

TRUE FRIENDSHIP

FRIENDS THAT BUILD YOU UP IN CHRIST

Written by Rev. Joseph R. Sund (2021)

2020-2021 Retreat

This retreat is provided free of charge. You are free to modify, adapt or change it as you like. I'd ask in return that you pray for the students at St. Mary's High School in O'Neill NE where this retreat took place and that if you make changes that are fruitful and meaningful that you share it with others.

Retreat Goal and Theme: Created in the image and likeness of God we were created as relational people. This retreat will focus on healthy friendship and relationships. On being a gift to someone as opposed to being used.

Guiding Scripture Verses: Sirach 6:5-16, John 15:15

Schedule

8:45am – Retreat Arrival and Start

9:00am - Settle down – Ice Break...

9:20am – Conference 1

9:35am - Small Group 1

10:00am – Journal Time 1 (NO SNACKS)

10:20am - Mass

11:15am - Conference 2

11:40am – Small Group 2

12:00pm – Lunch

12:40pm - Conference 3

1:10pm – Small Group 3

1:45pm - Journal Time 2

2:15pm-2:50pm. Adoration & Confession

3:00pm Clean Up and Depart

Session 1: Qualities of a Friend

(A special thanks to Nicole Flores and Paula Bastian of Omaha for their help on this section)

Begin with clip from Sandlot of “Small’s First Catch”

- Benny moves past the other boys outward appearance of the awkward and wimpy “Smalls”. He teaches him how to play baseball and how to be a part of the crew.
<https://youtu.be/zqcdIOQdqc>
- Leader of this talk will share a personal story about a good friendship. This is someone who builds you up, calls you to grow personally and in your relationship with God.

Teaching

- 1) Made in the image and likeness of God. God is a communion of 3 persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We were not made to be alone but were made for relationship.
- 2) “No one can believe alone and by himself, just as no one can live alone and by himself. We receive the faith from the Church and live it out in fellowship with other believers.” (You Cat 24)
- 3) What does it mean to be a friend? Friendship is actually a form of love. In Greek there are multiple words for love. The most basic love is filial love. Think of the city of Philadelphia. (City of brotherly love, comes from this word). Most of the people in our lives are a what CS Lewis terms as “storge” love or empathy and familiarity. (Good example of this might be people you have been around every day for the past 10+ years but aren’t considered best friends.)
- 4) Types of Friends (using the term loosely here)

Sirach 6:5-16 ⁵ If you are polite and courteous, you will enjoy the friendship of many people. ⁶ Exchange greetings with many but take advice from only one person out of a thousand. ⁷ When you make friends, don’t be too quick to trust them; make sure that they have proved themselves. ⁸ Some people will be your friends only when it is convenient for them, but they won’t stand by you in trouble. ⁹ Others will fall out with you over some argument, and then embarrass you by letting everyone know about it. ¹⁰⁻¹¹ Others will sit at your table as long as things are going well; they will stick to you like your shadow and give orders to your servants, but they will not stand by you in trouble. ¹² If your situation takes a turn for the worse, they will turn against you, and you won’t be able to find them anywhere.

¹³ Stay away from your enemies and be on guard against your friends. ¹⁴ A loyal friend is like a safe shelter; find one, and you have found a treasure. ¹⁵ Nothing else is as valuable; there is no way of putting a price on it. ¹⁶ A loyal friend is like a medicine that keeps you in good health. Only those who fear the Lord can find such a friend. ¹⁷ A person who fears the Lord can make real friendships, because he will treat his friends as he does himself. ¹⁸

- Leader is free to add any reflections on this scripture verse.

Small Group Questions – First Conference

- 1) The two biggest challenges of true friendship are competition and comparison. Is this something you have experienced?
- 2) Do you think there is pressure to be “perfect”? What contributes to this?
- 3) Is bullying a problem in your group of friends in school?
- 4) Discuss good qualities of a friend. Take a piece of paper and right down the different qualities that the students come up with.
 - a. Now that we have established qualities of friendship, what are actions or attitudes that can break a friendship down or prevent a friendship from forming?

Session 2 – True Friendships -- Availability and Vulnerability

Thanks to Ms. Bridget Schneider of St. Mary's O'Neill for the small group questions and the ideas around this talk.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mn_iHMu_xjQ Fr Mike Video

Sharing

- 1) The teaching element of this talk is taken care of by Fr. Mike's video.
- 2) The presenter of this talk can share of personal experience regarding relationships. Times that they have allowed their own beliefs and boundaries to be compromised to maintain a friendship. (Of course this is done at an appropriate level of sharing for the high school level.)
- 3) Share an experience of being able allowing someone inside the fishbowl in a positive way. This would be someone who wants you to grow in holiness and friendship.
- 4) Focus especially on this element of a good friend who knows you, who you can share anything without fear and the benefits of this when it is built in Christ.

Small Group Questions – Second Conference

- 1) **Fr. Mike talked about the importance of time. Do you make enough time for your friends?**
 - a. **Your family?**
 - b. **Yourself?**
- 2) **Are you transparent? Or are you vulnerable?**
 - a. **Which is easier for you? Or are either of them easy?**
 - b. **Do you let people inside the fishbowl, or do you just let people see?**
- 3) **Have you been desperate enough to compromise your values to be friends with someone? What is the difference between friends and acquaintances?**
 - a. **What drove you to that?**
 - b. **How was that relationship?**
- 4) **Do you have someone who knows you? Why do you think many people do not have close friends in their lives?**
 - a. **What makes that relationship different from pal ships/buddyhood?**

(characteristics of that friendship compared to others)

Session 3 –Examples of Friendships

For this session I reached out to several alumni of our high school. I had three videos on all recorded. This was during COVID-19 and video was the easier way to do this. If you have access to people who can give in person witness, this may give a stronger impact. On the video aspect of this presentation, twenty-five minutes should be the maximum length of all videos together.

The presenters were given the topic of: “Friends that build you up in Christ.” They recorded a video about 5 minutes in length talking about their experience of strong friendships and how these friendships challenged them to become better Christians.

Small Group Questions -- *(These were based off talks that were given, I provide these questions as a good ground work, but it would be appropriate to develop these questions based around the talks that are given)*

- 1) (Speaker 1) talked about friendships of utility. Do you think these friendships exist in your circles? Is this a positive thing, negative, neutral? Discuss.
- 2) (Speaker 2) spoke about friends that build us up in virtue. Do your friends challenge each other to grow? What ways can we challenge each other to grow in virtue?
- 3) Did you relate with any examples given of virtuous friendships? Which one stuck out to you the most?
- 4) Sometimes, relationships can be toxic and tear us down more than build us up. Why do you think we hold on to these friendships when we know they hurt us? Should they be cut off completely Or can they still exist with ground rules?
- 5) Do you have friends that lead you closer to Jesus? What are some ways you can be deliberate about this?
- 6) What are some key take-aways we can have from today’s retreat.

The resources on the next page are for the times of prayer and reflection given between talks. After the first and third talks we had sessions that are labeled “Journal Time” in the schedule. The students were allowed to be on their own for silent reflection during this time.

The first Journal time is specifically based around scripture that refers to friendship. You might have other scripture verses you would like to add.

The second journal time is meant to be a period of examination of friendships in their own lives, changes they need to make. We did not force this; allow this to be something that the Holy Spirit brings about.

The sheets ARE NOT collected. They are the personal reflections of the students.

Personal Reflection - Journal Time

(After Session 1)

After David had finished talking with Saul, he met Jonathan, the king's son. There was an immediate bond between them, for Jonathan loved David. From that day on Saul kept David with him and wouldn't let him return home. And Jonathan made a solemn pact with David, because he loved him as he loved himself. (1 Samuel 18:1-3, NLT)

Do I have friends that I love them as myself? Say a prayer for this person now. Give God thanks for this friendship. If not, don't stress, say a prayer and ask the Lord to place this person in your life.

The heartfelt counsel of a friend is as sweet as perfume and incense. (Proverbs 27:9, NLT)

Is there someone in my life I can seek for counsel (or help) Is there someone who regularly asks me for counsel and help? Reflect on how God has fragrancd your life with this person's presence.

As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend. (Proverbs 27:17, NLT)

Virtuous friends are called to challenge each other. How am I doing in this regard? Am I challenged or am I happy with staying where I am?

There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. (John 15:13-15, NLT)

Jesus laid his life down for us. Do I consider Jesus a friend? My best friend? If the answer is no, don't stress -- take a moment and ask Christ for that friendship.

A righteous person is cautious in friendship, But the way of the wicked leads them astray. (Proverbs 12:26)

Are there friendships that lead me astray and hurt my life? Ask the Lord for his help in these friendships and the strength to choose good.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

Reflect on the qualities of love above. Where have you seen these in yourself, in friends, in family, in God?

