

leader's  
resource



**jim burns**  
general editor

# uncommon camps & retreats

**CD-ROM INCLUDED**



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# introduction

Retreats and camping experiences are such an important part of youth ministry. One para-church organization I know says that 75 percent of their staff made a significant Christian commitment while at a retreat or camp. Many of us can remember a time away from home when God seemed more real to us, simply because we were away from our normal routines and distractions. As you know, students love all kinds of retreat experiences. There is a sense of excitement and curiosity. Retreats build lifelong memories. In a retreat setting, the atmosphere is casual, fun, relational and, frankly, much more spiritually sensitive.

Some time ago, my family was eating a meal in a restaurant near our home. A twenty-something guy walked into the restaurant with a wonderful wife and a rambunctious two-year-old. He looked familiar, but I couldn't get a handle on how I knew him. We watched this lovely family as they were seated near us. When the young man looked up and noticed me, he came right over and introduced himself. Terry told me that when he was 15 his first experience with God was at a retreat with our church youth group. Twelve years later, with bright eyes and enthusiasm, he exclaimed to me, "That was the greatest weekend of my life!"

As you give students the opportunity to get away from it all to focus on their relationship with God and develop positive peer relationships, you will be offering them one of the best experiences of their lives. In this book, we have tried to give you a variety of experiences from some of America's finest youth workers. I'm sure you will find many of these retreat experiences helpful and practical. Like anything else, you will need to adapt the sessions to fit your own group's needs. It is my hope that you will find this book as helpful as did the youth workers who have already used the material.

Thanks for your commitment to helping students find a closer relationship with God through Christian retreats and camping. God bless.

Yours in Christ,

Jim Burns, Ph.D.  
President of HomeWord  
Executive Director of the HomeWord Center for Youth  
and Family at Azusa Pacific University



# RETREAT GUIDELINES

**guideline:** \ 'gīd-,līn\ **1:** a line by which one is guided: as a cord or rope to aid a passer over a difficult point or to permit retracing a course **2:** an indication or outline of policy or conduct.

It has been said that some of the best ministry happens outside the walls of the church. This is especially true in the areas of camps and retreats. During a weekend retreat, you are likely to spend more time with your students than you do in all the hours of Sunday School put together over the entire year!

You may spend your weekend camping in the mountains, on the beach or at a lake; you may use a camp facility, stay at a hotel or use a private farm or ranch as your retreat location. Whether your time away together is built around a theme, a common goal, a service project or a tour, retreats have a way of changing the lives of everyone involved. The power of a retreat is more than just the program. It's the memories, the late-night talks, the lack of sleep and the concentrated time spent together building relationships with each other and God. A retreat gives you and your youth group time away from your regular routines and pressures, time for God to break through the noise and the busyness of life and time to see the Spirit of God transform lives and hearts.

So whether you've been on dozens and dozens of retreats in your life or this is your first one ever, our hope is that the retreats found in these pages will serve as a creative guide to help you as you seek to see your students' lives transformed by our Lord.



# retreat ingredients

## overview

The material for each retreat begins with a simple overview that includes the theme, key verses and main goals for the weekend you will be spending with your students. Suggestions are given for possible locations and a time frame for the retreat.

## advance preparation

This section provides a checklist for general items that you may want to set up before you schedule the retreat as well as specific materials you might need during the course of the weekend (note that these items may differ depending on the activities you choose). Also included is a checklist for what leaders need to bring, what students need to bring, and what students *shouldn't* bring.

## retreat schedules

The sample schedule provided in each of the retreats lists suggested activities and timelines you might want to use in planning your time together.

## counselor meetings

Adult counselors are key to any retreat's success. Students might not remember the games, the singing or the speaker, but they will always remember their counselors. Counselor meetings should be held while students are involved in organized games or activities or during free times. Items to discuss during a counselor meeting might include schedules, responsibilities, discipline policy (and any discipline problems), general updates for how things are going with the group, and prayer for students.

## warm-ups

These are fun exercises to get the students engaged and thinking about the topic that will be presented or just to help them interact with one another.

## worship times

Having a brief time of worship before the message and sometimes at the end of the message will help your students transition into the message and focus their thoughts on God—and worship Him. It is ideal to have a worship band lead the group in song, but you can also have a leader with a guitar or pre-recorded worship music for students to sing along with. For other ideas on worship times, see *Uncommon Worship Experiences* by Jim Burns and Robin Dugall (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2010).

## messages

The message times are the heart of the retreat. During this time, you or another leader will be presenting a message from Scripture that relates to the theme of the weekend. Discussion questions have been given to make the teaching time interactive with your students.

## small-group discussions

Students tend to apply truth within a small group better than they do in a large-group setting. Because of this, discussion starters are provided to help students work

together in small groups of five to six people. During these small-group times, students will discuss and consider ways to apply what they have learned from the message. An option is given to use the discussion starters with the students in their cabin groups before going to bed.

### **activities**

These are structured activities designed to foster a sense of community between students. Each retreat has activities for the group to participate in. One resource to help you plan activity times for your retreat is *Uncommon Games and Icebreakers* by Jim Burns (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2008).

### **solo times**

Solo times are held in the morning. Each solo time has written guidelines and questions that will help the students spend time alone with God and meditate on His Word. Students may also use this time for Bible study, journaling and prayer. Have solo time sheets available at or before breakfast for students to use.

### **campfire programs**

Campfire programs, as you might expect, can be held in the evenings after the final session and/or activity of the day. The goal of these programs is not only to give students some time to have fun together around the campfire but also to give them a time of worship that will leave them with a sense of God's awesome presence. Ideas are given in some retreats for ways to use this time. Use familiar worship songs as you conclude your evening in God's presence.

### **debriefing sessions**

The debriefing session is a time for you to solidify the growth experienced by students and prepare them to go home and face the challenges that are waiting for them. This can be done as a large group or in smaller groups. Following are some ideas:

- Have students share their most memorable moments at the retreat—let them get as bizarre as they want. If you write these memories down, you can share them at a retreat reunion later.
- Have students share one thing they learned during the weekend and how they will be different because of it. You can ask students to write these down and place them in envelopes that they address to themselves. You may also want to save a copy so that you can challenge students' growth when they return home. A week or two after returning home, mail the envelopes to students to encourage them to continue growing.
- Pray together for each member's continued growth, for group unity and for specific problems students may face when they go home.
- Close with a favorite song.
- Assign each student a "contact" at the church—a mentor (such as one of the retreat leaders) or other person with whom they can connect on a regular basis. It will be easier for students to stay connected with Christ if they also stay connected to the church.





- Challenge students to become more involved in youth group activities at home to continue the growth process. Invite them to join in upcoming events or discipleship groups to continue their growth and have accountability.



# student leadership teams



The purpose of student leadership teams is to encourage students to take responsibility during this special time together. Leadership learned while on a retreat can carry over to leadership in the youth group when students return home. Each retreat will list in the “advance preparation” section the suggested teams needed for that weekend. At least one or two adult leaders should oversee each group.

## **worship team**

This team is responsible for preparing and leading music during each of the worship times. To get members for this team, ask retreat participants who play a musical instrument to meet and form a worship band for the retreat. Responsibilities include:

- Choosing songs for each session (note that in many cases, the songs should relate in some way to the theme of the retreat).
- Creating song sheets or PowerPoint presentations for the lyrics of the songs that will be sung.
- Consistently meeting together before the retreat to rehearse the songs.
- Bringing any equipment necessary to the retreat, including instruments or CDs.

## **transportation team**

This team is responsible for vehicle maintenance and safety. Students are encouraged to help keep all vehicles clean and maintained. Responsibilities include:

- Checking vehicle safety: Do the lights work? Are there safety belts for all the passengers? Does the horn work?
- Cleaning windows.
- Cleaning up trash from vehicles.
- Checking vehicle fluids with the driver.
- Checking tire pressure.
- Loading and unloading all luggage and equipment.

## **bon appétit team**

This team is responsible for loading all food supplies, preparing all meals and cleaning up after the meals. Responsibilities include:

- Reviewing kitchen safety tips.
- Loading all food supplies into vehicles.
- Preparing all meals.
- Checking ice levels in coolers.
- Preparing drinks.
- Cleaning up.
- Cleaning and putting away all cooking equipment after the trip is over.



### **equipment team**

This team will help adult leaders collect the equipment that will be used on the trip. They will work with the transportation team to ensure that the following items are in the vehicles:

- Recreational equipment
- Water supplies
- First-aid kits
- Worship instruments
- Sound equipment/song charts
- Computer and/or projector (optional)
- Any other supplies specific to the particular retreat

The equipment team will also be responsible for cleaning and putting away equipment after the trip.

### **focus team**

This team helps group members focus on the purpose of the weekend. They also help the adult leaders during the small-group discussion times to encourage fellowship and reflect on the lessons. Responsibilities include:

- Praying as a team before each meeting.
- Using basic listening skills.
- Encouraging sharing during small-group discussion times.
- Praying together throughout the weekend as specific needs arise, such as resolving a conflict or overcoming an obstacle.
- Reaching out to those who might need encouragement or friendship.
- Helping others stay focused on the purpose of the weekend.
- Encouraging participation in activities.

### **recreation team**

This team is responsible for organizing fun times during the retreat. Responsibilities include:

- Organizing activities during free time.
- Supporting leaders during group activities.
- Setting up and putting away any equipment that is needed for an activity.

# sample medical and liability release



I/We, the undersigned, am/are the parent(s) of \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name) a minor child, \_\_\_\_\_ years of age, or the person having legal custody pursuant to authority of \_\_\_\_\_ or the legal guardian of the (designate authority, if applicable) minor child pursuant to an order of \_\_\_\_\_ (designate authority, if applicable) and now have, and am/are entitled to the full and complete custody of said minor child.

## **medical care**

I/We hereby authorize \_\_\_\_\_ (church or ministry name and address), its agents, servants, employees, officers and directors, or other adult sponsor bearing this written authorization, in whose care the above mentioned minor child has been entrusted by me/us, to obtain proper medical care from a licensed medical or dental doctor or facility. The medical/dental care may include, but is not limited to, any X-ray examination, anesthetic, medical or surgical diagnosis or treatment and hospital care to be rendered to said minor under the general or special supervision and upon the advice of a licensed medical doctor or dentist.

It is understood that this authorization is given in advance of any specific diagnosis, treatment or hospital care being required, but is given to provide authority and power on the part of \_\_\_\_\_ (church or ministry) and said adult person, to give specific consent to any and all such diagnosis, treatment or hospital care which a treating physician and/or dentist in the exercise of his/her best judgment may deem advisable in the event of injury to or illness of the minor. This authorization shall include transportation to receive the medical or dental care.

## **guidelines**

It is understood that while participating in activities sponsored by \_\_\_\_\_ (church or ministry), my child/ward is to follow the guidelines set by the adults in charge. Should my child/ward not cooperate with these guidelines, I agree to pick up him/her from the activity.

## **risk**

I am aware that these activities may involve some hazards. I have considered these risks, and I still wish my child/ward to participate. Furthermore, I agree not to bring legal action against \_\_\_\_\_ (church or ministry), staff or sponsors as a result of any injuries suffered in the course of his/her participation.

## **financial responsibility**

In the event of injury to my child/ward, I agree that I/we and my health care insurer shall be financially responsible for any medical treatment required by my child/ward as a result of any injury or illness suffered during his/her participation in any activities during the term of this agreement.



**dispute**

In the event a dispute arises between me and \_\_\_\_\_ (church or ministry) concerning injuries to my child/ward, then I agree that a Christian arbitrator acceptable to both sides shall resolve the dispute. The cost of the arbitrator is to be shared equally by the parties. All applicable statutes of limitation shall apply and arbitration must be requested within the appropriate period in order to preserve a right to recovery.

**term of agreement**

This authorization shall remain in effect through \_\_\_\_\_ (date), unless sooner (last day of scheduled activity) revoked by the undersigned in writing delivered to \_\_\_\_\_ (church or ministry), its agents, servants, employees, officers and directors.

**signatures**

_____	_____	_____	_____
(Date)	(Mother's Signature)	(Home Phone)	(Work Phone)
_____	_____	_____	_____
(Date)	(Father's Signature)	(Home Phone)	(Work Phone)
_____	_____	_____	_____
(Date)	(Custodian/Guardian's Signature)	(Home Phone)	(Work Phone)

**additional medical information**

Other emergency contact: _____	Phone: _____
Family doctor: _____	Phone: _____
Ophthalmologist: _____	Phone: _____
Insurance company: _____	Phone: _____
Policy/Group #: _____	Phone: _____

Date of last tetanus immunization: \_\_\_\_\_

Medications/allergies: \_\_\_\_\_

Will you allow blood transfusions if physician prescribes? \_\_\_\_\_

Other special health instructions: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# sample volunteer driver form



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Driver's License #: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: (H) \_\_\_\_\_ (C) \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
Car Model/Year #1: \_\_\_\_\_ Car Model/Year #2: \_\_\_\_\_  
Number of working seat belts in Car #1: \_\_\_\_\_ Car #2: \_\_\_\_\_  
License plate number for Car #1 \_\_\_\_\_ Car #2: \_\_\_\_\_

## liability insurance

Minimum required amount of liability insurance: (1) \$100,000 liability per person for bodily injury, (2) \$300,000 liability per incident for bodily injury for all vehicle occupants, and (3) \$50,000-\$100,000 liability for property damage. Amount on this (these) car(s):

### car #1

Insurance Company: \_\_\_\_\_ Policy #: \_\_\_\_\_  
(1) \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (2) \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (3) \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Uninsured/underinsured motorist coverage?  Yes  No

### car #2

Insurance Company: \_\_\_\_\_ Policy #: \_\_\_\_\_  
(1) \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (2) \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (3) \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Uninsured/underinsured motorist coverage?  Yes  No

## driving history

Are you licensed to drive a commercial vehicle?  Yes  No  
Have you been in an accident in the last three years?  Yes  No

If you answered yes, describe the accident and its cause:

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Have you been ticketed for moving violations within the last three years?

Yes  No

If you answered yes, describe the infractions:

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Have you been convicted for WDWI/DUI, or had your license suspended for moving violations, hit and run, eluding an officer, reckless or negligent operation of a vehicle, or driving while under suspension or revocation within the last five years? (Note: We will not be able to use volunteers with a “yes” answer.)  Yes  No

- I possess a valid driver’s license. Please attach a photocopy of your driver’s license and first page of your car insurance policy(ies).

**declaration and signature**

Students riding in my vehicle(s) seated in both the front and back seats will be secured with individual working seatbelts. (No double belting of children is permitted.) To my knowledge, my vehicle is in safe operating condition (brakes, tires, and so forth). I affirm that I will carefully transport students under my care, including obeying all traffic laws. I also declare that by signing this driver form I will not have ingested alcohol, a controlled substance or any other medication that impairs my driving abilities, during or within six (6) hours before the trip.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_