



# RENEWING THE PARISH

THROUGH

# ENCULTURATED REVERENCE





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b><u>Retreat Introduction</u></b> .....	<b>3</b>
<i>Audience</i>	
<i>Duration</i>	
<i>Structure</i>	
<i>Conversation and Communion</i>	
<b><u>Pre-Retreat Mass Assessment</u></b> .....	<b>6</b>
<i>Dimension 1: Remembering Why We Are Gathered</i>	
<i>Dimension 2: Praying, Not Talking</i>	
<i>Dimension 3: Room for Contemplation and Silence</i>	
<i>Dimension 4: The Body Matters</i>	
<i>Eucharistic Devotion</i>	
<b><u>Retreat Day Schedule</u></b> .....	<b>16</b>
<i>Suggested Retreat Day Schedule</i>	
<i>Planning Considerations</i>	
<b><u>Retreat Session Guide: Facilitator</u></b> .....	<b>18</b>
<i>Session #1: Behold</i>	
<i>Session #2: Meditate and Decide</i>	
<i>Session #3: Act</i>	
<b><u>Retreat Day Prayer Suggestions</u></b> .....	<b>22</b>
<i>Overall</i>	
<i>Suggested Prayers</i>	



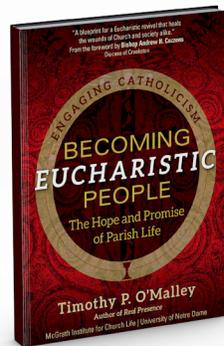
# RETREAT INTRODUCTION

## RENEWING THE PARISH THROUGH ENCULTURATED REVERENCE

Parish renewal is a focal point of nearly every diocesan strategic plan. But this renewal often focuses too much on strategy and not sufficiently on the spiritual renewal that is required to think anew about the mission of parish life in the 21st century, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. This retreat invites participants to discern how to cultivate a deeper enculturated reverence before the Eucharistic mystery, and to see this reverence as the privileged source of parish renewal.

### Audience

This retreat is designed for parish leadership (both clergy and the baptized faithful) to reflect on enculturated Eucharistic reverence as described in Timothy P. O'Malley's book, *Becoming Eucharistic People: The Hope and Promise of Parish Life* (Ave Maria Press, 2022). It is highly recommended that all participants read at least the first two chapters of this book prior to the retreat so as to engage in the exercises from a common ground.



The number of retreatants should be kept somewhat small: no fewer than five persons and no more than twelve persons. All members of the parish staff—including the pastor and key lay leadership—should be present.

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## Duration

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While this retreat has been designed to take place over the course of one day, it is important to note that the implementation of insights and ideas that arise during that day will take much longer to come to fruition.

Ideally, parish leadership should 1) commit to a process of spiritual renewal in the parish around the Eucharist that will unfold over at least two years, and 2) set aside several opportunities within those two years to regather, assess the progress that has been made toward the goals identified during the retreat, and determine whether any adjustments need to be made in either the goals themselves or their implementation.

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## Structure

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The structure of the retreat is designed around three movements inspired by the Church's method of see, judge, and act. Each of these movements should occur within the context of prayerful reflection on the Scriptures, celebration of Mass, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. These movements are:

### ***Beholding:***

To behold means to begin with a posture of prayer, beholding the mystery of wondrous love made available in the Eucharistic mystery. Beholding is also setting time aside to consider the various ways in which the parish might better celebrate the Mass.

### ***Meditating and Deciding:***

We cannot stop with the moment of beholding. To meditate means to think through what constitutes—for the sake of this retreat—an enculturated Eucharistic reverence. This includes studying the characteristics of such reverence, including:

remembering why we're gathered (the *kerygma*), praying and not saying, silence, our use of the body, and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. From this act of meditating, we make a decision. Where could our parish begin a process of spiritual renewal?

***Acting:***

It's one thing to behold, meditate, and decide. But we also need to develop a plan to act. If we want to improve liturgical music at Mass, what will we do about it? Action plans are developed at the retreat and carried out over the coming months as the parish begins its spiritual renewal grounded in Eucharistic reverence.

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## Conversation and Communion

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Conversations around the liturgy can easily turn ugly. In some respects this makes sense, because the liturgy is where we believe, celebrate, and live the fullness of our Catholic faith. For this reason, it is essential to remember that all conversation during this retreat should be inspired by the Eucharistic mystery itself. In other words, conversation should lead to deeper communion, even when there is disagreement. Here are some guidelines to bear in mind:

- 1 Remember the reason that you're talking about improving parish liturgies. It is because we want people to glorify God and experience sanctification through an encounter with Jesus Christ. It is not because we are artists, trying to make everything beautiful.
- 2 Dialogue, don't lecture. This isn't the time to present a treatise on the Eucharist. It is a time for honest, spiritual self-reflection rooted in humility and offered in love for God and neighbor.
- 3 Experience will shape how to approach the question of reverence. This is not a bad thing. But we need to listen respectfully to one another. Remember to always presume the best of your fellow leaders and you will learn to appreciate what they have to offer.



# PRE-RETREAT MASS ASSESSMENT:

## FIVE DIMENSIONS OF ENCULTURATED REVERENCE

*This assessment invites you to participate in a celebration of the Mass at your parish or even school, paying close attention to whether and to what degree the Five Dimensions of Enculturated Reverence are present. Use the prompts provided to complete your assessment, writing down your responses in a notebook or journal. Plan to complete this assessment a month before the retreat, where you will be able to attend three or four Masses (weekday and Sunday) at your parish.*

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### **Dimension 1: Remembering Why We Are Gathered**

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*The General Instruction of the Roman Missal describes the centrality of the Mass to Catholic parish life. Paragraph 16 states:*

The celebration of Mass, as the action of Christ and of the People of God arrayed hierarchically, is the center of the whole of Christian life for the Church both universal and local, as well as for each of the faithful individually. For in it is found the high point both of the action by which God sanctifies the world in Christ and of the worship that the human race offers to the Father, adoring him through Christ, the Son of God, in the Holy Spirit. In it, moreover during the course of the year, the mysteries of redemption are celebrated so as to be in some way made present. As to the other sacred actions and all the activities of the Christian life, these are bound up with it, flow from it, and are ordered to it.

For this reason, the Church must never forget that the celebration of the Mass is the privileged manner in which God sanctifies and redeems the human race. Men and women respond to this sanctification through learning to offer their lives in return as a sacrifice of love.

Liturgical banality, as chapter two of *Becoming Eucharistic People* clarifies, is marked by forgetting the reason for the Mass in the first place. As O'Malley writes:

“Liturgies become banal when we forget what God is doing for us in the act of worship, when we forget the story that matters. Jesus Christ has died, risen, ascended, and now seeks to draw us to the right hand of the Father. Every word and gesture of the Mass is intended to bring us into deeper union with Jesus Christ. . . For this reason, avoiding liturgical banality begins with reencountering the kerygma. Is my parish sufficiently aware (or desirous) of an encounter with Jesus Christ?” (*Becoming Eucharistic People*, 36)

Therefore, the first task of assessing the Eucharistic culture of a parish is getting a sense of the reason that the People of God are going to Mass in the first place. First, ask yourself these questions:

- Do parishioners across the lifecycle know the *kerygma*, why the Church calls the Eucharist the source and summit of the Christian life?
- Do you think that many people in the parish could tell their neighbor why they go to Mass? If so, what might they say? If not, why do you think this is the case?
- Think about the celebration of the Mass in your own parish. In the context of the Mass, is it clear that God is being glorified and the human race being sanctified? If so, how? If not, what would need to change?

In addition, as Pope Francis notes in his document *The Joy of the Gospel*, knowing the *kerygma* means more than being able to tell people about Jesus. As he writes:

Goodness always tends to spread. Every authentic experience of truth and goodness seeks by its very nature to grow within us, and any person who has experienced a profound liberation becomes more sensitive to the needs of others. As it expands, goodness takes root and develops. If we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good. (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 16)

If a parish believes that an encounter with Jesus Christ changes everything, then that parish will live with a joyful sense of hospitality. In such a parish, there will be

a desire to welcome every person into the encounter with Jesus Christ that unfolds in the celebration of every Mass. Therefore, also ask the following questions:

- Are people greeted warmly when they enter the church for Mass? How so?
- Are regular parishioners missed when they are not present? Have you reached out after COVID-19 to those parishioners who have not been back to Mass since the pandemic?
- Does your parish especially welcome children and those with physical and intellectual disabilities? How so?

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## Dimension 2: Praying, Not Talking

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Chapter 2 offers several concrete practices that may help cultivate a more prayerful celebration of the Mass. It is worth recalling that what we do in the Eucharistic celebration is qualitatively different from everything else that happens in daily life, so the manner of our speech should also be qualitatively different. This does not mean that we put on false airs or an overly-pious demeanor; rather, it means that we approach the liturgical texts with awe, wonder, and most of all, humility, recalling that the purpose of this second dimension of enculturated reverence is “to communicate the importance of our relationship with Jesus Christ, to show everyone who walks through our parish doors that Jesus is the reason for our gathering” (*Becoming Eucharistic People*, 37).

As you consider this dimension, ask yourself: if someone who had no concept of prayer randomly walked into your parish’s celebration of the Sunday Mass, would he or she have a sense that something special was taking place? Or would it just seem like any other public gathering? Reflect on whether and how your parish practices each of the following:

### ***Balancing Sung and Spoken Prayer:***

- How often are the dialogues and/or acclamations sung? If they were not sung during the Mass you observed, are there particular times of year when sung prayer is more common (e.g., Advent, Lent)?

- How comfortable are your parishioners in singing the responses to the dialogues and/or acclamations? How comfortable are your priests and/or deacons in intoning them?
- How lengthy or brief is the Universal Prayer (Prayers of the Faithful) in your parish? Is the structure of the intercessions simple to follow? Are alternate or seasonal responses ever utilized?

***Proclaiming the Scriptures:***

- How do the lectors in your parish approach the ambo? How do they handle the Lectionary?
- Is the Book of the Gospels processed and enthroned ? Is it honored with incense or adorned by candles?
- Do lectors prayerfully study Sacred Scripture?
- Overall, how would you describe the manner in which the Scriptures are proclaimed in your parish? Do those listening have a sense of the joyfully serious story of salvation that we remember at each Mass?

***Distributing and Receiving the Eucharist:***

- How do people approach the altar to receive the Eucharistic presence of Jesus Christ?
- Observe the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. How would you describe their approach to distributing the Eucharist? What kind of formation do they receive to engage in this ministry?
- Has your parish leadership ever offered formation (written or verbal) on the dispositions one should foster in approaching Holy Communion?



If you are a priest at your parish, you have a little more reflection to do. First, if it's been a while, re-read *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. Ask yourself what you noticed in this reading. Is there anything in the instruction that causes you to reflect on your own *ars celebrandi* or “art of celebration”? Ask some of your parishioners how they experience the way that you celebrate the Mass. How did they respond? In addition, spend some time considering these questions:

***Preparation for Mass:***

- At what point do you make decisions about which liturgical texts (prayers, prefaces, etc.) you will use during the Mass? Do you spend any time reading, meditation, and praying with these texts beforehand?
- Do you set aside time for quiet prayer before/after celebrating the Mass? If so, how much time? If not, why not?

***Gestures and Postures:***

- How would you describe your gestures and posture throughout the Mass? What might your gestures, posture, and general body language be communicating in terms of reverence?

***Preaching and Praying:***

- Think about the proportion between the time it takes to deliver your homily and the time it takes you to pray the Eucharistic Prayer. Are these things in balance?
- Have you ever found yourself choosing a shorter Eucharistic Prayer because your homily ran long? What might that be communicating to your parishioners in terms of which is more important?

***Demeanor:***

- What does the word “reverent” mean to you? Can you think of any priests from throughout your life and your ministry who embodied reverence in the way they celebrated the Mass? What qualities did they display that seemed reverent to you?
- How can your demeanor become an invitation to the entire assembly to “lift up [their] hearts” as they pray the Mass with you, and you with them?

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### Dimension 3: Room for Contemplation and Silence

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As chapter 2 points out, “We are very uncomfortable with silence in late modern life, used to noise wherever we go” (*Becoming Eucharistic People*, 43). But if the Eucharistic liturgy is supposed to be qualitatively different from everything else we do during the week, it makes sense that it should take place in an environment where silence is not just welcome but expected, and practiced well.

As you consider this third dimension of enculturated reverence, ask yourself: how comfortable are you with silence? (Be honest!) How comfortable are your parishioners? What dispositions might need to be cultivated within your own heart and the hearts of those in your pews in order for silence to become a more welcome, normative part of the Mass? Reflect on whether and how your parish practices each of the following:

***Formation into Silence:***

- Has there been any intentional effort to help your parishioners embrace silence during the liturgical celebration? If so, how?

***Proportions of Silence, Speech, and Music:***

- Does your parish keep a period of silence at the Penitential Rite? After the readings and homily? After the reception of the Blessed Sacrament? How would you characterize each of these moments of silence?
- Does instrumental music serve as a constant cover for moments in the liturgy when no prayers are being spoken (e.g., preparation of the altar, purifying of liturgical vessels)? Could there be a better balance between music and silence?

***Announcements:***

- How are weekly announcements handled in your parish?
- If announcements are made by the priest or by a lector, how long do they usually take?
- Are announcements made during Mass also printed in the bulletin?

Again, if you are a priest, you have a little more reflection to do. Using the prompts below, examine whether and how you balance speech with silence in the Mass. Ask your fellow retreatants for their observations on these facets of your approach to presiding at the Eucharistic liturgy.

***Openness to Silence:***

- Consider your own comfort level with silence (or lack thereof). Does silence have a place in your own personal prayer time? Why or why not?
- When presiding at Mass, do you pause for a moment of silence after invitations such as, “Let us call to mind our sins” or “Let us pray”? If so, for how long? If not, why not?

***Additional Commentary:***

- Do you usually offer a kind of ‘introduction’ to the Mass during the Introductory Rites, or a ‘recap’ during the Concluding Rites? If so, how much time is spent on this? Do these commentaries result in a kind of secondary (or even tertiary) homily?

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### **Dimension 4: The Body Matters**

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Several direct assertions are made in chapter two: “The body matters. . . . Because I have a body, I need stuff” (*Becoming Eucharistic People*, 45). “The stuff of worship is what makes Catholicism so real to people” (46). This ‘stuff’ consists of art, music, architecture, processions, as well as candles, incense, bells, holy water, Advent wreaths, Nativity scenes, ashes, palms, and other sacramentals.

As you consider this fourth dimension, you may wish to spend time in your church before Mass and make note of the ‘stuff’ that is or is not present. Then, during the Mass, pay attention to whether and how the celebration engages your physical senses and invites you to pray through your body. Afterward, reflect on each of the following:

***Art:***

- What is the most distinctive artistic or architectural feature of your church (e.g., stained glass windows, crucifix, altar, tabernacle, baptismal font, etc.)? Do your parishioners know the story behind that feature? If it includes any symbolic visual language (e.g., a pelican feeding her young carved into the front of the altar, a Pietá on the tabernacle doors), has that symbolism been unpacked for your parishioners to aid their contemplation and prayer?
- If multiple cultures are represented in the parishioners of your parish, does the art in your church reflect this? For example: are there any images of Our Lady as she has been honored and represented throughout the world? Is the richness and diversity of the Communion of Saints represented?

***Architecture:***

- In what shape was your church built? Is it cruciform? In the round? How does this impact the reverence of the liturgy?
- If your church has statues or devotional images (e.g., the Sacred Heart, the Blessed Mother, the saints), are parishioners able to pray quietly before them? To light votive candles? If payment is asked for votive candles, are instructions provided and/or donation receptacles clearly marked?

***Music and Sound:***

- *The General Instruction for the Roman Missal* notes that chant is given pride of place in the liturgy because it allows for the singing of texts and dialogue. What parts of the Mass are chanted?
- How would you describe the music at your parish? Do the selections ever fall into the category of kitsch, as defined in chapter two? Are different styles of music selected to align with different modes of prayer (e.g., proper antiphons or congregational hymns for Sunday Mass, devotional songs for Eucharistic Adoration)?
- Are Sanctus bells ever rung during the Eucharistic Prayer at the invocation of the Holy Spirit and/or during the elevation of the consecrated Eucharistic species? Is the Blessed Sacrament itself ever revered with incense and candlelight during the Eucharistic Prayer?

***Fragrance:***

- Are fresh flowers or greenery used to decorate your church? Could a parishioner place an offering of fresh flowers before a statue of Our Lady or another saint? Are parishioners ever invited to honor deceased loved ones by purchasing a poinsettia or Easter lily that they can then take home at a certain point in the season?
- Is incense used in your parish? How often?

***Movement:***

- What processions do you include as part of each and every Mass? How are these processions celebrated?
- Does your parish celebrate the processions that are part of the Mass during the liturgical year on Palm Sunday or Candlemas?

***Touch:***

- Where is the holy water located in your church? Are parishioners ever invited to take small bottles of holy water from the parish home with them (and to bring these back to be refilled when they're empty)?

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## Eucharistic Devotion

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Finally, chapter two concludes with the reminder that love for the Eucharist grows when devotional practices outside of the celebration of the Mass are fostered and encouraged among the faithful. Consider the following questions:

***Accessibility:***

- Does your church building remain unlocked during the day so that people might spend time before the presence of Jesus Christ in the tabernacle? If the building is only open at certain times, are these prominently displayed onsite, online, and in the bulletin?

- Does your church have a dedicated chapel or space for Eucharistic Adoration? How easy/difficult would it be for a visitor to find this space? Is there adequate security for the safety of those praying and of the Blessed Sacrament?

***Devotional Practices:***

- Is Eucharistic Adoration regularly offered at your parish? If you have a small perpetual Adoration chapel, are there opportunities for larger groups to gather in the church on occasion to adore the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament?
- Has your parish ever organized a 40 Hours Devotion? Could your parish partner with a nearby parish in coordinating such an effort?
- Does your parish host a Eucharistic procession for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi? What does this look like? Does the procession engage the broader neighborhood around the church? How might fun and festivity be incorporated to complement the solemnity and beauty of the procession?
- Is there cultural diversity relative to Eucharistic devotion in the parish? What does this diversity look like?
- Are any simple devotions encouraged among your parishioners (e.g., making the Sign of the Cross when driving or walking past a church to acknowledge Christ present in the Eucharist)?

***Language:***

- Think about how the Blessed Sacrament is referred to in your parish, both inside and outside of the Eucharistic celebration. Does this language communicate the truth of the Real Presence of Christ, or does it imply that the Blessed Sacrament is merely an object?
- Consider the language utilized in the Eucharistic hymns used during Mass and Adoration. Is the language poetic? Rich in meaning and beauty? Does it lead the heart to deeper contemplation and love of the Eucharistic Lord?

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## Conclusion

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*Now that you've made some observations about how the Mass is celebrated in your parish, what one thing stood out to you most in each of the five dimensions of enculturated reverence? Be prepared to share these with your fellow parish staff members during the retreat day.*



# SUGGESTED SCHEDULE:

## DAY RETREAT SUGGESTED SCHEDULE

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<b>8:45am</b>	Arrival
<b>9:00am</b>	Opening Prayer [ <i>see page 22 for suggestions</i> ]
<b>9:30–11:00am</b>	<b>Session #1: Behold</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Segment 1: Individual Assessment Responses—What did I see? [40 minutes]</li><li>• 10-minute break</li><li>• Segment 2: Group Reactions—What do we see emerging across our observations? [40 minutes]</li></ul>
<b>11:00–11:15am</b>	Break
<b>11:15am–12:00pm</b>	Mass
<b>12:00pm</b>	Lunch
<b>1:00–2:30pm</b>	<b>Session #2: Meditate and Decide</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Segment 1: Where can we improve? [40 minutes]</li><li>• 10-minute break</li><li>• Segment 2: What will be our focus for this year? [40 minutes]</li></ul>
<b>2:30–2:45pm</b>	Break
<b>2:45–4:15pm</b>	<b>Session #3: Act</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Segment 1: Identify goals and tasks [40 minutes]</li><li>• 10-minute break</li><li>• Segment 2: Assign tasks, determine time frame for completion and evaluation [40 minutes]</li></ul>
<b>4:15–4:45pm</b>	Closing Prayer [ <i>see page 23 for suggestions</i> ]
<b>4:45–5:00pm</b>	Clean-up, depart

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## Planning Considerations

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- 1 Several weeks before the retreat, each participant should complete the Mass Assessment, reflecting on the presence or absence of the Five Dimensions of Enculturated Reverence in the parish's Eucharistic celebration.
- 2 This schedule is designed to approach the tasks of the day in manageable segments of time, with plenty of breaks provided to allow participants to refresh and refocus. If you wish, you can eliminate the mid-session breaks and extend each segment to 45 minutes.
- 3 The times set aside for prayer are essential. If the retreat is being conducted in a venue where a chapel is easily accessible, you may wish to consider inviting participants to spend the breaks in between sessions in quiet reflection in the presence of the tabernacle.
- 4 If possible, provide coffee, tea, and water for participants. Greet them as they arrive and have pens and paper at tables. Depending on the size of the group and how well everyone knows one another, you may want to consider assigning seats or providing name tags.



# RETREAT SESSIONS: FACILITATOR GUIDE

*Note: These session guides have been designed according to the suggested structure outlined on page 16. Facilitators may feel free to adapt or change as necessary.*

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## Session #1: Behold

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### ***Segment 1: Individual Assessment Responses—What did I see? [40 minutes]***

In this segment, invite each retreatant in attendance to share *one key observation from each of the five dimensions* of enculturated reverence they recorded in their pre-retreat assessment.

#### ***Notes for this segment:***

- For the sake of time, resist the temptation to analyze or comment on the observations as they're shared. That analysis will come later. This segment is simply about creating a space where each retreatant can name the one thing for each dimension that most stood out to them in their assessment. If fellow retreatants noted a similar observation, invite them to indicate agreement by simply raising a hand so as not to take up time or disrupt the process.
- Document the observations shared for each of the five dimensions of enculturated reverence. You may wish to choose a different color of ink for each dimension, or write observations on five different sheets of paper or poster board displayed around the room for ease of visibility and later analysis

*If more than one person noticed the same thing, be sure to indicate this in your documentation using check marks, tally marks, or whatever system works best for you.*

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## Session #2: Meditate and Decide

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### Segment 1: Where can we improve? [40 minutes]

Looking at the five key observations arrived at in the previous session, retreatants should now ask themselves: what can we be doing better as a parish community? For this segment, it's not necessary to decide on a direction just yet—the goal is to simply notice and name where things are going well, and where things could be going better.

#### *Notes for this segment:*

- Based on the size of the group, it may be worthwhile to break into pairs or trios to talk about the observations that were raised in the previous session.
- The facilitator may consider inviting retreatants to share more candidly about potential areas for improvement, drawing from their experience of parish life beyond what they observed in the pre-retreat assessment as part of this meditation and discernment process.

[ 10-minute break ]

### Segment 2: What will be our focus for this year? [40 minutes]

Having shared observations and named areas where improvement could be made, by the end of this session, retreatants should identify 1–3 areas where the parish will dedicate time, energy, and resources in the coming year. This one area will likely comprise several endeavors across ministries (this will be fleshed out in the action plan).

#### *Notes for this segment:*

- If the parish has a mission statement or a strategic plan in place, it may be worthwhile to share that with retreatants in this segment. That way, any decisions made relative to focused improvement for the coming year will hopefully align with the parish's already-established mission and goals overall.

- Along similar lines, if the diocese has named any priorities for the coming year, retreatants would do well to consider those as well. Therefore, in this segment, it may also be worthwhile for the pastor or other appropriate parish leader to share information on any upcoming diocesan initiatives that might provide impetus toward a particular focus at the parish level.

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### Session #3: Act

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#### Segment 1: Identify goals and tasks [40 minutes]

Now, having decided on the dimension of enculturated reverence where the parish will dedicate time, energy, and resources in the coming year, based on the needs determined by the assessment and previous conversations, the group will determine together what the specific goals within that area ought to be, and the tasks necessary for their accomplishment.

#### *Notes for this segment:*

- Identifying goals is the first step in creating an Action Plan. There are many free resources like [this one](#) available online to help guide this process. The facilitator may wish to spend time before the retreat reviewing such resources to determine what procedures will work best in the particular circumstances of the parish.
- Within this segment, you may decide to identify phases or waves for completing your goals. Be sure to account for following up on these as you begin to assign tasks and create timelines in the next segment.

[ 10-minute break ]

**Segment 2: Assign tasks, determine time frame for completion and evaluation [40 minutes]**

Having created SMART goals in the agreed-upon area of focus, the final step in the process (for now) is to begin assigning tasks and setting time frames and deadlines.

***Notes for this segment:***

- If your parish already has a system in place for tracking large-scale projects, you can start to build your goals and tasks within that framework. If not, there are many free project manager programs and templates available online.
- Scheduling times for checking in and assessing progress is essential to any large-scale project; therefore, the final part of this session should focus on when the first round of follow-up will take place, and who will be involved. Otherwise, there's always the risk that tasks will remain incomplete and goals will remain unrealized.



# APPENDIX: RETREAT DAY PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

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## Overall

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If possible, incorporate Eucharistic Adoration into the Opening or Closing Prayer times (ideally both), including Exposition and Benediction. Spending time as a community before Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament is a powerful way to both orient the retreat at the beginning of the day and offer its fruits back to God at the end of the day.

If Exposition, Adoration, and Benediction are not possible, ensure that these times of prayer can take place in the presence of the Eucharist, reserved in the tabernacle. That way, your participants will still be able to spend this time of prayer with Jesus.

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## Suggested Prayers

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### **Opening Prayer: *Lectio Divina***

Beginning the retreat day immersed in Scripture is a beautiful way to gather the group together. Contemplating the words of Jesus in one of the Gospels or pondering the Eucharistic imagery in the writings of St. Paul or the Book of Revelation will provide a kind of spiritual alignment as the group prepares to undertake the work of the retreat sessions.

If you are unfamiliar with the practice of *lectio divina*, you can learn more about it in this free [Prayer Enrichment Guidebook](#) from the McGrath Institute for Church Life.

***Here are some Scripture passages you can choose from for this time of prayer:***

- John 6:30–35
- John 6:48–51
- John 6:52–58
- Luke 24:13–35
- Acts 2:42–47
- 1 Corinthians 11:23–26
- 1 Corinthians 11:23–29
- Revelation 5:1–10
- Revelation 5:6–14

**Closing Prayer: *Vespers (Evening Prayer)***

Ending the day with Vespers or Evening Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours is a beautiful way to gather the graces that have been experienced throughout the retreat and offer them to God the Father through Christ the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit. This form of prayer includes psalms and canticles from the Scriptures, and is a powerful reminder of the unity that the liturgy of the Church offers. At any given moment, throughout the world, thousands of faithful men and women are offering the same prayers, united with one another as members of Christ's Body, the Church. If you are unsure of how to plan or pray the Liturgy of the Hours, your pastor, associate priest, or deacon will be able to assist you, or, you can learn more [here](#).

As with the Opening Prayer, it is highly recommended that Exposition, Adoration, and Benediction be part of the Closing Prayer for this retreat. If you opt to pray Evening Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours, there are special instructions you will need to follow for including Exposition, Adoration, and Benediction. These can be found in a book entitled *Order for the Solemn Exposition of the Holy Eucharist*. Your parish will likely have a copy.

Another option for the Closing Prayer is simply to bookend the retreat with *lectio divina*, returning to the Scripture passage with which you began the day (again, including time for Eucharistic Adoration if possible).

**For more resources from the McGrath Institute for Church Life,  
please visit [mcgrath.nd.edu/resources](http://mcgrath.nd.edu/resources).**

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