

OVERVIEW OF



A PARISH RETREAT

by Dennis Mahaney

PRELIMINARY INFORMATION

Lent and Easter comprise the most important time of the entire Church year. But, for many Catholics, Lent lacks the countdown-like excitement of Advent with its shopping and preparations before Christmas. Frankly, many wish they could arrive at Easter without having to pass through the penance and sacrifices associated with Lent. Many have also lost sight of the organic connection between Lent and Easter. These people arrive at Easter a bit disappointed that their feelings do not correspond to what should be a most holy season for the Church. This disappointment stems in part, from a loss of appreciation for the Lenten practices of *prayer, fasting and almsgiving* that give so much meaning to the celebration of Easter. Come and find out why Lent is the road less traveled to Easter.

Lent: the Road Less Traveled parish retreat is designed for parishes who want to help parishioners gain a greater appreciation for the season of Lent and gain greater access to the spiritual disciplines of *prayer, fasting and almsgiving* in preparation for Easter. Each session examines one of the spiritual disciplines, *prayer, fasting and almsgiving*, through presentation, prayer, reflection, small group discussion and personal witness.

Preparation for **Lent: the Road Less Traveled** begins by gathering a core group of parishioners. These leaders have a spiritual vision that includes an appreciation of these elements in their own lives. This core group leads the parish in preparation for the retreat in cooperation with the parish staff.

The retreat can begin with the weekend liturgies and continues for three evenings. Dennis Mahaney is available to speak at all the weekend Masses prior to the retreat, introducing the theme of the retreat and inviting people to participate.

Session Themes

Each of the three sessions of the retreat explores a particular Lenten discipline.



Session 1 – “The Prayer that God Hears”

Although those whom we now consider to be spiritual giants were all people of prayer, prayer is not just for spiritual giants! Prayer is for all of us. But many do not pray because they still have questions about prayer including why God seems to hear some prayers and not others. This session addresses what, why, when, where and how to pray.

Session 2 – “The Acceptable Fast”

For many of us fasting during Lent has become a necessary though often irrelevant evil. Those who have given up candy each Lent only to enjoy the Easter binge of chocolate rightly question the good accomplished by fasting. Many Catholics today have forgotten what constitutes a fast acceptable to the Lord. Participants will learn about a fast, so pleasing, that it is worth continuing after Easter.

Session 3 – “The Secret of a Cheerful Giver”

Almsgiving is a form of fasting, a form that some consider the hardest of all. When most people hear the word “almsgiving,” they think of money. We feel guilty whenever the topic comes up. We struggle with dilemmas like “Is money the root of all evil or is it an instrument for great good?” For many of us this is because we lack the secret of the cheerful giver. The Gospel is clear. No matter how wealthy we are, each of us has what it takes to be a cheerful giver. We only fail when we forget what it means to be *alms-giving*.



RETREAT FORMAT

Each session incorporates time for prayer, presentation on the topic, a witness talk, discussion and refreshments.

- 1. Welcome and Hospitality**
 - Parish coordinates greeters
 - Parish provides name tags, pencils, handouts

- 2. Opening Prayer Service (see the pages that outline the prayer services)**
 - Led by the presenter
 - Parish provides prayer materials (song books, a Bible or Lectionary)
 - Parish selects music and the lector
 - Includes time for brief small group faith sharing

- 3. Presentation: Dennis Mahaney**

- 4. Witness Speaker (while not essential, can demonstrate how to live our faith practically)**
 - Parish selects the witness speaker

- 5. Discussion (led by the presenter)**

- 6. Closing Prayer Service (see the pages that outline the prayer services)**
 - Led by the presenter
 - Parish selects music and lector

- 7. Announcements (optional social with refreshments)**

Note: Adaptations of this format can be made in consultation with Dennis Mahaney.

RETREAT PREPARATIONS



The success of **Lent: the Road Less Traveled** parish retreat depends on the close cooperation of a number of important entities. The following are the descriptions of the areas of responsibility of the various people who are needed to make this endeavor a success.

Dennis Mahaney will:

1. provide remote support and guidance to the core group enabling them to prepare for **Lent: the Road Less Traveled**
2. conduct the presentations each evening of the retreat
3. provide resources for publicity and directions for arrangements and facilities in preparation for the retreat
4. provide guidance for an evaluative meeting with the core group after the retreat

Parish Staff will:

1. involve appropriate parish leaders in the decision to conduct **Lent: the Road Less Traveled** in the parish
2. identify and recruit appropriate persons for a leadership team or *core group*
3. oversee logistics for the **Lent: the Road Less Traveled** retreat
4. ensure that the **Lent: the Road Less Traveled** retreat has priority on the parish calendar during the week that it is scheduled
5. assist the core group in finding witness speakers for each session

Core Group will:

1. pray daily as individuals and at meetings for this parish undertaking.
2. assign members of the core group to specific area of responsibility in the Pre-Mission Tasks.
3. consider ways for the entire parish to be involved in the **Lent: the Road Less Traveled** retreat (even if they cannot attend); for example, a special invitation to the homebound or nursing home residents to pray for the parish at this time, or collaboration with the school or faith formation program, etc.

4. arrange for an hospitable environment during the retreat (reception of participants, materials, refreshments, etc.)

Importance of the Core Group

There are three primary reasons for the formation of the core group for the parish retreat:

- 1) To assist the staff in the preparation of the parish for the retreat;
- 2) To build ownership for the retreat among the greatest number of parishioners possible;
- 3) To maximize the number of people who can extend a personal invitation to other parishioners to attend the retreat.

Constituency and Structure of the Core Group

The Core Group is a group of people who agree to exercise leadership for the preparation and smooth flow of the parish retreat. It is composed of 6-8 parishioners who each agree to gather additional people and work with that group to coordinate work in one the following recommended areas. The pastor or a designated staff member works with the Core Group to assist them and oversee their work.

The core group can be made up of:

Pastor or a staff representative;

One or two people who agree to chair one of the following subcommittees:

- Prayer Ministry
- Liturgy and Prayer Services
- Publicity
- Hospitality
- Witness Speakers