



Frequently Asked Questions

Contemplative Outreach of Colorado's 4-Day Weekend Intensive Retreat

1. COVID-19

COVID Retreat Precautions:

Retreatants must be fully vaccinated and boosted prior to making their retreat. Retreatants must be COVID-19 symptom-free for a minimum of two weeks prior to arrival. If you develop any symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat or new loss of taste or smell) within that time period, please cancel your retreat. We will gladly provide a refund.

COVID Retreat Modifications:

Prior to COVID, the retreat has allowed for talking at dinner Thursday evening and at lunch on Sunday. We will not know if talking will be allowed at these meals until closer to or at the retreat.

Masks requirements change based on COVID conditions. Please plan on bringing a few masks.

The retreat may have other precautions and modifications due to COVID concerns that will not be known until closer to or at the retreat. In serving retreats during COVID, the retreat team has not found that COVID protocols impacted the purpose of the retreat and in some cases has benefited the retreat atmosphere. Whatever is in place at the time of the retreat, the retreat team is committed to providing an environment for deepening solitude, reflection and prayer.

2. How is silence observed during the retreat?

Silence begins after orientation in the Chapel the first evening of the retreat (Thursday). The atmosphere of silence continues throughout the retreat including meals until the closing circle on Sunday.

Silence is a very important part of our retreat and the purpose is to create a space for conversation with God. Retreatants are encouraged to cultivate the attitude of quiet not only in the chapel and at meals, but also in the halls, in your room and while walking around the grounds. Retreatants may experience a tension between the benefits of external silence and getting to know retreat companions. We suggest that retreatants allow themselves to get to experience other retreatants in the "space of silence". This silence also provides the space for a retreatant to know themselves in a deeper way.

Some retreatants feel called to avoid eye contact as a way to enter more deeply into the silence. While this may be disconcerting to some who like to make eye contact, the observance is not

intended to disparage others. We also encourage retreatants to fast from computers and cell phones as a way to deepen the retreat experience.

3. Why doesn't a Centering Prayer Retreat include yoga, instructive DVD's or interaction with other retreatants?

The retreat is patterned after the St. Benedict's Monastery post intensive retreat in Snowmass, Colorado. This retreat was designed in the early days for the growing number of Centering Prayer practitioners in Colorado and continues to this day. For some a retreat at Snowmass was not a viable option and so Sister Bernadette and Mary Mrozowski developed what is now known as the Sedalia Retreat at Sacred Heart Retreat House. The purpose of the retreat is to provide participants with time and space for silence, stillness and rest. The hallmark of the time is a deep, respectful silence maintained by all.

Little has changed from Sister Bernadette's and Mary's design. Any improvements made are in how we carry it out not in what we do. It is by design simple and uncluttered and relies on silence and the grace of God. We have avoided adding prayer practices, DVD's or other activities. Individuals are free to quietly pursue any activities that support their prayerfulness.

4. What can I expect from a weekend intensive retreat?

The weekend will consist of a combination of scheduled centering prayer sits and times for solitary reflection. Silence will be maintained throughout the weekend. On Saturday evening after centering prayer you may stay for Lectio Divina. On Friday, Saturday and Sunday you may attend Catholic Mass if desired. On Saturday afternoon, priests are available for those who wish to go to reconciliation (also known as confession). You can sign up for a soul friending session if desired. You are encouraged to let the Spirit guide you and to participate in ways that meet your needs.

We have found that it is helpful to set an intention for the weekend. The Holy Spirit has established a track record for providing what we need, and having an intention sometimes helps us be more aware of the Spirit's movement in our lives.

We recommend that those attending this retreat have incorporated a Centering Prayer practice into their daily lives for at least six months.

5. What should I bring? *It depends on how you want to enjoy God's Presence.*

Centering Prayer Sits: Whatever helps make the sits more physically comfortable: back support cushion, foot pillow, etc.

Wearing Masks: Masks requirements change based on COVID conditions. Please plan on bringing a few masks.

Alarm Clock: Bring an alarm clock if you prefer to leave your cell phone off during the retreat.

Outside admiring creation's beauty: sunscreen/hat; walking stick; water bottle; sturdy footwear; sunglasses; umbrella; raincoat/heavier coat; layered clothing. (Colorado's weather fluctuates in temperature and moisture so bring items that best support the flexibility to adapt to changing conditions.)

Inside pondering: scripture; book for spiritual reading; prayer shawl/cushion; journal

Self-care essentials: toiletries; medications; blankie or pillow; alarm clock;

Fragrances: We ask you to refrain from wearing fragrances in the Chapel during our prayer sits – such as lotions, aftershave and perfumes. Consider this in bringing toiletry items.

Gluten Less: The retreat center provides limited gluten less and vegetarian choices at every meal. You may bring food with you to keep in the small kitchenette that has a refrigerator and microwave for your use.

Whatever best fits you:

- If you prepare for every eventuality, your list will be long.
- If you are a minimalist, the less the better.
- As a contemplative, bring your whole self open to the Spirit.
-

6. What is Soul Friending?

Engaging in prolonged silence may bring about a deeper unloading of the unconscious, unexpected awarenesses or other experiences. Soul Friending provides a way for retreatants to intentionally share their retreat experiences in a sacred space. On Saturday afternoon, two staff members are available for soul friending and retreatants can sign-up for a 30-minute period of conversation.

7. What would be helpful in transitioning and integrating the retreat experience?

When returning from a retreat involving prolonged silence and prayer, it is helpful to intentionally provide ways that allow transition and integration of the retreat experience, such as:

- Before the retreat, intentionally set aside a few days following the retreat that have limited commitments to allow space for silence, prayer, reflection and pauses throughout the day.
- Extend periods of centering prayer. For example, instead of two 20 minute periods of centering prayer a day, extend this to three or four periods; or extend the period to 30 minutes two or three times a day. If possible, continue this practice for a few weeks after the retreat.
- Let the retreat experience unfold and do not be too quick to try to wrap up the experience in a nice package. When sharing the retreat experience with others, often it is better to be brief. Sometimes in sharing with others and trying to put the retreat experience into words can rush the unfolding and others may not understand.
- Some unloading of the unconscious or other awarenesses continue after the retreat. We encourage retreatants to provide space to be gentle on themselves. Some may have the need to talk to a spiritual guide such as a spiritual director about areas that are coming up for them. We encourage taking time to discern what would be most helpful.

Sacred Heart Intensive Retreats (Sedalia Retreats)

Background and Purpose

Background:

In the early days of the Denver Chapter of Contemplative Outreach Sister Bernadette Teasdale enlisted the help of Mary Mrozowski to design a retreat for the growing number of Centering Prayer practitioners in Colorado. St. Benedict's Monastery in Snowmass, Colorado could not accommodate everyone who wanted to make a retreat. For some a retreat at Snowmass was not a viable option. So, Sister Bernadette and Mary came up with what is now known as the Sedalia Retreat at Sacred Heart Retreat House.

In the early days the Snowmass retreats were called intensives and were designed to teach Centering Prayer (showing Fr. Keating's videos in the afternoons) and give the participants an extended experience of prayer and silence. The second type of retreat was called a post-intensive and was for people with an established practice. The retreat did not contain periods of instruction. Instead, there were times for communal Centering Prayer, an option to join the monks for liturgy and time for individual prayer and reflection. Silence was maintained by all throughout.

Purpose:

The Sedalia retreat is patterned after the post intensive Snowmass retreat. The purpose of the retreat is to provide the participants with a time and space for silence, stillness and rest. Like the Snowmass retreats, the Sedalia retreats have several periods of Centering Prayer and Liturgy is provided by the retreat house. The schedule is rigorous in that prayer starts early and last for an hour at a time. This is balanced by the approach that retreatants participate to the extent that it nourishes them. The hallmark of the time is that a deep, respectful silence is maintained by all.

The retreat is served by the Jesuits who own, staff and maintain the facility; other staff who are skilled in providing meals and housekeeping services in a retreat atmosphere; and the Retreat Team who attend to the preparation for and implementation of the retreat. The work of the retreat is organized such that the team can participate fully in prayer and reflection. The team also observes silence. When talking is necessary it is done in the least intrusive way possible.

Little has changed from Sister Bernadette's and Mary's design. Any improvements that are made are in how we carry it out not in what we do. It is by design simple and uncluttered. It promotes prayer, both communal and individual. It relies on silence and the grace of God. We have avoided adding prayer practices or trying techniques. Individuals are free to follow their own desires for prayer and techniques that are helpful to them and do not intrude on the silence of others.

One change that has been made was to go from a 3 day to a 4-day retreat. This was done at the suggestion and request of participants. At the time it was uncertain if it would work or not. The participants love it and the retreat continues to be an offering of The Center that has a waiting list. The retreat is held each year at the beginning of Advent and again in the spring. Sacred Heart Retreat House provides the space we need, delicious meals, beautiful grounds and a commitment to silence. It is centrally located for the community we serve.

Each retreat is filled with a mix of returning veteran retreatants and first-timers. Some have been practicing for years, others are new to the practice of Centering Prayer and/or retreat. One and all we receive untold grace for our journey. We are encouraged and are uplifted by our community. Our time in silence brings us closer. The Retreat Team remains dedicated to preserving the spirit of the retreat, adhering closely to the purpose and serving the needs of each group, all in prayerful silence.

We are deeply grateful to Sister Bernadette and Mary Mrozowski for making this retreat a part of our regular offerings.

(February 2022)