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CHRIST THE KING RETREAT HOUSE MOLDS BETTER PARISHIONERS

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The dictum “a good retreatant is a better parishioner” has been given credence time after time thanks to the work of the Passionist Fathers who conduct Christ the King Retreat House—primarily for men—in Citrus Heights. The modern day disciples of St Paul of the Cross are experts in this apostolate with more than a century of work in the United States alone in fostering the retreat movement.



Photo by John E Boll 2008

Christ the King Retreat Center, Citrus Heights Today

As long ago as 1945, the late Bishop Robert J Armstrong extended an invitation to the Passionists to come to Sacramento to open a retreat house to serve both clergy and laymen. Five years later, on May 7, 1950, the bishop dedicated Christ the King facility in Citrus Heights and the first laymen’s retreat was conducted on May 19, 1950, by Father Angelo Hamilton, CP.

The policy set by Father Angelo of organizing groups according to parishes, assigning each parish an annual date and definite number of reservations, of selecting one or two men in each parish to work as coordinator and retreat captain, is still being followed.

Recommendations contained in the decrees of Vatican Council II are now being incorporated into Christ the King's retreat program. In addition to retreats and days of recollection for the clergy and weekend retreats for laymen, there now are retreats for married couples, collegians, and high school students.

This coming June, the weekend of the 13-15, something still newer is being tried in the field of parish retreats. Father Virgil Gabrielli, pastor of St Lawrence Church in North Highlands, will make the retreat with a mixed group of men, women and young people from his parish.

During the month of August, two 19-day religious institutes for Sisters will be conducted by a team of eight Passionists, each a specialist in his own field.

For the past two years, there has been some experimentation with the daily schedule of exercises. It has been found that most men prefer a schedule of five 30 minute talks in chapel daily with time for reading, reflection, private interviews with the retreat master, some public acts of worship, including visits to the Blessed Sacrament, recitation of the rosary and outdoor Stations of the Cross. The celebrated Mass has become the high point of the day for many on retreat.

Father Isidore, CP, current director of retreats, calls attention to a marked increase, 20 per cent, in recent months for attendance on the laymen's retreats. These open each Friday evening with dinner at 7 o'clock and close with a Concelebrated Mass at 2:30 on Sunday afternoon, early enough to allow distant travelers ample opportunity to return home.

Father Isidore explains that the earliest recorded retreat for laymen in the United States was conducted by the Jesuit Fathers in what is now the state of Maryland in 1638.

The next reference to a layman's retreat is found in the Metropolitan Catholic Almanac, published in Baltimore in 1852, in which the Redemptorist Fathers are listed as "admitting gentlemen of the laity into their convent for performing the exercises of a spiritual retreat."

The Passionist Fathers came to the United States that same year and began their retreat work in 1860 by receiving classes of boys into their monastery "in preparation for their first Holy Communion." At that time in history it was customary for boys and girls to make their First Communion during their last year in grade school or first year in high school. "So," states Father Isidore, "we have here the beginning of closed retreats for high school students."

The Jesuit Fathers are responsible for promoting the retreat movement in California. At Santa Clara in 1903, Father Richard Gleeson, SJ, assembled a group of men from San Francisco at a farm house to "experience the spiritual exercises." In 1904, a permanent organization was set

up in which the men pledged themselves to make an annual retreat and encourage others to do likewise. This is the first instance of a laymen's retreat league in the United States.

The Passionist Fathers' first retreat house for laymen was in Boston, in answer to a request from William Cardinal O'Connell in 1908. St Gabriel's Monastery and Retreat House opened on December 8, 1911 and became the second permanent all year retreat house for laymen in the country.

The first was Mount Manresa, or Staten Island, New York, built and conducted by the Jesuits, with its first retreat held on September 8, 1911.



Photo from the Catholic Herald

Men's Retreat at Christ the King Retreat Center in the 1950s