



PACEM in TERRIS
HERMITAGE RETREAT CENTER

A THREE-DAY SELF-DIRECTED SILENT RETREAT

You Did Not Choose Me *I Chose You*

F O R E D U C A T O R S

A retreat for teachers, professors, administrators, tutors, coaches, and all who form the minds and hearts of the young — drawing from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola and the living Word of Scripture.



Sacred Paths Retreat Series

Before You Begin

Who this retreat is for · The Ignatian foundation · How to use this guide

Teaching is one of the most ancient and sacred of human vocations. To form a mind, to awaken a conscience, to kindle curiosity in a young person — these are acts of profound consequence. And yet few callings are as exhausting, as frequently undervalued, and as spiritually depleting as the work of education.

This retreat is for educators of all kinds — classroom teachers and university professors, school principals and homeschooling parents, coaches and tutors, catechists and formation directors. It is for those who have given themselves to the formation of others and who now need to be formed themselves.

THE IGNATIAN FOUNDATION

Why St. Ignatius for educators?

St. Ignatius of Loyola was himself a teacher. The Jesuits he founded built some of the most influential educational institutions in the world, and his Spiritual Exercises reflect a deep understanding of how human beings learn, grow, and are formed. His method is attentive, embodied, and holistic — engaging intellect, memory, imagination, and will. It is, in the truest sense, an education of the soul.

This retreat adapts his wisdom for the specific terrain of educational life: the depletion, the vocation, the relationships, and the deep question of why you chose this work — or why it chose you.

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.”

— John 15:16

THREE MOVEMENTS

The shape of this retreat

Day One: Called — Returning to the origin of your vocation. Why teaching? Who called you to this work? What did you carry into it that has since been lost or buried?

Day Two: Formed — The teacher as learner. Receiving what you give. The spiritual roots of your pedagogy and the God who teaches through you.

Day Three: Sent — Returning to the classroom renewed. The fruit that remains. Releasing outcomes and receiving freedom.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Two questions for your journal

- What word would you use to describe the state of your teaching life right now — not the ideal version, but the honest one?
- When did you last feel genuinely alive in the work of education? What was happening?

WHAT TO BRING

Your only essentials

A Bible. A journal and pen. Permission to stop performing. You have spent days, months, possibly years serving others' formation. These three days are yours. Come as the student, not the teacher.

“The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens — he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught.”

— Isaiah 50:4

Day One: Called

Theme: The origin of your vocation · Why you were chosen for this work

Every educator arrived at this work through a story. Some were called early — a gifted teacher who lit something in them that would not go out. Some arrived by accident and stayed by compulsion. Some feel the clarity of vocation; others the ambiguity of a career that became something more than a career. Today we go back to the beginning — not to sentimentalize it, but to recover something that may have been covered over by the weight of the work.

MORNING PRAYER · 30 MIN

Settling and asking

1. **Settle:** Sit in complete silence for ten minutes. Notice the particular exhaustion you carry — not just physical, but the weight of unfinished essays, unmotivated students, impossible expectations, the institutional fatigue. Name it silently to God. Set it down.
2. **Preparatory prayer:** Ask God for one grace today — that everything in this retreat serve a deeper love of your students and your work. This is the Ignatian preparatory prayer: it orients the whole day.
3. **Journal:** Write for five minutes on this question: What was the moment — however small — when you first thought you might be a teacher? What drew you?

FIRST PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

The burning curiosity: The boy in the Temple

Read Luke 2:41–52 — Jesus at twelve years old, sitting among the teachers, listening and asking questions. Notice: he is not lecturing. He is asking. He is listening. Those who heard him ‘were amazed at his understanding and his answers.’

Use Ignatian imaginative contemplation. Place yourself in the scene — you are one of the teachers in that circle. You do not know who this boy is. You only know that something in his questions is awakening something in you. What does that feel like?

“After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.”

— Luke 2:46

Journal prompt

When was the last time a student asked you a question that genuinely startled you — that woke something up in your own thinking? What did that moment feel like? What does it tell you about why you teach?

SECOND PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

Called by name: Samuel and the voice in the night

Read 1 Samuel 3:1–10. Samuel hears his name called in the night and does not immediately know it is God. He goes to Eli three times before Eli recognizes what is happening. ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’

Ignatius invites us to pray with our memory. Sit quietly and travel back through your history as an educator. Who were the students who changed you? Who were the teachers who formed you? Where, in that long thread of formation, do you hear God’s voice?

“And the Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ And Samuel said, ‘Speak, for your servant hears.’”

— 1 Samuel 3:10

Journal prompt

Who called you into teaching — even if they didn’t use those words? Write a letter of gratitude to that person, whether they are living or not. You do not need to send it. Let the writing itself be the prayer.

MIDDAY EXAMEN

Five movements at noon

4. Give thanks: Name three specific things about your work as an educator for which you are genuinely grateful — not the ideal version of the work, but the actual work you do.
5. Ask for light: Pray: ‘Lord, show me what you most want me to see about myself and my vocation today.’
6. Review the morning: Where did you feel most drawn toward God in prayer? Where did you feel resistance or flatness?
7. The wound beneath the work: Is there something in your history as an educator — a failure, a difficult student, an institutional injury — that you have been carrying? Name it. Bring it.
8. Look forward: Ask for one grace for the afternoon. What do you most want God to give you in the next hours?

THIRD PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

The teacher Jesus called: Matthew at the tax booth

Read Matthew 9:9–13. Matthew is at work — at his profession, his desk, his daily task — when Jesus walks by and says simply: ‘Follow me.’ And Matthew got up and followed him. No long discernment process. No committee. No curriculum review.

The call to a vocation rarely announces itself with fanfare. It comes at the ordinary desk, in the middle of the ordinary day. Sit with this passage for the full period. Where is Jesus walking past your ordinary desk right now?

“As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he rose and followed him.”

— Matthew 9:9

Journal prompt

If Jesus walked into your classroom or office today and said ‘Follow me’ — what would he be asking you to leave behind? What would he be leading you toward?

Evening

Read Psalm 78:1–4 — the ancient charge to pass on what we have received, to tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord. You are part of a chain of formation that stretches back further than you can see. Rest in that tonight.

“We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done.”

— Psalm 78:4

EVENING EXAMEN

- 9.** Where did I feel most alive in prayer today?
- 10.** Where did I feel most resistant or distracted?
- 11.** What one word or phrase from today do I want to carry into sleep?

Day Two: Formed

Theme: The teacher as learner · Receiving what you give · The God who teaches through you

One of the occupational hazards of teaching is that the role of teacher can quietly crowd out the role of student. We become so practiced at giving that receiving feels foreign, even uncomfortable. We are so accustomed to knowing that not-knowing begins to feel like failure.

Today we practice being formed. We sit at the feet of the Teacher. We receive what we have been pouring out. We attend to the God who is teaching us, even now, through the very work we find so exhausting.

MORNING PRAYER · 30 MIN

Opening: The student's posture

Read Proverbs 2:1–6. Receive wisdom as silver; search for it as for hidden treasure. Educators spend much of their lives dispensing wisdom. Today we ask to receive it. Begin with ten minutes of silence, holding your hands open in your lap — physically open, as a gesture of receiving. Ask God: ‘What do you want to teach me today?’

“For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.”

— Proverbs 2:6

FIRST PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

Mary at the feet of Jesus: The better portion

Read Luke 10:38–42. Martha is busy with many things — preparing, serving, managing. Mary sits at the feet of Jesus and listens. Jesus does not condemn Martha's work. He says only one thing is necessary.

For educators, this passage cuts to the bone. We are almost always Martha — preparing lessons, grading papers, managing classrooms, serving institutional demands. What would it look like to be Mary? What would you have to stop doing, or stop performing, in order to simply sit and listen?

“But one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

— Luke 10:42

Journal prompt

In your educational life, what is the ‘one thing necessary’ that you have been neglecting in the press of many things? What would you have to release in order to attend to it?

SECOND PRAYER PERIOD • 45 MIN

The greatest teacher: What Jesus's pedagogy teaches us

Read John 3:1–21 — Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night. Notice Jesus's teaching method: he does not lecture. He asks questions. He uses metaphor. He meets Nicodemus in his confusion rather than dismissing it. He allows mystery.

Then read John 8:1–11 — the woman caught in adultery. Notice again: Jesus does not respond immediately. He writes in the dirt. He waits. He asks a question that redirects the entire room. He addresses the individual with dignity, not the crowd with performance.

Sit with these two scenes. What do they teach you about teaching? What does Jesus's pedagogy reveal about how God forms human beings?

“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

— John 3:8

Journal prompt

Think of one student you have taught whose formation you cannot explain — someone who grew or changed in ways that had nothing to do with your lesson plan. What does that tell you about the limits of your role and the freedom of God's work in another person?

MIDDAY EXAMEN

Five movements at noon

- 12.** Gratitude: Name one student — past or present — who has genuinely taught you something. What was it? Give thanks for them.
- 13.** Consolation & desolation: In your prayer this morning, where did you feel most alive (consolation)? Where did you feel flat, resistant, or distracted (desolation)?
- 14.** The idol beneath the vocation: Is there something you want from your teaching — recognition, gratitude, results, legacy — that has quietly become more important than the students themselves? Name it honestly. Bring it to God without self-condemnation.
- 15.** The student God is forming in you: What is God trying to teach you through your teaching? What lesson keeps showing up, in different forms, in your life as an educator?
- 16.** Afternoon intention: Ask for one specific grace for the afternoon prayer periods.

THIRD PRAYER PERIOD • 45 MIN

The Holy Spirit as teacher: You will be taught what to say

Read John 14:25–27 and John 16:12–15. Jesus promises his disciples a teacher who will ‘teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.’ The Holy Spirit is given as a teacher, a guide into truth, a reminder of what matters.

Educators so often feel they must generate wisdom from their own reserves. The promise here is different: the Spirit teaches. You are the instrument, not the source. Sit with this distinction for the full period.

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

— John 14:26

Journal prompt

Can you recall a moment in teaching when something came through you that you did not plan — a word, an insight, a response — that seemed to land exactly where a student needed it? What does that experience suggest about the source of your best teaching?

AFTERNOON WALK · 30–45 MIN

Walking as a learner

Take a slow walk outside — alone, without music or a podcast. Today’s walking question is not a question you answer. It is a question you carry: ‘Lord, what are you forming in me through the work of forming others?’ Walk with open hands and an open mind. Do not rush to an answer. Let the question do its work.

Evening: Lectio Divina

Read Deuteronomy 6:4–9 — the Shema — which is the foundational educational text of the Hebrew tradition. It is not a curriculum. It is a way of life: loving God with everything, and passing that love on through the ordinary moments of every day. Read it four times: once for the words, once for what stirs in you, once as a prayer, once in silence.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children.”

— Deuteronomy 6:5–7

Day Three: Sent

Theme: Returning renewed · The fruit that remains · Freedom and release

The Ignatian Exercises do not end in the prayer room. They end in the world. Ignatius's final great prayer — the Contemplation to Attain Love — is a practice of seeing God's love active everywhere: in sunlight, in bread, in the face of a student who does not know their own worth.

Today we practice going back. Not to the same exhaustion, not to the same depletion — but sent, with something recovered or received in these three days that will change what we bring into the room.

MORNING PRAYER · 30 MIN

Review and receive

Begin by reading slowly through your journal from Days One and Two. Do not analyze — simply notice. What recurring words, images, or movements appear? Where did God seem most present? Where did you feel the most resistance?

After reading, sit in silence for ten minutes and ask: 'What is the one thing you most want me to carry back into my teaching?'

FIRST PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

The mustard seed: What your teaching actually produces

Read Matthew 13:31–32 and then 1 Corinthians 3:6–8. The mustard seed is the smallest of seeds. It becomes the largest of garden plants. Paul makes the same point about formation: 'I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.'

One of the deepest burdens educators carry is the burden of outcomes — the anxiety about whether what we are doing is actually working, whether our students are actually changing, whether our work actually matters. Today we release that burden to the One who gives the growth.

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth."

— 1 Corinthians 3:6–7

Journal prompt

Name one student whose growth you did not cause — whose life took a turn you could not have engineered, in a direction you did not predict. What does their story tell you about the limits of your control and the scope of God's work? Can you release them — and all your students — to that larger work?

SECOND PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

The Contemplation to Attain Love: God in the classroom

Ignatius's Contemplation to Attain Love asks us to see God's love laboring everywhere in creation. Today we bring that contemplation specifically into your educational world.

Close your eyes and imagine your classroom, office, or wherever your educational work takes place. Look slowly around the room. The chairs where students sit. The boards or screens or books. The papers. The light through the window.

Now ask: Where is God at work in this room? In which students? Through which moments — however small — has God moved in this space? What does it mean that the God who created all things has chosen to work through the ordinary exchange of a teacher and a learner?

"Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!"

— Psalm 139:7–8

Journal prompt

Name three specific moments from your teaching life — recent or distant — where, looking back, you can see God was present and at work in ways you may not have recognized at the time. What do those moments tell you about the nature of your vocation?

THE SUSCIPE — Adapted for Educators



*Take, Lord, and receive my lesson plans and my improvisations,
my prepared words and my stumbling ones,
my best students and my most difficult ones,
my successes and my failures in the classroom.
You have given this work to me. To you, Lord, I return it.
Do with it what you will. Grow what I cannot grow.
Reach whom I cannot reach. Form what I cannot form.
Give me only your love and your grace.
That is enough to walk back into any room.*

— After St. Ignatius of Loyola

THIRD PRAYER PERIOD • 45 MIN

Go and bear fruit: The sending

Read John 15:12–17 in full. 'You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.' This is the text the entire retreat has been orbiting.

You were not an accident in your students' lives. You were appointed. The fruit of your work — much of which you will never see — is meant to abide. That word, abide: it means to last, to remain, to endure beyond the moment of planting.

Sit for the full period with the word 'appointed.' You were appointed. Not by a school board or a hiring committee only — but by the One who knew you before you were formed.

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you."

— John 15:16

FINAL EXAMEN · 30 MIN

What I am leaving with

- 17.** Review: Read slowly back through all three days of your journal. What recurring themes, words, or images emerge?
- 18.** Name your graces: Write three specific gifts God gave you in these three days. These are yours to keep.
- 19.** One resolution: What is one specific, small, concrete thing you will do differently in your teaching because of this retreat?
- 20.** Name a student: Name one specific student — by name, in writing — for whom you will pray when you return. Write a blessing for them. They do not need to know you wrote it. The writing is an act of intercession.
- 21.** Write a letter to yourself: Write a brief letter to be opened at the start of the next school year — or the next semester. What do you want to remember? What do you want to protect?

Go, Beloved Teacher

You entered this retreat as one who teaches. You leave as one who has been taught — formed by the One who called you into this work and who has never stopped working through it. The classroom you return to is not the same classroom, because you are not the same person who left it. Go and bear fruit. The fruit will abide.

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace."

— Numbers 6:24–26

Core Practices & Extra Scripture

Ignatian methods for educators · What to do when prayer is hard · A treasury of passages

IGNATIAN METHOD

Imaginative Contemplation

Place yourself inside a Gospel scene using all five senses. You are not an observer — you are a participant. For educators, this method is deeply natural: it is the same imaginative capacity you use when you help students inhabit a text or a historical moment. Use it for yourself in prayer. Enter the scene. Notice what moves you.

IGNATIAN METHOD

Consolation & Desolation for Educators

Consolation: the experience of energy, rightness, love, creativity, meaning in your teaching — the days when the work feels like a gift. Desolation: the flatness, the going-through-the-motions, the sense that nothing is working or mattering.

Ignatius teaches: in desolation, hold the course. Do not make major decisions about your vocation from a place of desolation. The dry season is not the truth about your calling. In consolation, receive freely and remember it — it will sustain you through the dry seasons.

PRACTICE

The daily two-minute examen for educators

At the end of each teaching day, before you leave the building or close the laptop: one moment of gratitude from today's teaching. One moment where God seemed present — however briefly. One thing you are releasing rather than carrying home. Two minutes. Every day. The practice changes what you notice, and what you notice changes what you do.

PRACTICE

Praying for students by name

Keep a short, running list of students who are on your heart — the difficult ones, the struggling ones, the ones who seem unreachable. Once a week, pray through the list by name. You are not solving their problems. You are interceding. You are placing them in the hands of the One who loves them more than you do and knows them better than you can.

PRACTICE

If prayer feels dry or impossible

- Change your posture. Walk, kneel, sit on the floor — the body affects the soul.
- Return to the passage that moved you most in this retreat. Repetition is the Ignatian method: return to where God moved, not forward for novelty.
- Write your prayer instead of speaking it. Educators who live by words often pray best through words on paper.

- Pray Psalm 139 slowly — the whole psalm, verse by verse. Let God’s knowledge of you be the prayer when you have no words of your own.
- Rest. The work of teaching is holy. Rest in the One whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light.

FOR THE JOURNEY BACK

Carrying the retreat into your teaching life

Consider sharing one insight from this retreat with a trusted colleague. The Ignatian tradition was always communal — these Exercises were never meant to stay private.

Schedule a monthly examen in your calendar — a twenty-minute check-in with your own soul about the state of your vocation.

Open the letter you wrote to yourself at the start of the next school year or semester.

Return to this retreat guide in a year. You will be a different educator. The texts will say different things.

EXTRA SCRIPTURE

A treasury for educators

- Proverbs 9:9 — Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still
- Isaiah 11:2 — The Spirit of wisdom and understanding
- Matthew 5:14–16 — You are the light of the world
- Matthew 18:1–5 — Unless you become like a little child
- Mark 10:13–16 — Let the children come to me
- Luke 6:40 — A student is not above the teacher
- Romans 12:7 — If it is teaching, then teach
- Ephesians 4:11–13 — Equipping the saints for works of service
- Colossians 3:16 — Teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom
- 2 Timothy 2:2 — Entrust to faithful people who will teach others
- James 3:1 — Not many of you should become teachers (the weight of the call)
- Psalm 25:4–5 — Teach me your paths; guide me in your truth

“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

— Philippians 1:6