

# A FIELD HOSPITAL: Pope Francis' image of the Church

## Advent Retreat

“I see the church as a field hospital after battle. The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and warm the hearts of the faithful....  
.....It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if they have high cholesterol or about the level of his/her blood sugars! You have to heal their wounds. Then we can talk about everything else ... Ministers of the Gospel need to be people who walk through the dark night with their people, who know how to dialogue and to descend themselves into their people's night, into the darkness, but without getting lost” (Pope Francis)

The spiritual exercises in this particular retreat are a response to the image which Pope Francis describes above - a Field Hospital. A spiritual exercise is a simple, structured, refreshing way to pray. It was developed by St Ignatius Loyola nearly 500 years ago and has helped many people during times of feast and famine, enrichment and plague, inside and outside churches.

Each spiritual exercise is a stand-alone prayer which is designed to be done AT HOME. Each will draw on your lived experience, your present feelings and desire. **While great for personal prayer, each exercise may be fruitfully prayed, and subsequently reflected upon in a group OR if you choose to be one-on-one with a spiritual companion.** The invitation to share your stories and graces assumes safe sharing.

The exercises have three uses: to meet your immediate need, to give you a spiritual resource, and to share with others.

The principal name for God in the exercises is ‘Spirit’. However you may use your preferred name.

Adapting and personalising, making each exercise your own, helping others with them, is true to the recent thoughts of **Pope Francis** on life during the COVID-19 pandemic:

“I’m living this at a time of great uncertainty. It’s a time for inventing, for creativity. ....Take care of the now, for the sake of tomorrow. Always creatively, with a simple creativity, capable of inventing something new each day”.

## LISTENING BOOK

### What is a Listening Book?

A Listening Book is a special journal book that I listen to after giving it my reflections. It's a bit like a good friend. So, after a spiritual exercise, I write down in it the more important things I experienced. These I record in the Listening Book. Then I close it.

After some time - some hours, a day or so later - I open it and read what I have written. I 'listen' to my Listening Book as it reveals new meanings and evokes fresh feelings. The Listening Book gives me both time to absorb my prayer experience and a way to tell me what they know. **I may also be certain that the Spirit will speak to me.**

My Listening Book is like a compass or map of my desires and the Spirit's directions as I move through an unknown territory. It charts my journey over time. I learn so much, and discover where there is life.

### How do I use a Listening Book?

- 1. Identify the most notable experiences without any censoring**
- 2. What relationships seemed to emerge?**
- 3. In what way have you been moved?**

Some retreatants will opt for a spiritual companion. Bring along your Listening Book to that encounter to more easily share your Sacred Story.

## The Art of Sharing Sacred Stories (in a group)

*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. (Gal 5:22-25)*

### **1. Listen with an affectionate presence.**

Be a listening presence to one another.

### **2. Listen with respectful reverence.**

Hold the story teller with reverence and compassion.

### **3. Listen with a just openness.**

Listen to each story with curiosity – even the curiosity of a child.

### **4. Listen with a faithful understanding.**

Understanding does not require our agreement or belief.

### **5. Listen with a delightful empathy.**

In empathy, I forget myself and just accept and hold the other person's feelings.

### **6. Listen by your body-language.**

Offer a natural nod or smile. Never close your eyes. Do not interrupt.

### **7. Listen with grateful spaciousness.**

Pause before speaking your own words to appreciate the words you just heard.