

CONFIRMATION RETREAT GUIDE

WHERE TO START

Choose a facility

One of the first steps you need to take is that of choosing a facility that best suits your group and the kind of retreat you have in mind. Keep in mind that camping facilities often require a deposit and your booking to be a year in advance, so plan ahead. If you are partial to a specific camp, ask to be placed on their waiting list in case room becomes available. If you have a small group, there is more lodging flexibility. Consider another church, a family cabin or even a university dorm.

Publicity

As soon as you know the dates and times of the retreat there are several publicity steps you can take. First, be sure that the dates are on the church calendar, publish a “save the date” in the church newsletter, bulletin, e-mail blasts and website. Once the event is closer (around 3 months in advance) send another round of emails and re-publish in all the necessary places. If you wait until the event is less than 3 months away, you will find that most families will already have activities on their calendar.

Cost

When calculating the cost of the retreat, consider the following:

- lodging and meals
- any meals en route
- vehicle rentals and gas
- program expenses

Then, find out if you need to include the adult volunteer’s lodging and meals in the cost per person or if your church will absorb the costs. Also consider whether or not your church’s liability policy covers insurance; your church’s budget may provide some funds for the overall retreat or at least provide scholarship money for students who need it. Think ahead and make arrangements so that money never becomes a deterrent for student participation.

Registration Forms

You always need a parental permission form when you take students offsite. On this form you may ask for: emergency contacts, daily medication, dietary needs, physician information and when necessary a copy of insurance. When you send the student’s guardians this paperwork, also send a form for them to keep that includes the retreat’s time and dates, location and cost. Send these forms via e-mail, post on the website, have copies at the church office and/or mail them to each student that has registered about 1 month before the retreat.

Transportation

If your church does not have a transportation policy in place, meet with the necessary people and committees in order to have one in place before the retreat. Once you have a policy, enforce it. Expect your adult leaders to follow the speed limit, and advise them to pull over and refuse to keep driving if seat belts are not fastened or if unruly behavior is distracting them from driving. Most auto-rental insurance policies require drivers to be at least 23 years of age, as do most car-rental companies (know the age in your state).

Assign the students to vehicles. Doing so ahead of time allows for a mix-up of your group that will help create community and encourage them to make new friends. Ahead of time, create a folder for your drivers that has a folder with a list of their students, along with a copy of their parent permission forms. Each vehicle should have a first aid kit, garbage bag(s), wet wipes, a list of emergency contact numbers, a list of cell phone numbers of each adult on the trip and a contact person who is not on the trip to call if an emergency happens en route and another vehicle cannot be reached.

Insurance

Verify that the church's insurance policy will cover the retreat. If the policy does not, work out a plan, even if it's just for the retreat weekend.

Van and Rooming Plans

In order to build community in your group, establish van and room groups prior to the trip. Do not reveal the assignments until departure, and refuse to change them. Make a game out of the "Room Reveals" and this way it will feel like something exciting. Remind your students the importance of the opportunity to get to know their van and roommates better. Encourage them to listen, talk to and learn more about the people in their room. Make room assignments, and post them outside of each room in case you need to locate an individual in the middle of the night.

Group Norms and Expectations

Create a behavior covenant for the students to sign before they leave the church. It will help you clarify your expectations and establish consequences for infringement of these guidelines. Have both the parents and the students sign the covenant stating that they fully understand the expectations and the consequences if the covenant is broken.

Small Groups

To encourage community building, designate small groups in advance. Take into consideration personality types, friendships among students and the way in which they get along. Be aware of the gifts of your leaders and needs of each group and try to match them as best as possible.

Schedule

Have a schedule, but be flexible. Provide copies of the schedule, and post them around camp (In the bathrooms, rooms, hallways, cafeteria, on the back of nametags, etc). Enforce lights out and allow at least 8 hours of rest. Have adult leaders do a mental head count to make sure that each student is where they are supposed to be at each step on the schedule.

Safe Sanctuaries

Consult your church's Safe Sanctuaries policy and use it to train your retreat volunteers. Communicate all expectations clearly.

SAMPLE *CONFIRM* RETREAT SCHEDULE

Friday

7:00 pm	Arrive and Unpack
7:30 pm	Games/Activity
8:30 pm	Session 1 (Worship, Lesson 3 – Loving Together)
9:30 pm	Snacks
10:00 pm	Ready for Bed
11:00 pm	Lights Out

Saturday

7:30 am	Wake Up
8:00 am	Breakfast
9:00 am	Devotional time and worship
9:45 am	Session 2 (Worship, Lesson 8 – Wesley and the Methodists)
10:45 am	Break
11:00 am	Session 3 (Lesson 16 – A Loving Church)
12:00 pm	Lunch
1:00 pm	Session 4 (Lesson 19 – Experiencing God)
2:00 pm	Afternoon Activities & Free Time
5:00 pm	Dinner
6:00 pm	Worship

7:00 pm Session 5 (Lesson 27 – Hitting the Mark: Sin and Grace)
8:00 pm Game or Activity
10:00 pm Ready for bed
11:00 pm Lights Out

Sunday

7:00 am Wake up & Clean up
8:00 am Breakfast
9:00 am Worship and devotional time
10:00 am Session 6 (Lesson 37: A Spirit to Find)
11:00 am Lunch
12:00 pm Pack up and Leave

Tips and Tricks

Know your group. The Saturday night Large group activity could be a prayer walk, extended worship, games, campfire, Taize or whatever your group needs. Make it a time of personal worship, or if your group would benefit from relationship building in fellowship, do that.

Activities. Have activities that allow for a burn of energy, but that aren't humiliating or can cause harm. If you have an introverted group, have lower energy games but that will give them enough of a break that they will be engaging during their small group times. Have more activities ready to go than you have time for.

Be Flexible. Feel free to change and alter the schedule to what best fits your group. Your students should walk away from the retreat having learned the Confrim curriculum, have a stronger understanding of their faith and also with a stronger sense of community amongst your group.

Pictures. Parents love seeing their kids having fun. Assign a student leader or adult(s) to be in charge of taking photos and posting them to a closed Facebook group for parents with students on the trip and/or Instagram. Have this person make sure they have at least 2 photos of each student on the trip. Take photos of them engaging in small groups, worship and having fun. Be sure it's a well-rounded representation of the retreat. If you post photos online, be sure every parent has signed a release form allowing for the publication of the photos.