



Ignatian Spirituality Project

Spiritual Retreats Ending Homelessness

Our retreats offer women and men the opportunity to change their lives.



Our Story

The Ignatian Spirituality Project began in 1998 when Fr. Bill Creed, SJ was invited to begin making the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius available to the economically disadvantaged. The Exercises, a program with some 500 years of tradition, focus on seeking union with God and achieving inner freedom.

The wisdom of the Exercises expressed in the contemporary language of the 12-Step recovery program provides a unique backdrop for our retreats and a helpful starting point for our retreatants.

We sponsor Weekend Retreats, Days of Reflection, and Ongoing Reflection Programs. Long lasting transformation is only possible when one has a fundamental paradigm of hope: our retreats provide that spark. Ultimately, we hope that our efforts help end the injustice of homelessness.

Some Figures

- 1998 Project founded in Chicago, IL and quickly spread throughout the country
- 20 As of 2013, the number of cities within the National ISP Network
- 1,536 Number of retreatants involved in ISP Programs in fiscal year 2013
- 471 Number of volunteers in the ISP Network in fiscal year 2013



How can I help?

We ask you to journey with us by accompanying our brothers and sisters at the margins. We have many volunteer opportunities depending on your interest. Contact our office for more information on how you can help.



Our Network is Growing.

ISP has teams in 20 cities throughout the country and hopes to carry our mission to even more people in years ahead.

Our Retreatants

We partner with service providers throughout our Network to invite men and women who are already working toward ending their homelessness. Often these persons are:

- Sober for two months
- Willing to share their story
- Want to companion others in their journey

Our Approach

We form teams in each of our cities to help facilitate our retreat ministry. Our talented and dedicated volunteers are trained to offer these retreats drawing upon the 500 year old tradition of Ignatian Spirituality expressed in the modern 12-step addiction recovery movement.

Our Needs

We offer our retreats at no cost to our participants. On average, it costs the network about \$250 per person, per retreat. We remain grateful for your prayers and support.

Amanda shares her story of hope with ISP

I showed up at St. Martin's in Chicago, lifeless, penniless and hopeless. Because of my addiction I had severed every family tie. I had almost lost the will to live. Then Sr. Therese told me about the ISP retreat and invited me to attend. I didn't want to go at first, but then I began to feel safe. It was an overwhelming feeling of peace. It was like, "wait a minute - they care about us? They know we

stole, we were raped, we were molested and they still care?! Where is the camera? God is somehow in ALL of this?"

After the retreat, Sr. Therese said I looked different. Everything I learned on the retreat and with the team is like a huge chest of spiritual tools that I can take back to the shelter and to my life and to the women and to their children.



Everyone wins if just one person comes back different.



Summary of an ISP Retreat

By Bill Creed, SJ
-Founder-

General Introduction

This retreat is set up for retreatants for whom this is a first retreat. It therefore has a rhythm of inviting and challenging, of growing awareness interiorly and sharing personally with others, of bringing one's self and history to God and finding God receptive and encouraging. And it is a new experience for them. Almost always the experience the retreatants have is beyond anything they have previously experienced, even though they may have made other "retreats."

The Retreatants

We tell the directors of the transitional shelters that the retreatants who come must be able to share personally in a group setting something of themselves, must be able to listen to others who are telling their story and must sober for several weeks. We accept retreatants whom the directors recommend.

We invite three or four shelters to each suggest three or four retreatants each. This mix seems to work best. Also when there are between ten and twelve retreatants, rather than fifteen to twenty, they can become familiar with each other, listen to one another, and relax with one another more easily. Larger numbers seem to become a hidden block to deeper trust and sharing. A ratio of three or four to one, retreatants to team, seems to give the retreatants the sense that they are the majority rather than the minority. This ratio seems to foster a sense of security in the retreatants and better disposes them to trust. So the total number on retreat generally is twelve to sixteen.

If a team member or retreatant is not in recovery, she or he must be able to listen to others with a certain attentiveness, non-defensiveness and eagerness. All must be willing to share those aspects of one's experience where the struggles reside; everyone struggles with some kind of compulsiveness, obsessiveness or avoidance.

Spiritual Themes Encountered on Retreat

The retreat has been shaped from a particular spirituality – Ignatian spirituality. This spirituality, while inclusive of other spiritualities, is noteworthy because of several characteristics which distinguish it from other popular and worthy spiritualities:

- **It is incarnational rather than transcendent**, attending to the concrete lived experiences of each person in his incarnate history and asking God to be in intimate relationship with the person in his concrete lived experience.
- **It involves reflection on experiences of lived life** rather than prayer experiences which move one to an altered state as do many popular prayer experiences, so practices like the "healing of memories" and the daily Examen of awareness are presented during the retreat.

The great majority of retreatants have had their lives sabotaged by addiction. The retreat focuses on freedom from addiction, compulsion, obsessions and the liberating call to be oneself and to be in right relationship with others and with God.

Connection to Ignatian Spirituality

Because the retreat proceeds at the intersection of Ignatian Spirituality and recovery, we attend to the twofold purpose of the Spiritual Exercises:

- By inviting retreatants to face the denial of addiction/compulsion we encouraging trust and honest transparency about one's personal narrative.
- By hearing others name their personal history, retreatants are moved to claim their own narrative as THE place where God is addressing them. In the very concreteness of their personal narrative God's grace liberates one from the lies which imprison.

In Ignatian terms, this retreat is an adaptation of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Eighteenth Annotation. It attends to the fundamentals of the spiritual journey: those practices which have been self indulgent and avoided God at the center of life and the universe. It seeks conversion from self-absorbed awareness and isolation. In terms of the Twelve Steps, it attends to the first three steps: unmanageability of my life, belief that God can save me from myself, surrender in trust by placing my life and will into the care of God.

Several characteristics of Ignatian spirituality are operative during this short retreat: freedom from addictive behavior (Anno 1), focusing on that one reality which God is inviting me to face (Anno 2), giving oneself generously on retreat by giving of self to the other retreatants by speaking the truth and accepting others as they are (Anno 5), and allowing God to deal with each person uniquely rather than trying to preach or correct another retreatant (Anno 15).

Format for a Retreat

The retreat begins with personal story and soon asks retreatants to consider a fear they have overcome, and a fear they still struggle with. Allowing time for everyone to share something from the past reinforces the central edict of mutuality and it invites the retreatant to claim God's interaction in his or her life. It increases the retreatant's capacity to claim past successes as a source of trust and hope (faith) that present challenges can be overcome. The initial exercises set the tone: personal story, sharing in large group where the team shares as equals.

The method of presenting the retreat is witness. Rather than teach new techniques of prayer or give insights in spiritual practices, this retreat invites all present to be peers with one another by claiming the truth of how my personal story has been undermined by forces that have overwhelmed my personal calling. This retreat invites men and women to be vulnerable before God and before one another by naming concretely those places where I have lied, isolated, and indulged my desires to the detriment of my own well being and the loss of relationships with family and friends and even with God.

The Purpose of the Retreat

This retreat is shaped to help retreatants claim God's commitment to them in their lives. Each activity builds on the previous activity, and invites the retreatant to seek God's living presence and teaching in their experience, and thus rely on God as the way to recovery, sobriety and responsible living. The retreat's focus on unique personal experience honors Ignatius' wisdom (15th annotation) that God is dealing interiorly with each retreatant and each retreatant is responding to God uniquely.

The point of the retreat is to help retreatants experience hope and strength from their hearts.