



BURG – Occasional Paper No 5
What to do on your first Retreat
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The purpose of this occasional paper is to provide an introduction to a Retreat for someone who is not sure what will happen or what they can do.

Let us firstly recall the purpose of a Retreat. It is a period of time in a place of quiet or calm. You come there to be silent, thoughtful and pray. It is a place and a time for your relationship with God. So it will involve your feelings, intellect, relationships, physical nature and faith. It may involve confirmation of what you are already doing with God. It may however involve change, repentance, confession, re-commitment.

Retreats organised by BURG usually last two to three days and although they are all different, each day includes the following:

- Morning Worship, Guided thought
- Evening Worship, Personal reflection
- Open time for a walk, a rest
- Meals

Except when you are at worship, the day with others is in silence. Even the meal times! You see from this there is a lot of time spent on your own. There is opportunity to rest and relax. The personal reflection following the Guided Thought by the Leader is not meant to occupy all your time. It is there to help you along the journey of thought and prayer you must take.

There is also always opportunity to have a personal conversation with the Retreat Leader during the course of the Retreat.

From all this, it can be seen that preparing for your first Retreat in fact begins before you arrive!

Before you come on Retreat

Ensure those who need to know have the emergency contact telephone number and know the pattern of the Retreat programme.

Choose clothing which is comfortable and relaxing. For a countryside location, bring weatherproof footwear and overclothing.

Select reading materials for your personal use that will stimulate and help you in your relationship with God and His world.

Consider bringing along your knitting, tapestry, sketching pad ... if you have such pursuits.

For your peace of mind, as far as possible clear your diary, do the phone calls and settle the home arrangements, to avoid a mid-Retreat panic!



During the Retreat

Familiarise yourself with the timetable and location. Throughout the occasion feel free to contact the Leader or Assistant if you have a query.

Each Retreat will vary. However, so that silence is helpful, punctuality is important.

You are free to opt out of any part of the programme. There is no pressure to conform.

Silence: accept the unfamiliarity; do not forget everyone is there to use it, so be natural. By all means acknowledge and offer a smile of greeting; mealtimes in silence have humour, absurdity and pleasant surprises, all in equal measure.

Using the Programme

During each session the Retreat Leader will be guiding you through the chosen theme. Be prepared to listen and take notes. But let the listening take precedence over the notes. There will be no demand in the style that you should learn or remember. The 'feel' will be reflective.

Towards the conclusion the Leader will probably offer you Scripture Readings and Questions to use in the time that follows. You can do this in your room or stay in the communal rooms. It is sometimes helpful to allocate a specific time in the following silence to these tasks and then move out and on in your thoughts and prayers. The Chapel can often provide a different focus for your thoughts.

You might consider this a possible pattern for your time on your own:

Pray: that God's Spirit will guide you through this time

Sit Quietly: don't force your thoughts, quieten down and rest

Plan: sort out how you will use the period ahead of you between the Leader's suggestions and your own reading

Do: what you have planned – but be adaptable; change course if it is sensible

Relax: by a catnap, a stroll, a cuppa!

Review: what you have done and offer that in prayer to God

It is not uncommon for thoughts about home, church, your daily routine to intrude into the Quiet and Prayer. The intrusion may be welcome and gentle as you see them in a new way. It may be harsh and upsetting. Awareness of this possibility releases us from its interruptive power.

The power can be utilised by taking them into prayer and listing them on a separate piece of paper as 'for future attention'.

Interview with Retreat Leader

On most Retreats, this is optional. It is there for you to bring out into the open some of the gremlins the Quiet and Prayer provoke.

Equally the Leader can give guidance on how to use the time of the Retreat. Information, solace, conversation, clarification, a hand to hold, all can happen in this time.



Now a brief list of 'things to do in the silence':

Rest

A stroll, taking in the sights and smells of where you are

Write a journal of a part of your life that you want to understand more about

The idea of a 'journal' can be applied to many things

Draw, paint, compose a song or a poem

Design a mural, a bookmark, a banner

- let none of these take over the point of Retreat.

Worship

Strange to have such an item in a paper on Retreats! The specific times of prayer and praise together will complement all that goes on. They are there to unite the solitariness of the occasion. Often all can participate in some way, and you should not feel surprised at how responsive you are!

A Good Ending

The silence will conclude about two hours before the end of the Retreat. Plan for this. It is useful amidst all the packing up to do the same in your thoughts and prayers. You cannot tidy everything up, but it will be worthwhile if you have spotted:

what you have received

what you have resolved

what you have to do

what you must wait for

After the Retreat is over

Each of us will make our own way back to everyday life. We will quickly become immersed in all its excitement, tension, fun and fear. You may find it helpful to:

Debrief yourself on what happened; get it into perspective

Talk it over as much as you can; do not keep those nearest to you in the dark over what happened

React to the Retreat Leader or Steering Group by letter or phone over what happened

Wonder how you must carry on –

What of your Church Prayer Meeting?

What of the Church Members' Meeting?

What of Retreats in everyday life?

What of a Spiritual Guide for your life?

What of the responsibilities of your daily life?

Retreats, whether alone or with others, are a personal experience of yourself and God that can destroy and build, close down and open up, uproot and plant. They are as helpful as our response to the grace of God in our lives. May God bless you in your Retreat.