

# LOYOLA PRAYER SHEETS

## **SPEAK, LORD, YOUR SERVANT IS LISTENING** *An Introduction to Individually-Guided Retreats*



Many people arrive to make an individually-guided retreat wondering what they have let themselves in for. Even those who have made them before may be unsure about the form they take at

Loyola Hall. This leaflet tries to answer some of the questions that may occur to you. In general, though, please bring to your guide any uncertainties you may have - we are well aware that not everything can be covered in an introductory meeting, and are always happy to explain anything that is unclear.



Above all it is important to realize that, unlike some of the other events in our programme, the individually-guided retreats (IGRs) do not have any particular theme or programme of meditations. Instead, the guide seeks to help you find the areas it would be most helpful to pray and reflect over during your time here. It is *your* retreat with *your* concerns.

## ***WHAT DO I DO?***

There are different elements which make up the day while on retreat, some of which appear on the general timetable:

### **Meals**

Meals are normally taken in silence, with background music at lunch and the evening meal. You will be told which dining room to use, but there are no set places within the rooms.

### **Prayer together**

There is a Eucharist in the house each day during the retreat, which you are welcome to attend. In the evening there is usually an hour in the chapel when people can pray together in silence. Feel free to come and go during this period. It is often a time when people pray for each other.

### **Individual prayer**

Normally a person would, after they have settled in to the house and become rested, make room for between three and five periods of private prayer each day. The length of these will depend on what you feel comfortable with - between twenty minutes and an hour is the average. The prayer may be based on scripture, some other reading, or a reflection on some area of the retreatant's own life.

### **Guidance**

You will usually be invited to meet with your retreat guide daily for between 20 and 45 minutes. Here the guide will listen to help you to reflect on your experience, and may suggest some ways to spend the coming 24 hours. A second daily meeting may be arranged for those new to retreats.

## Time alone

Time between prayer periods is most profitably spent alone, in silence. Some walking or other exercise is often helpful. Relaxing from the stresses and strains of everyday life, especially at the beginning of a retreat, can be very important. To this end early nights, taking a siesta during the day, or using the sauna or jacuzzi as aids to relaxation can be recommended. A certain amount of reading or listening to music might be helpful - this is a good area to discuss with your retreat guide.

There is one criterion which you and your guide will use together to choose how to spend your day during the retreat. It is this: "*What will most help you to get in touch with God and God's action in your life at this time?*" The main advantage of coming on retreat is that everything - meals, prayer, relaxation, surroundings - is directed towards supporting this meeting between yourself and God.

## ***SILENCE***

Individually-guided retreats are spent for the most part in silence. This is not intended as an ascetical penance, but serves to enable you to get in touch with what is deepest within yourself. For a few days in the year it is good not to seek to escape from myself and from God in conversation, TV, radio, shopping, or any other of the distractions of everyday life. Please respect also the silence of others who are on retreat. Most people take a day or so to get used to the silence, but then come to really appreciate its value.

## WHAT TO TALK ABOUT WITH YOUR GUIDE

The guide is listening for the ways in which God is relating to you, both in and out of prayer, and so is more interested in how you are feeling, your desires, joys, and sorrows, than in any intellectual ideas or pious reflections that you might have. The guide is particularly concerned with your general mood and its changes, in what brings you joy and consolation, and what pulls you down, making you depressed and desolate. These are all pointers to God's work.

It is good to go over your personal timetable with the guide and decide how you intend to spend the time and how much formal prayer would be helpful. It is not the guide's job to tell you what to do, but to share from their experience and training ideas of what may best serve your own intentions.

The guide will ask you how your periods of prayer went, whether you found them pleasant, distracted, boring, moving ... You have a chance to say what went on in the prayer periods, what struck you. It is often helpful to jot down a note or two after each prayer period in this way as a record for yourself. You may also be asked how the time between the prayer periods felt.

Especially if there is something pre-occupying you, or which keeps coming back to you, it is good to talk this over. Don't worry if these things seem trivial. It can be consoling to find that something you thought particular to you is not uncommon. And remember that everything you say to the guide is held in confidence.