

## Give yourself a Mini-Retreat!

Are you at a stage in your life when you are starting down a new path? Okay, so you missed the Transitions Retreat, you can still take the time out of your life to go to a quiet spot at home, or at your cottage, or at another spot you love, to reflect on where you've just been and where you are going.

This retreat is geared towards those who are going to college or university. **If you do this retreat all at once, the whole retreat will take you 55 minutes to complete.** Otherwise, take breaks and even do this retreat over a few days.

Feel free to write down some questions or things you are nervous about while you are on the retreat. At the end of your retreat consider coming to visit with me, or email me, to chat about your thoughts. I would love to hear from you or talk with you in person.

|        | <b>Part One: Looking at Your Academic Life and Your Social Life</b>  |
|--------|--|
| 2 min  | <p><u>Opening Prayer</u></p> <p>Gracious God, walk with me today and in the future<br/>           And grant that I may hear your footsteps<br/>           And gladly follow where you lead.<br/>           Talk with me today and grant<br/>           That I may hear your voice<br/>           And quicken to its counsel<br/>           Stay with me today and in the future<br/>           And grant that I may feel your presence in<br/>           All that I do, say, and think<br/>           Be my strength when I weaken,<br/>           My courage when I fear.<br/>           Help me know that you are with me<br/>           Through all the hours of this day<br/>           And when night falls,<br/>           Grant that I may know I rest in you.</p> <p>Amen.</p> <p>I want you to understand that you are in a safe space today. You will be thinking about some serious issues and some exciting things. <b>I need you to try to be as honest with yourself as you can today.</b></p> |
| 11 min | <p>While you are now reflecting on where you are going, transitions also are a time when <b>we can reflect on what we just finished.</b></p> <p>4 years of high school is a long time. Maybe you've been with the same friends for 4 years and things are about to change. Perhaps you are going away to university or to college. Maybe you are leaving behind a girlfriend or a boyfriend. Maybe you're excited to meet a new girlfriend or boyfriend! It's important to reflect on what we've just finished. The good times that we had, the big accomplishments, even the mistakes we've made in high school. The past 4 years of high school have all contributed to who</p>  |

|        |  |
|--------|--|
|        | <p>we are right now.</p> <p>There is a scripture passage that made me think of this time in your life;</p> <p><b>1 Corinthians 13: 11</b><br/> <i>When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.</i></p> <p>You are now entering a stage in your life when you are going to be viewed as an adult. You are leaving behind your ‘childish ways’ of high school. With this in mind stop and reflect on what you’ve just finished, <b>if you want, please take a piece of paper and write down what you want to remember about high school.</b> The good memories, the mistakes you learned from. Reflect on where you are at this time in your life, perhaps you are still trying to make decisions about where you want to go in life. It is a scary time to be making decisions about your future, but sitting in silence for a few minutes allows you to put things into God’s hands.</p> <p><b>Take 10 minutes to reflect on all this and write down some of your thoughts.</b></p>   |
| 15 min | <p><b>Main Reflection (If you don’t want to read this all at once feel free to read this slowly, maybe even over a few days)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The time after high school can be an extremely exciting and scary time all rolled into one!</li> <li>• Whether you live at home or you go away to school, you have more freedom than you did in high school and it is important to start thinking about what you want to do with that freedom.</li> <li>• Many of your parents will tell you to study hard, ALL THE TIME, but it is not always realistic in a post-secondary setting, you are going to have a really full social life in the next few years! The reality is that you will have to control both your academics and your social life all while deciding; what kind of adult do I want to become?</li> </ul> <p>Now it is time to reflect on a few important things to consider before you head off to your college or university;</p> <p>I am going to make a few statements, and I will express the different ideas that came up at the Transitions retreat. At our Transitions Retreat alongside high school graduates we also had mentors who were in their second or third year of university and some had already graduated. These students gave us their input on these statements.</p> <p>Some say;</p> <p><b>University/College is just like high school only bigger.</b><br/> There was real division in people’s thoughts here.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some people said that university is completely different, you are exposed to so many different people with so many different opinions and from so many different backgrounds, it’s nothing like high school, you have more freedom.</li> <li>• Another person raised the point that <i>in high school teachers care</i> about how well</li> </ul> |

you are doing in class. They ask you for assignments and remind you about tests or homework that needs to be turned in. *Not in university or college*; there it is YOUR responsibility to know when assignments are due and to get them done. No one is going to help you pass in university or college.

- Others said that it depends on which college or university you go to. Sometimes your entire high school might be going to Ryerson or York and then university can become just like high school with everyone hanging out in the same groups and gossiping just like in high school. In reality, it is nice to keep old friends, but make some new friends too, no matter where you go. New friends can help you keep growing.

### **Drinking and drugs are a huge part of the university experience.**

This was a big area of discussion.

- Colleges and universities are filled with media messages that are encouraging people to drink. While some people at the retreat said that many people have already been exposed to drinking and drugs in high school, the reality stands that now you have more freedom, and mom and dad won't be checking your breath when you return home. It is important for your own safety to be responsible about how much you drink.
- Other students said that if you don't want to drink you won't be pressured to like in high school, now it is your own choice.
- We also spoke about how in residence some people end up drinking a lot because your surroundings include many students who are having parties and drinking as well. While drinking and drugs can be part of the college/university experience, it is up to you to make decisions that are smart and safe.
- Also, if you are drinking, always make sure you have friends that will not leave the party without you, sexual assault is not imaginary. It does happen and can happen even with those you trust. Drinking affects everyone's ability to make decisions and serious mistakes are made when drinking is involved.

### **Exploring your own sexual identity has to happen through having sex at University.**

Opinions varied again.

- This statement was much like the alcohol and drugs statement. Some people said that you will not be pressured into having sex and that it is your own decision.
- Again, like alcohol, colleges/universities have media all around campus encouraging people to explore their sexuality through sex. It will be up to you to make this important decision. Please remember that this is your body, and it is up to you to keep yourself safe emotionally and physically.
- Our mentors at the retreat talked about how some people act really promiscuous at university and college and it is not a good idea. While sex involves pleasure, the reality is that it has to involve real love before you engage in it, and even our students spoke about how they are too young to really know what real love is right now. Dating is important at university, but you don't have to have sex to enjoy your new boyfriend or girlfriend's company.

### **To hang on to your Christian identity, you must only hang around Christians**

We had a great discussion around this topic.

- We discussed how at university and college you will not be in a religious environment anymore. Being in a secular school means you will be around

students of every faith and around students of no faith.

- We talked about how it is good to have friends from different religions and how you can learn a lot from them. Diversity is good for you. While sometimes it feels comfortable to be around people of your own religion, to be comfortable around **all people** is important, after all, the world is not only made up of Christians. It is a good idea to make friends of other faiths now.
- We also spoke about how it is nice, however, to make some Christian friends so that you do have someone to talk to about your faith or to attend mass with. It is always more comfortable to worship with friends, and Christ wanted us to worship in community!

#### **To achieve academic excellence at University, you must always be studying.**

- Here we spoke about how our parents want us to “Keep our eyes in our books at all times.” While this is a good idea, your social life in your first year, of college or university, is packed. It is going to be up to you to balance your social life and your academic life.
- While you are there to earn a degree or diploma, developing a social life is important, friends and new experiences will also teach you about life. However, learning how to balance your social life and your academic life is a HUGE lesson to learn! You will have to continue to do this as you get older, balancing work and play is an important part of adulthood (For example learning how to deal with responsibility without getting too stressed out).

#### **Anyone can do well at college/university, they just need to study hard**

- Sometimes you might get into a class where you can't understand the material!! You study and study but you just don't get it. The professor is too busy to help you and your TA takes care of hundreds of students, don't know what to do? **Find a tutor or a friend to help you out.** Don't be scared of saying that you can't understand the material.
- The students at the retreat brought this up; in high school you are spoon fed information by your teachers....this will be the first time you have to practice **independent learning**. This means you have to read and learn the material on your own, you probably will have to ask for help, don't worry about it. Everyone is learning how to do this too, the important thing to note is you can't ignore the problem, **you do have to make the decision to keep up your grades.**

#### **Making friends at college/university is really hard**

We had different opinions here.

- Some said that making friends at college/university is easy; you just have to be yourself. But, if you don't like that you are a shy person right now, you have the chance to change that. In this new place no one knows you! You can become an outgoing person if you want to.
- Some also said it is easy to make friends because everyone is in the same boat, everyone is together entering a new university or college, many of our mentors reminded people...**go to your orientation week!** Orientation week is where you can make lots of new friends with students who are all in first year.
- Also, be patient with yourself. Sometimes it is hard to make new friends. Classes can be very large and you may not have a roommate because you are commuting from home to college or university, the important thing is to stay

|        |   |
|--------|---|
|        | <p>open to new friendships.</p> <p>→ Also, join clubs!!! <b>There are a million and one social clubs on college and university campuses.</b> Chances are you have one hobby that you can explore with a club. Here you will meet people who may be quite similar to you! There are also <b>club days</b> at your college and university, find out when they are by searching your university or college website online.</p>   |
| 10 min | <b>Take a break!! Your mini retreat can continue later, take a walk and relax!</b>  |
|        | <b>Part Two: Looking at your Inner/Faith Life</b>   |
| 2 min  | <p>Okay, so earlier we talked about parts of our academic life and our social life that are going to be changing, <b>now we are going to be looking at parts of our faith life, our inner life that will also be changing within us as we move to new surroundings</b></p> <p>→ We have to be realistic. <b>You are now going to be moving from a small faith based community, your high school and St. Bonaventure Parish, into a large multi-faith and ‘no faith’ university or college setting.</b></p> <p><b>So as we approach this theme this afternoon, let us start with a prayer</b></p> <p>Spirit of the living God<br/> move us to know you better<br/> when we tend to stay put in apathy.<br/> Warm us up when we are spiritually cold.<br/> When our faith gets boring,<br/> Put some excitement into our life.<br/> Make us enthusiastic for good things,<br/> Make us high for love of you<br/> And love of your people.</p> <p>Amen</p> |
| 10 min | <p>My first question for you all this afternoon is;</p> <p><b>Will you take your faith with you on this next part of your journey?</b><br/> (You can write your response below)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Of course as we grow from children, to teenagers, to young adults the way we develop and express our faith changes.</li> <li>• You are no longer going to have mom and dad waking you up and taking you to church.</li> <li>• The important thing is to find a safe space where you can pray and/or express your faith through song, going to mass, or discussing your questions about faith in a relaxed non-judgmental group setting.</li> </ul>   |

|       |   |
|-------|---|
|       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At this point in your journey you may have to look for a new spiritual home. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This may mean finding a new parish on campus</li> <li>○ Finding a small faith sharing group<br/>(It doesn't have to be Roman Catholic, other Christian communities have much to share when it comes to learning about scripture, plus you may teach them something about what a Roman Catholic person looks like and thinks like!)</li> <li>○ Or simply finding a chaplain or a counselor whom you can talk to in times of personal and spiritual crisis.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>We also have to be realistic; you might be studying alongside individuals who are not respectful of your faith.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many young adults today think that religion is a joke and means that you are not intelligent enough to handle your own problems, you need an imaginary God to take care of you. You will have to find your own understanding of your faith and you may have to be prepared to defend your position on religion.</li> <li>• If you have a relationship with God or have a desire to develop one, stay strong.</li> </ul> <p>To deal with people who attack your faith, it is important to have a strong inner life. We do this by having a strong prayer life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To have a strong prayer life, you can create your own prayer space at home</li> <li>• You can use a prayer book, read a small section of the bible, or you can simply sit in silence and listen for God's direction.</li> </ul> |
| 3 min | <p>To conclude your retreat, play your favourite song to relax, <b>it doesn't have to be Church music.</b> Any type of music is good to listen to right now if it helps you to chill and really be more centered and closer to God.</p> <p>When you are ready please say this final prayer.</p> <p><b><u>Closing Prayer</u></b></p> <p>God of wisdom and truth<br/> You enlighten our lives with your presence.<br/> May this light shape our dreams,<br/> Raise our hopes and empower our aspirations.</p> <p>Before the darkness of prejudice,<br/> Ignorance, greed and selfishness-<br/> Help us to bring alive the power of truth,<br/> of tolerance, of generosity, of compassion.</p> <p>May our lives always reflect<br/> The highest ideals that you modeled for us,<br/> As well as the love of parents and family.</p>   |

|       |  |
|-------|--|
|       | <p>May we carry forth the example of our teachers,<br/>Coaches and mentors,<br/>Those who have challenged<br/>Our intellect and spirit,<br/>While nourishing our many gifts.</p> <p>As we move forward on our journey<br/>please hold us closer to you.<br/>We ask this blessing in your holy name.</p> <p>Amen</p> <p>(By Rev. Angus MacDougall)</p>  |
| 2 min | <p><b>I am so happy that you took part in this mini-retreat.</b></p> <p>If you have any comments or want to talk further about the topics covered in this document, <b>come visit me at The Franciscan Church of St. Bonaventure!</b> (<a href="http://www.st-bonaventure.ca">www.st-bonaventure.ca</a>) I am in the office almost every day, drop by or call me; 416-447-5571 ext. 257. Or you can email me with your thoughts or to make an appointment to visit me; <a href="mailto:rachel@st-bonaventure.ca">rachel@st-bonaventure.ca</a></p> <p>I hope that you benefit from this document and please know that I am praying for you. You are taking a big step into adulthood as you go to college or university, good luck and may God be with you wherever your spirit may take you.</p> <p><b>God bless you!!</b></p> |