



PACEM in TERRIS

HERMITAGE RETREAT CENTER

A RETREAT FOR VETERANS & FIRST RESPONDERS

Greater Love Has No Man Than This

A retreat for those who have served — in uniform, in fire stations, in squad cars, in emergency rooms — honoring the specific burden of service and the God who meets the moral injury, the trauma, and the weariness of those who protect others.



Sacred Paths Retreat Series

Before You Begin

Who this retreat is for · What service does to a person · Why silence helps

You have been trained to keep moving, to suppress what you feel in the field, to take care of others without showing that you need care yourself. The debrief comes later — or never. The sleep problems, the hypervigilance, the things you saw that you cannot unsee: these rarely have a language in the culture you serve in.

This retreat offers what very few environments in your life have offered: permission to stop. To be still. To bring the weight of what you have carried — the things you have seen, the calls you cannot forget, the decisions made under pressure, the colleagues lost — into the presence of a God who is not shaken by any of it, and who does not look away.

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.”

— John 15:13

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

No need to perform

[

1. Y
2. o
3. u
- 4.
5. d
6. o
- 7.
8. n
9. o
10. t
- 11.
12. h
13. a
14. v
15. e
- 16.
17. t
18. o
- 19.
20. b
21. e
- 22.
23. o
24. k
25. a

26. y
27.
28. h
29. e
30. r
31. e
32. .
33.
34. Y
35. o
36. u
37.
38. d
39. o
40.
41. n
42. o
43. t
44.
45. h
46. a
47. v
48. e
49.
50. t
51. o
52.
53. h
54. a
55. v
56. e
57.
58. p
59. r
60. o
61. c
62. e
63. s
64. s
65. e
66. d
67.
68. e
69. v

70. e
71. r
72. y
73. t
74. h
75. i
76. n
77. g
78. .
79.
80. Y
81. o
82. u
83.
84. d
85. o
86.
87. n
88. o
89. t
90.
91. h
92. a
93. v
94. e
95.
96. t
97. o
98.
99. k
100. n
101. o
102. w
103.
104. h
105. o
106. w
107.
108. t
109. o
110.
111. p
112. r
113. a

- | | |
|------|---|
| 114. | y |
| 115. | |
| 116. | o |
| 117. | r |
| 118. | |
| 119. | w |
| 120. | h |
| 121. | a |
| 122. | t |
| 123. | |
| 124. | t |
| 125. | o |
| 126. | |
| 127. | s |
| 128. | a |
| 129. | y |
| 130. | |
| 131. | t |
| 132. | o |
| 133. | |
| 134. | G |
| 135. | o |
| 136. | d |
| 137. | . |
| 138. | |
| 139. | Y |
| 140. | o |
| 141. | u |
| 142. | |
| 143. | o |
| 144. | n |
| 145. | l |
| 146. | y |
| 147. | |
| 148. | h |
| 149. | a |
| 150. | v |
| 151. | e |
| 152. | |
| 153. | t |
| 154. | o |
| 155. | |
| 156. | s |
| 157. | h |

158. o
159. w
160.
161. u
162. p
163.
164. a
165. n
166. d
167.
168. b
169. e
170.
171. p
172. r
173. e
174. s
175. e
176. n
177. t
178. .
179.
180. T
181. h
182. e
183.
184. r
185. e
186. t
187. r
188. e
189. a
190. t
191.
192. w
193. i
194. l
195. l
196.
197. m
198. e
199. e
200. t
201.

202. y
203. o
204. u
205.
206. w
207. h
208. e
209. r
210. e
211.
212. y
213. o
214. u
215.
216. a
217. r
218. e
219. .

BEFORE YOUR FIRST PRAYER PERIOD

Two questions — write honestly

- What is the call, the deployment, the shift, or the incident that comes back to you most often? You do not have to go into detail. Just name it.
- What do you wish someone would say to you — about what you have seen, what you have done, what you have survived — that no one has ever said?

Day One: The Weight

Theme: Naming the burden · Moral injury and honest prayer · God who has seen what you have seen

The burden of service is specific and often invisible to civilians. It includes not only the physical risks but the moral weight: the decisions made in impossible situations, the times when there were no good options, the losses that cannot be explained away, the gap between the work you were trained to do and the work you actually encountered.

MORNING PRAYER · 30 MIN

David and the warrior's weight

Read Psalm 22:1–19 and Psalm 55:1–6. David is a warrior-king who knew violence, loss, betrayal, and the weight of decisions with life-and-death consequences. His psalms are among the most honest prayers ever written — no composure, no managing the image, just the raw cry of a person under crushing weight.

Journal: What would your psalm look like right now? Not a polished prayer — the honest cry. Write it.

“My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me.”

— Psalm 55:4–5

FIRST PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

Elijah — the aftermath of the battle

Read 1 Kings 19:1–18. Elijah has just survived an enormous confrontation. He should feel victorious. Instead he collapses in the wilderness and asks to die. God's response: sleep and food. More sleep and food. Then a still small voice.

Post-traumatic stress does not respect spiritual achievement. The collapse after the battle is not weakness — it is the body and soul asking for what they need. Journal: What would your body and soul ask for right now, if you gave them permission to ask?

MIDDAY EXAMEN · 20 MIN

- 220.** Gratitude: Name three things your service has given you — skills, camaraderie, purpose, perspective.
- 221.** The incident: Name the one you wrote about this morning. Can you bring it to God specifically, rather than generally?
- 222.** The body: What does your body need right now? Rest, movement, quiet, release?
- 223.** The question for God: What is the question you most need to ask God today? Not the one you think you should ask — the one you actually have.
- 224.** Grace: What one thing do you need from God this afternoon?

SECOND PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

Jesus in Gethsemane — the night before the worst

Read Matthew 26:36–46. Jesus in the garden the night before his arrest and execution. He is not at peace. He asks to be spared. He sweats blood. He goes back to prayer three times. And an angel comes to strengthen him — not to rescue him, but to strengthen him for what is coming.

The God you are praying to has been in the worst night of his existence. He knows what it is to be in the dark before something terrible. Journal: What does it mean to you that the God who asks you to bring your worst night to him has already been in his own?

Evening

Read Psalm 46 — 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.' Then sit in silence for ten minutes with nothing to do and nothing to produce. Just be still. That is the discipline for tonight.

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear.”

— Psalm 46:1–2

Day Two: The Wound and the Welcome

Theme: What service has cost · Receiving care · The God who tends the wounded

Service people are often the last to receive care. The culture of toughness that keeps them effective in the field can become a barrier to the healing they need. Today we practice the difficult discipline of receiving — of being tended, rather than tending.

MORNING PRAYER · 30 MIN

Isaiah's wounded servant

Read Isaiah 53:3–5. 'A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief... by his wounds we are healed.' The central figure of Christian faith is a wounded servant. Not a conquering warrior. A wounded servant who chose the wound for the sake of others.

This does not make your wounds good. But it means the God you pray to knows exactly what they look like from the inside. Journal: What wound from your service do you most need to bring to God today? Not a general wound — a specific one.

"He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities... and by his wounds we are healed."

— Isaiah 53:5

FIRST PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

The good Samaritan — from a different angle

Read Luke 10:25–37. You know this story. You have probably lived it — on the road when others passed by, when you were the one who stopped. But today, read it from the perspective of the wounded man in the ditch.

What is it like to be the wounded man — to be lying there, unable to help yourself, dependent on someone else's care? Most service people are deeply comfortable in the role of the Samaritan. The practice today is inhabiting the wounded man. Journal: What would it look like to receive care as readily as you give it?

AFTERNOON WALK · 45 MIN

Walking without a mission

Take a slow walk with no destination and no objective. No route to clear. No perimeter to check. Just walking slowly through the woods, along the lake, wherever the path goes. Carry one question loosely, without trying to answer it: 'What is God saying to me in this silence?' Walk for the full period. Return and journal whatever came.

Evening

Read John 20:19–23 — the risen Jesus appearing to disciples who are hiding, afraid, behind locked doors. His first words: 'Peace be with you.' Then he shows them his wounds. He does not hide them. He is risen and still wounded. And he breathes on them and says: 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' Sleep with his peace tonight.

“Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’”

— John 20:19

Day Three: The Honored Servant

Theme: Your service matters · Being seen by God · Sent back with something to give

You did not serve for recognition. You served because it was what you were made to do, because someone had to, because you believed in something larger than yourself. Today we receive what the culture often fails to give you: a genuine, unhurried account of the weight and worth of your service — from the God who saw every shift, every call, every decision made in the dark.

MORNING PRAYER · 30 MIN

Matthew 25: What God saw

Read Matthew 25:31–40. 'I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me.' Jesus identifies himself with the ones who were served. Every person you pulled from a burning building. Every victim you reached before they died alone. Every person in crisis you talked down from the edge. Jesus says: 'That was me.'

Journal: Write three specific moments from your service when, looking back, you can see that you were in the presence of the sacred — even if you did not know it at the time.

“Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

— Matthew 25:40

THE SUSCIPE



*Lord, take and receive my service —
the years I gave, the risks I took, the things I saw,
the ones I reached in time and the ones I did not,
the pride I carry and the weight I cannot set down.
You saw every call, every shift, every decision in the dark.
To you, Lord, I return it all.
Do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace.
They are enough to keep going,
or to rest,
or to begin whatever comes next.*

— After St. Ignatius of Loyola

FINAL EXAMEN · 30 MIN

225. Review all three days. What word gathers what God gave you?

- 226.** Name three things you will carry home — specific gifts from this retreat.
- 227.** Name one person in your service community you will reach out to when you return. Not to fix them — just to say: 'I'm glad you're still here.'
- 228.** Write a letter to yourself — to be opened the next time the weight gets very heavy. What do you want that version of yourself to know?

Go, honored servant

You have given more than most people will ever know. You have been in rooms and scenes that most people never see. You have made decisions that most people never have to make. And you are here — still going, still caring, still carrying it. The God who saw every moment of your service honors it. Go, and know that you are seen.

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.”

— John 15:13

Core Practices & Extra Scripture

PRACTICE

The debrief prayer

After any difficult shift or incident: sit for five minutes before you leave the station, the vehicle, or the parking lot. Name what happened. Name what it cost you. Name one thing you're grateful for. Bring it briefly to God. Then drive home. The practice keeps the weight from accumulating unseen.

PRACTICE

Find a peer

The most important thing you can do from this retreat: identify one person in your service community with whom you can be honest about the interior cost. Not a therapist — though that may also be appropriate. A peer who has been in the same rooms and who will understand without explanation. Reach out to them this week.

EXTRA SCRIPTURE

For those who serve

- Psalm 91 — He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
- Isaiah 40:28–31 — He gives power to the faint
- Isaiah 41:10 — Fear not, for I am with you
- Matthew 5:9 — Blessed are the peacemakers
- John 15:13 — Greater love has no one than this
- Romans 8:38–39 — Nothing can separate us from the love of God
- Revelation 21:4 — No more crying or pain — God will wipe every tear

© 2026, Pacem in Terris Hermitage Retreat Center, 26399 Highway 47 NW, Isanti, MN 55040