

We Create the Path by Walking: Online Spiritual Retreat for Young Adult Seekers on "Go Apart with Jesus Christ"

By Ashiknaz Khokhar, Alloys Nyakundi and Joseph Healey

I. Introduction

The word “retreat” means many things to different people:

- In the military world it is “an act of going away especially from something difficult, dangerous, or disagreeable” such as a military retreat from the enemy.
- In the secular and commercial world it is to withdraw/go to a separate place for a special meeting to evaluate and plan.
- In the religious and spiritual life/world it is “a period of seclusion for the purposes of prayer and meditation.”

Depending on where you live this third meaning is known and not known. Recently my 14 and a half year-old grandniece in the USA said, “Uncle Joe, I am going to be confirmed on Saturday, 6 May, 2023. Before the celebration of the sacrament my confirmation class is going on a retreat.” Some people think that a retreat is only for priests and sisters. Many Catholics know only about a preached retreat.

In fact there are three models of Catholic Retreats or Recollection Days. All are important and all are necessary. First, is the traditional, “preached” retreat. The retreatants listen to a series of talks (“conferences”) on spiritual topics. Second, is the [Small Christian Community](#)/Synodal Style retreat that is more interactive and participatory. Retreatants reflect and share in small groups on the *Bible* and spiritual topics. Third, is a Private/Individual Retreat like a silent Eight-day Retreat or a silent 30-Day retreat.

So we have tried something new/created a new path in developing a online spiritual retreat that is:

- just for Catholic Young Adults (men and women).
- in a synodal style and spirit that is more interactive and participatory.
- uses periods of silence.
- online on Zoom.

II. Outline of Our Online Spiritual Retreat

This description of our actual Online Spiritual Retreat serves as a model that can be copied or adapted by others. It is No. 28 in the “APPENDIX: 28 Online E-Resource Materials on the On-going Formation and Training of Small Christian Community (SCC) Leaders and Members” in our free, online ebook [*Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa.*](#)

Sunday, 12 March 2023: Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community (SCC) Online Spiritual Retreat

The Retreat Master: Jesus Christ.

Joe Healey, MM will facilitate the Online Retreat on 12 March 2023 at 5 pm East Africa, 7 pm Pakistan, 9 am EST and 6 am Pacific.

Theme: “Go apart with Jesus Christ.”

Scripture: *Mark* 6:7–13, 30–33

The retreat will take two hours. Here is the breakdown of the events:

Part 1: A 3:32 minute YouTube video of “Jesus Appeared on the Road to Emmaus.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8YIzWPPiH4A&t=83s>

Part 2: 10 minutes of silence where the following events will take place:

- What is God saying to us.
- Listen to God.
- Closing of eyes and praying.
- No Facebook, Tik-Tok, emails, messages and calls during this time.

Part 3: 15 minutes of silence:

- Young Seekers have a spiritual conversation with Jesus Christ.
- Assume you are sitting or walking with Jesus Christ.
- Write our prayer intentions on a piece of paper which we will hold up on the screen at the end of the retreat.

After the 30 minutes we will all come back together again.

Part 4: 1 hour.

- Go around the online circle and each person describes his or her conversation with Jesus Christ for a maximum of three minutes guided by the following questions and any other thoughts that come up during the retreat:

- i. Did you ask Jesus a question?
- ii. When am I going to get employed?
- iii. How am I going to live with Muslims?
- iv. I don't have a boyfriend or a girlfriend.
- v. I'm sick.
- vi. The professor doesn't understand me in school.
- vii. I am having fights with my parents.
- viii. I don't know what to do during Lent.
- ix. What am I seeking in my life?

Part 5: 25 minutes

- Open discussion.
- What did you hear from the other young people (based on "deeper listening")?
- Prayers of the Faithful.
- Praise and Glory to Jesus. Song: "I Love You Lord." Songs from Kenya, Pakistan, Tanzania and Uganda.

III. My Thoughts and Experiences by Ashiknaz Khokhar

"Go Apart with Jesus Christ" anchored on the scripture of *Mark* 6:7-13, 30-33.

My name is Ashiknaz Khokhar from Pakistan and I participated in the online retreat on 12 March, 2023 of 12 Young Adults (eight young men and four young women). Father Joe Healey gave us spiritual guidance to experience the wonderful opportunity where I feel very close to God and can talk to Him and gave our all during the praying and meditation session.

This is first time that I ever attended any retreat in whole of my life. There was a concept in mind and even understanding that retreat is only for clergy or religious. I merely asked to priests and nuns about this but never get guidance from them and they explain that it's a wonderful experience enjoyed by religious.

As we started the retreat session I thought it must be very boring or time consuming as you have to remain silent, just listening and meditation. But as Father Joe open the floor for us and started with an interactive dialogues to keep us alive during all the sessions of Gospel reading, meditation on the Word of God, sharing our understanding about it, putting our prayer requests to God, encouraging each other and sharing our experience with others – all these were an amazing happiness.

We felt so energetic and thinking that this is a blessing to sit in a gathering of young people where a priest is guiding us and leading the sessions of the retreat. I don't know how many were attending this for first time, but in Pakistan there is not in my experience that any laity is involved in retreat sessions. Since childhood to now, priests and nuns do this retreat for 15 days in mountains areas as they will have a retreat again in June--July with their communities.

It is such a good experience and I would happily do it time to time with my other seekers by finding the facilitator for it. In the retreat we read different passages of the *Bible*. There were 12 men and women in the retreat from Africa and Asia. All were so happy and actively having the blessings from this gathering. This retreat sessions will be conducted in the future as well because it gives us chance to explore the God within our soul and we feel Him that He is sitting along side to us and listening to us. We heard the challenges of young people that they are facing in their lives and our facilitator put all this to God.

I am also glad to find the words of Mother Teresa of Calcutta: "find God in silence." So sharing and walking with Jesus filled our heart with joy and peace. I also want to thank Father Joe and Brother Alloys for giving us this chance to experience a retreat. More blessings to you all.

IV. Facebook Comments of Participants in the Online Spiritual Retreat

Cecil Nick (Kenya):

"Hello. Yesterday as young seekers we had an online retreat guided by the theme: "Go apart with Jesus Christ." It was my first time having an online retreat and I can say it was extremely good and an act of my spiritual growth as a Catholic. I learnt more from Father Joe and other young seekers. I felt it was more of taking some time and have a spiritual talk with our God and listening to our inner selves in the presence of the Lord. Also through sharing I learned that we should always seek God's guidance before making decisions. Let's learn from our past experiences but focus more on great things and not let our past experiences hinder or become obstacles in the success of our life and more emphasis on the power of prayer . It's also good to pray for each other too. From the *Bible* readings (*Mark* 6: 7-13 , 30-33), I learned that when called upon to do God's work, do it diligently, focus on what you're called to do no matter the difficulties you face and allow God to be your protector and guide you. I'm hoping will have more of these online retreats and thank you to everyone who made the event successful.

Mwanjila Steven (Kenya):

"Yesterday, we had the opportunity to participate in a beautiful online retreat that left us feeling renewed and inspired. Despite being virtual, the experience was incredibly powerful, and we were able to connect with others and deepen our faith. We're grateful for the chance to have participated in this retreat and for the community that came together to make it happen. Thank you to everyone who organized and participated in this meaningful event!"

James Mhangwa (Tanzania):

"I am pleased to join the retreat held 12 March through our Zoom gathering. The retreat has assured me that spiritual communion among brothers and sisters is not limited by distance due to how the retreat was organized and we were well coachable. Another experience is of allowing Jesus Christ to be our Spiritual Master and creating faith through imagination of having him (Jesus) by my side after going apart with him. I think of it as a necessary practice for Christians, and in a special way young seekers. The retreat was full love and brotherly/sisterly affection. Thanks Mwanajumuiya Joe and participants. Praise Lord!"

Faith Makori (Kenya):

“I was finally able to get the recording for the Sunday 's Young Seekers' online retreat where I was able to journey with those who participated. I first want to thank Mwanajumuiya Joe for taking his time to guide us during the retreat, Brother Alloys for coming up with such an idea and to the young seekers for accepting the idea even though most of us had never experienced an online retreat. As the theme suggested "Go apart with Jesus Christ", we were all able to understand the importance of silence where we had a few minutes to communicate with Jesus and which later was shared amongst ourselves. I was able to learn that we as young people we have different challenges but in the end we should always pray for God's guidance and trust in Him that He is always in control. I especially liked the saying that "we should learn from the past but not be paralyzed by it." From the guiding scripture (*Mark 6:7-13, 30-33*), I was able to learn just like the 72 disciples we are told by Jesus to spread His word and given the power to heal the sick, we are also called by Him as young adults to spread the *Gospel* and we shouldn't take advantage of others. It was overall a nice experience and I thank the Almighty God for its success. I would like to experience it again fully with everyone else if ever given the chance.”

Mary Wahome (Kenya):

“The online retreat on Sunday was a nice experience. I wish to thank Joe Healey for accepting to guide the young seekers throughout., He was the facilitator but the retreat master was Jesus Christ. I also wish to thank Alloys for organizing for it and all the young seekers for making time from their busy schedules to get a chance to meet with Christ, blessings upon you all. The theme was “Go apart with Jesus,” while the guiding scripture was from *Mark 6:7-13,30-33*. It was mainly about how Jesus commissioned the disciples and sent them out. Afterwards they came back and he walked with them to a silent place. We walked with Jesus during the silent session and we got a chance to talk to him about all our worries and our troubles of life and got to ask him some questions. It was such a nice time as most of the young seekers got answers to some of the questions they had and they say Jesus encouraged them to be strong and that he will always be by their side till the last minute.

I got to understand that young people have different challenges of life. They each fight different battles in their day to day life activities but all in all they hope and trust in Christ Jesus. It was so nice and so encouraging to hear that the young people amidst these challenges that they face, amidst all these silent battles that they fight, they still put full faith and trust in God, that there's a reason for it all, and they believe that sooner or later, It will all be over. Many young people depend on their parents, friends, siblings and even relatives, but the young seekers depend on God who is their Heavenly father. He is a father who never abandons his children. I am looking forward to more online retreats as personally it came at a time and day when I needed it so much, and after it, I felt my heart at peace, that heavenly peace from the heavens and all my worries were gone. Mwanajumuiya Joe, God bless brother Alloys, God bless the young seekers. Shalom.”

Gerhardt Gerard (Kenya):

“This Sunday 12 March Online Retreat was a great experience. I have attended a few retreats but not one hosted virtually. Well, there is always first time in everything. Themed, "*Go Apart with Jesus Christ*", and anchored in the scripture of *Mark 6:7-13, 30-33*, I had a chance learn a lot. My takeaway was what Jesus said to His disciples, “*Come away by yourselves to a*

deserted place and rest a while” (Mark 6:31a). This verse enlightened and made me understand the ‘minutes of silence’ that we had in the retreat. During those minutes of silence, I had my rest, unburdened myself, sought Christ’s face, and spiritually conversed with Jesus Christ. During this Lenten period, I will continue seeking Jesus in minutes of silence. The sharing session that we also had made it clear that young adults experience similar challenges and even with the different ones still the baseline is that Jesus Christ is *the way, the truth and the life*. Such sharing helps us journey together as young adults and reinforce our understanding of Christ’s teachings. I believe this was just a beginning of many more online retreats to come. I appreciate Mwanajumuiya Father Joseph Healey for facilitating the retreat and always being part of the Young Adult’s Seekers bandwagon. Thumbs up to Mwanajumuiya Alloys Nyakundi and all those who made the retreat a success.”

Jesca Donisian (Tanzania):

“Shalom. The retreat was so impactful and it gives me ability to see the importance of always be close to God and plan for other retreats for myself and others in my local community. In Tanzania hours we meet from 5 PM to 7 PM. The facilitator of this retreat Joe Healey, MM guided us in these two hours with the theme: “Go apart with Jesus Christ.” And our retreat master was Jesus Christ. Having silence time during this retreat was so impactful to me since I learned in prayer I should be silent to listen what God is saying to me. Scripture: *Mark 6:7-13,30-33*. After this silent time I got to know what God saying to us from the scriptures. These are among of my meditation points:

We should cooperate, walk two by two, as how Jesus sent his disciples. (*Mark 6:7*)

We should observe God’s rules and instructions. It is through them that we can be able to fulfil God’s call in our lives. (*Mark 6:8-11*)

We should give report to Jesus after any activity we do. (*Mark 6:30*)

After the work of this world we will rest with Jesus in heaven. (*Mark 6:31*)

I recommend to have several retreats even after this Lenten season. Thank you Father Joe Healey for leading us on this. God bless you all.”

V. The Way Forward

As the saying goes *we create the path by walking*. We can network our Online Spiritual Retreat by sharing the link below with others as well as the report that is posted on our Small Christian Community Website.

From the above testimonies by Young Seekers, it’s clear that Online Spiritual Retreats are the way to go because they save time and money. Young People don’t have to travel to a specific location to participate in the retreat but only need internet support to access the Zoom room. Young people sharing their challenges during the retreat and walking with Jesus Christ were also very new to many young people because many confessed that they had been used to retreats where the priests take charge of everything that happens during the retreats. We encourage the Catholic Church to embrace this Online Spiritual Retreat Model because young people are active online and can easily connect globally. Having in-person, online and hybrid

retreats together gives young people options to choose from rather than limiting them to one model that might not work for everyone.

This retreat is a process to feel with God and thank Him for His blessings. Even this is new for us – to meditate and pray together in retreat. It enables us to feel our inner relationship with God. Talking with God is a blessed moment for any person. We suggest that in one year this retreat should be done on national or international levels – in person, online or hybrid -- with Young Adults where they can make communion and friendship with other Young Adults.

As special resources see:

YouTube Video Recording of Our Online Spiritual Retreat

<https://youtu.be/FslUssUnMRQ> (2 hours and 10 minutes)

**Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community (Kenyatta University)
Facebook Page**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/875453985953421>

This Facebook Page was formed to help young people develop a personal relationship with one another, grow their relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ, network young people through Small Christian Communities, support the marginalized in our local communities and help young people develop a sense of pride. It is connected to our twice monthly Zoom Gatherings.

Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Global Collaborative Website

<https://www.smallchristiancommunities.org>

This website was started in 2004 with a vision to establish a global collaborative networking website for Small Christian Communities (SCCs) worldwide. We share SCCs contact information, events, materials, news, videos and photos for each of the six continents. Special features on the Home Page include a “SCC Poll,” “What’s New” and a “Calendar of Events.” We welcome any and all feedback, contributions, SCCs materials, etc.

Small Christian Communities Facebook Page

<https://www.facebook.com/www.smallchristiancommunities.org>

This Facebook Page was formed to share Small Christian Communities (SCCs) information, events, materials, news, videos and photos for each of the six continents. It serves as a forum for an exchange of SCCs ideas and to promote dialog on SCC topics. The page has sections for “Like,” “Comment” and “Share.” It is classified as a society and culture website. We welcome any and all feedback, contributions, SCCs materials, etc.

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