

Transformation Awaits ...

Spiritual Formation Retreat Preparation Guide

Relax!

Most first year students anticipate their first Spiritual Formation retreat with much trepidation and anxiety. The anxiety and trepidation mounts because in most cases first year students are unaware of what is expected of them and have yet to make friends with other ACOM students.

However, upon interviewing students on their departure, a common comment students make is that their experience of retreat was a remarkable and awe inspiring time that in many cases has deepened their lives.

Receive

Receive a warm welcome from ACOM staff and Faculty who are very keen to greet you. ACOM Faculty and staff love coming to retreat with the express purpose of forming a relationship with you that will develop over quite a few years.

You can expect comfortable accommodation, food and fellowship with other ACOM students. There is a mixture of shared and single rooms dependent upon the state retreat you are attending. Please be prepared for either.

Upon arrival, you will be given a comprehensive introduction to the Spiritual Formation Unit and at the conclusion of the retreat, some guidance on the reflection paper to be written from the retreat.

You will be assigned and meet your formation group members (4-8 others) for the year as well as your Formation Director who will lead the group for the year.

You will be led through a process of forming a small group covenant that strengthens confidentiality and bonding.

You will then enter into the main purpose of the retreat which is the **Life-Story Telling** segments. During the stories, you are free to share what you feel comfortable with, but most students dive in deep and experience the rich and rare benefits of deep communion with their group members. Traditionally this is a wonderful experience and students find and form a cohesive and genuine bond which often outlasts their studies.

To assist you to think about the kind of material to include in your story telling segment and decide what you might like to share, refer to the following tips for Life Story Telling. Usually you are given up to one hour to share and this is followed by affirmative feedback from the other group members.

Tips for life story telling

There are several stories to our lives. The external story forms the structural backdrop to our lives describing movements and events e.g. places of residence, schools, and jobs.

The internal story tells how we felt about ourselves on the inside, both the joy and the pain of being 'who we are.'

The spiritual story tells how responsive we have been to the presence of God as God has invited us towards himself. This includes 'brushes with God', encounters with God, crises of faith, empowerment by God, significant formation events and any seasons of drought or flourishing.

The External Story

- a) Your family of origin and heritage
- b) Where you grew up and went to school
- c) How you found school life and early family life
- d) Your emergence into adulthood
- e) Career choices or jobs, marriage and family
- f) Key events of life.

The Internal Story

- a) The nature of your connection or disconnection with parents and family
- b) Significant others who shaped the sense of self for the good and bad

- c) Defining moments of self-discovery, self-acceptance or self-rejection.
- d) How you matured into adulthood and the adult passages of life
- e) Turning points in life
- f) The emotional effects of defining events

The Spiritual Story

- a) Early memories, revelations or teaching about God and spiritual things
- b) The journey of response to God
- c) How God's presence is generally felt
- d) Times of reaching out to God, key consolation and desolation times.

Points to note:

Your story should evolve out of your own journey, not a list of events, just start the story and see where it leads you. Trust God to guide you on the spot about what to include. Do not read the story. There is a dynamic in speaking it mostly from memory that engages the group much more, although a list of bullet points as prompts works well. You will generally have up to 1 hour to share uninterrupted by others. Concentrate more on the internal and spiritual story and use the external story like the coat hanger for the other two.

Reading prior to retreat

Please read through the 'Welcome to Spiritual Formation' page found on Moodle for your unit.

SF1 students - read through "Session 1: An Invitation to Spiritual Formation", particularly look at article "The Content of A Spiritual Autobiography" by Richard Peace.

SF2 students - read through "Session 1: An Invitation to Formation with others", particularly look at article "Giving Away Your Story" by Dan Allender.

SF3 students - read through "Session 1: Introduction to Spiritual Formation for Ministry".

P5001 students - read through "Session1: Invitation to a Journey" and "Session 5: Life Story: Developing Your Life Narrative".