

We are glad that you have chosen to retreat at Desert House of Prayer, a place dedicated to silence and solitude. In this world of myriad distractions there are few places like ours where one can enter into the depths of uninterrupted silence. In this brochure we offer you some ways of looking at observing silence and, as well, some suggestions and guidelines as you enter into silent retreat.

### **CLEARING THE WATERS**

One primary intention of the silence and solitude is to deepen your spiritual journey. In many ways, silence is not as much about not talking as providing space to listen to what you hear within. If you think of this life as wading through a pond and continually stubbing your toe against something, a retreat allows time and space for the silt to settle. And once the water has cleared, you can pick up and look at the stone, debris, or treasure on the bottom of the pond.

### **PRAYING THROUGH THE STORIES**

Many things happen to us throughout each day: diverse events, requests, demands, surprises . . . In the spiritual life, what happens to us is less important than our reactions to what happens, and how we interpret what is happening. These are the stories we tell ourselves. In deep silence we have opportunities to notice how these stories have a hold on us. We can pray through or beyond them to a place of greater freedom.

### **BEING RADICALLY AT HOME**

When we are anxious or distracted, it is easy to see silence as something outside of us that we very much need to find. The richest silence, however, is at the place within where we know

ourselves most deeply and where the Holy One knows and embraces us, the place where we find our vital connections to God, and to all people and things. At any time, in any place, you can enter into this rich silence and be at home. When you leave this place, that silence goes with you.

### **OBSERVING SABBATH**

A retreat can be Sabbath, which, according to Rabbi Michael Lerner, involves pleasure, rest, freedom, and slowness. In U.S. culture, we place a premium on speed, efficiency, and productivity, and these can work counter to Sabbath. Rabbi Lerner notes that in our culture it can initially feel like a kind of death to stop for a whole day. Here on retreat, keeping silence can also feel like a kind of death, especially if you are not used to it. You might view your retreat as Sabbath, where you stop, listen, and allow time and space for a greater More.

### **SOME PRACTICES THAT MAY HELP YOU**

- Give words to your longing for your retreat; that is, name your particular intention at this time in your life for this retreat.
- Listen to your body. It takes time to slow down both the mind and body, and you may need more rest than you realize. Sleep as much as your body tells you to. A rested body is much more available to listen.
- Use your senses. We so often live in our heads, but we can slow down the mind by paying attention to our senses. Smell

the desert, feel the wind or sun against your skin and the ground beneath your feet, savor your food as you eat, listen to the birds or the wind, see the vast sky and the splendid variety of life in this desert environment. Practice being aware.

- When you find yourself anxious about something, be gentle with yourself and bring your attention back to the present moment by using one of your senses, by focusing on your breath, or by reacquainting yourself with the silence within. And sometimes all we need is a simple one or two word silent prayer.
- Trust how you are being led. Your journey will likely open to you as you listen for what is inviting your attention.
- We have a substantial library with many excellent print and audio resources. On silent retreat, you have the luxury of reading leisurely and staying with whatever word, phrase, or image seems to call to you.
- Journal, draw, or use various art media to express yourself creatively. You need not fully understand what you are creating; your hands can express what your mind is not ready to name. You will find some art supplies in the lower level of the library.
- Lectio Divina is a way of praying the scriptures that many people find helpful. If you are unfamiliar with this practice

and would like to know more, a brochure is available in our office.

- You are welcome to take advantage of the opportunities we offer for community prayer and Community Eucharist. You are welcome to participate to whatever degree you find helpful and as fits the rhythm of your retreat.
- Some people pray best “on their feet.” We have a small labyrinth you can walk, or you can walk the larger one across the road at the Redemptorist Renewal Center (RRC). Both Desert House and RRC have a Way of the Cross you can walk and pray. There are also many hiking trails in the area. Maps are available in the office. Retreatants at Desert House have limited access to the refreshing pool at RRC.
- There are a thousand wonderful things you can do while on retreat, and a few are listed here. We invite you to be mindful that any activity, no matter how noble, can at times be a distraction, keeping us from what we would secretly rather avoid. That said, not every retreat needs to be a time to do hard inner work. You know why you are making a retreat. Listen within to whether you are being drawn to a particular action or to a place beyond action and words. If you listen with tenderness and honesty for any inner

nudges or promptings, there is a good chance the right balance will unfold.

- You may find it helpful to meet with one of the spiritual directors on staff. They are experienced listeners who are trained in accompanying others on their journeys. Further, you have the option of making an appointment with a certified massage therapist across the road at the Redemptorist Renewal Center. These services are available for fees beyond your room and board charges.
- Sometimes any of us can be so exhausted or stressed that we do not know what we want or need other than to stop and rest. There is considerable value in simply stepping away from our usual patterns and rhythms, or from particular stressors. Your path forward may or may not become clear for you as you retreat in silence. Either way, all is well. You have made important steps in discerning the need to retreat and in following through. Be gentle with yourself, relax, and enjoy your time away.

## **ON BEING IN SILENCE: SOME REFLECTIONS AND AIDS**

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