

- Contemplative Retreat Questionnaire

Since you have expressed an interest in coming to the Ignatian Contemplative Retreat on June 18-26, 2019, we need to give you more information to help you know whether it is for you or not. We assure you that it is not meant for everyone.

Let us begin by giving you an image. Think of a life guard and what they need to learn. This person needs to know at least two things. They need to know how to swim, and they need to know how to subdue a drowning person before they bring them to safety. Otherwise the drowning person will struggle and drown them. This is a physical subduing.

With this image in mind, think of God as your life guard. God needs to subdue you spiritually before God can bring you to new life. However, the quieting down is a process that takes place over a period of time as you experience your life and grow in your relationship with God. From a concern about one's relationship with the world, one is brought by God to want simply to be in God's Presence. 'Be still and know that I am God' (Ps. 46:10) has become or is becoming their primary desire.

The Contemplative Retreat is an experience of being taught by God. It is a silent retreat that includes some instruction on prayer and discernment. The first night will give you an overview of the retreat and your prayer will begin. Then there will be three days in which there will be talks by one of us in both the morning and afternoon. These talks will be about 45 minutes and always have suggested prayer passages.

During these three days, you will learn two types of discernment that will help you understand how God has been, is and always will be present in your daily life. After these days are over, there will be a shift. You will be introduced to a new way of praying. It will be letting God lead and being totally passive. It will be like the experience of Peter in Jn. 21:18. "You will go where you don't want to go". There still will be a talk every morning, but the afternoons will be different. You will be invited to share your experiences of prayer in a small group and learn by experience how to discern passive prayer. One of us will be present in each group and help you reflect on your experiences in terms of your relationship with God. In this way, God will become your only foundation (Psalm 127).

Who will benefit from this retreat? It is meant for any person experienced in prayer who is being called by God to greater intimacy. This means the person is in the process of becoming quiet or is already quiet. It will allow you to understand and discern your experience through the teachings of St. Ignatius, St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. It will give you a new way of living, praying and discerning that belongs to anyone who is being called by God into greater union.

So how do you know whether or not this retreat is for you? St. John of the Cross gives us three signs that perhaps indicate the Lord is calling one to a new way of being in relationship with God. The signs of St. John of the Cross are very simple and indicate that there is an invitation to surrender to God's lead (Ps 127).

- 1) Previous methods of prayer no longer work;

- 2) One is losing enthusiasm for everything;
- 3) One simply wants to be in God's Presence.

If all three signs are present in your life, not just the first two, there is a call from God to a form of passive prayer. So, if you can identify with these three descriptions in some way, then this retreat might be just what you are looking for.

If you are still interested in coming, please apply by sending us a short letter in which you address each of these five questions. Your answers need to be in some detail. Please e-mail your letter to Marilyn Merikangas, mwmerikangas@gmail.com

1. Briefly describe your psychological/spiritual journey through life.
2. Did you previously have consoling prayer experiences, but now find the "good feelings" are no longer there no matter what you try?
3. Do you feel stuck in a life style, work or aging process that seems to be an obstacle to following Christ rather than a call to new life?
4. Do you feel anxious and distraught because God feels so far away?
5. Describe your prayer experiences, e.g. relatively quiet and refreshing, or dry, or filled with distractions, or frustrating.

Your letter will help us decide whether or not this retreat is for you. Our main concern is that this retreat experience is suitable for you and will help you on your journey from God, with God and to God (1Jn 3:1-2).

In Christ,

Marilyn Merikangas, Martina O'Shea, Thomas Gavin, S.J.