

An Opening Welcome (Know Yourself) Outline for First Meditation

General Comments: This is the first talk which is given as the Pilgrims gather on the opening evening. The talk is normally given in the Rollo (Conference) Room before the first visit to the chapel. The purpose of the talk is to offer a warm, gracious greeting, to address the normal anxiety that is experienced by guests on this manner of weekend, and finally to invite the guests into a time of retreat. It is important to echo throughout the talk that all of us-team and guests-are together on this retreat, hence we invite the guests to join us in this brief time of retreat. This talk will introduce the guests into the unique nature of the Pilgrimage weekend, and urge a spirit of openness.

Outline:

1. Offer an introduction of yourself sharing with the guests some of your own anxiety as you prepared for this weekend as well as some of your “busyness” on this day coming to the camp. Like it or not-anxiety is a part of who we are. Most of us rather imagine we know who we are in life. Still, the presence of tension shows that not one of us lives in any pure sense of security. So, tonight we begin with the question: “Who Am I?”
2. Scripture: Luke 10:38-42 Here is a devoted disciple who wants to serve, and yet her own anxiety, her inability to sit still, her concern to accomplish familiar tasks gets in the way of receiving what she deeply needs to receive. Over against the anxious busyness of Martha is her sister Mary who is able to retreat from all that is familiar and routine.
3. Offer words which might welcome the guest wherever they are at this moment. Surely some of you might be very excited to be here. You just wanted to get away from home. You enjoy church retreats, etc. Yet just as surely some of you have come carrying with you a real measure of tension. Perhaps emotionally it was hard to leave work...family...unfinished tasks at home.
4. Offer some of the questions which guests bring on this weekend. Such as: Am I going to be comfortable with all these strangers? Will I get any decent sleep at a camp like this? Am I going to fit in? Will I be put on the spot? What do they expect from me? Do I really want to be here? What if something goes wrong back at home. Back at work?
5. Offer words of comfort letting guests know that we will do all we can to be sensitive to their concerns throughout the weekend. We can not push a button to end all anxiety, but we can take one step closer to Christ, like Mary, and see the value of retreat.
6. Define retreat as letting go of the familiar and the routines of life, and searching to sit at the feet of Christ. Share the importance of giving ourselves the opportunity of retreat in the life of the Christian.

7. Offer the general picture that this retreat will be like other retreats in certain respects (i.e. talks, music, worship, table fellowship, times of humor, etc.) Offer the picture that, in some ways, a Pilgrimage weekend is different, such as

- a. This is North Carolina Presbyterian Pilgrimage #____. Yet from the very beginning, this has been an ecumenical movement. There is leadership this weekend, and every weekend, from Christians from different denominations. We gather as brothers and sisters in Christ to explore the most basic ideas of the Christian faith. We hope you will join us in welcoming all guests on this weekend.
- b. This is a more structured weekend than many retreats. Compared to other church retreats, there is relatively little unstructured time. At times, you will like this. At times, you may feel frustrated. We want to feel freedom in Christ, but we have found great help in this structure. We urge you to give yourself, as much as you are able, to this structure.
- c. You will experience some different things on this weekend.
 - Some of you will learn a number of new songs. We hope you will enjoy them.
 - For two days, we will use a crucifix in our chapel, until we return on Sunday to our more traditional empty cross.
 - We will celebrate communion each day, which will be a new experience for many of you.
 - And tonight, we will honor a time of silence, which some of you will welcome; while, for others, it will seem a bit awkward. It is a time for you to begin to reflect, “Who am I?” and “Who is Christ to me?”

8. Review again the Scripture, offering a closing encouragement for guests to enter a time of retreat, and reminding them that during the night of silence, they may use these “prompts” to begin their self-reflection. Reflect on Mary as one who gave herself as a gift--Mary as one who recognized that she was “poor in spirit” and needed to let go of her pressing concerns and simply listen for words of grace and hope. Was this selfish? Yet it is this same Mary...later in life...who is remembered as the only disciple who ministers to Jesus just prior to the cross. Mary found nourishment for her life and is able to minister in a remarkable way.