesus</i>	<u>Week 4</u> <i>Jesus' Public Ministry</i>	<u>Week 5</u> <i>A New Vision of the Kingdom</i>	<u>Week 6</u> <i>The Passion of Jesus</i>	<u>Week 7</u> <i>Experiencing the Risen Jesus</i>	<u>Week 8</u> <i>Co-Laboring With God</i>
Context of Prayer	We know God only in relationship. The Living God Mysticism of daily life	The question of meaning On being a loved sinner Goal of human life is communion.	The early life of Jesus. A new vision of what God intends. The pattern of Jesus life and ministry.	Wilderness as sacred space Merton's true and false self The Beatitudes	God's rules for eating May they all be one. A new consciousness	Mystery of suffering and dying. The Paschal Mystery	On the road to Emmaus The risen life Mysticism for Today.	Contemplation to attain love
Prayer Form	Examination of Conscious-ness	Lectio Divina	Imaginative Prayer			Prayer of Quiet Presence		
Grace	"Lord God, I want to be aware of your loving presence in my life."	Lord God, Help me to become more aware of your great love and hopes for me, in both my goodness and my sinfulness.	Jesus, I ask for the grace to be attentive to the Father's call just as you were.	Jesus, I want to know you more intimately, that I may love you more intensely, and follow you more closely.	Jesus, I want to know you more intimately, love you more ardently, so that I might be formed into your likeness.	I ask for sorrow, regret, and confusion because the Lord is going to his Passion for my sins.	Jesus, I want to experience the joy and power of your resurrection in the ordinary circumstances of my life.	Jesus, I ask for the grace of Gratitude.
Day 1	Isaiah 55: 1-13 Seek the Lord	Jeremiah: I know well the plans I have for you.	Luke 2: 1-20 Birth of Jesus	Luke 7: 36-50 The woman who was a sinner	John 2: 1-12 The wedding at Cana.	John 13: 1-15 The washing of the feet.	John 20: 19-23 The disciples behind locked doors.	
Day 2	Isaiah 43: 1-4 Do not be afraid	Luke 15:11-32 Prodigal Son	Luke 2: 41-52 Lost in the temple	Luke 9: 1-6 The sending of the disciples	Luke 14: 15-24 The parable of the wedding banquet	Mark 9: 2-10 The Transfiguration	The Risen Jesus goes to his mother.	

	Ignatian Week 1		Ignatian Week 2			Ignatian Week 3	Ignatian Week 4	
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Day 3	Ps. 139 Lord you have probed me and you know me.	Romans 7: 18-25 I know nothing good living in me	Mark 1: 9-11 Baptism of Jesus	John 5: 1-9 The paralyzed man at the Sheep Pool	Luke 13: 18-20 The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed.	John 11: 45-57 The Raising of Lazarus	Acts 2: 1-13 Pentecost	
Day 4	Luke 7: 11-17 Raising of the widow's son.	Deuteronomy 30: 15-20 I set before you life and death. Choose life.	John 4: 5-15 Samaritan Woman at the Well	Mark 1: 21-39 Jesus at Prayer	John 9 The man born blind	Mark 14: 32-42 The agony in the garden.	John 21: 1-15 "Simon, Son of John, do you love me?"	
Day 5	Ps. 8 : 1-9 What are human beings that you spare a thought for them?	Luke 15: 1-7 The Good Shepherd	Luke 4: 1-13 Jesus tempted in the desert	Mark 3: 31-35 Who are my mother and my brothers?	1 Corinthians 11: 23 ff. This is my body, which is for you.	Mark 15: 1-41 The Passion and Crucifixion	Matthew 18: 21-22 "How often must I forgive...?"	
Day 6	The Principle and Foundation	Luke 1: 26-38 The Annunciation Let it happen to me as you have said.	Luke 4: 16-22 Inaugural Sermon in Nazareth.	John 1: 35-42 "Where do you live?" Come and see."	Matthew 6: 7-15 The Lord's Prayer	Mark 15: 42-47 Burial	Ephesians 3: 14-21 This then, is what I pray, kneeling before the Father..."	
Day 7	Review	Review	Review	Review	Review	Review	Review	