

NEW RETREATS FOR MEN

There is a hunger for a new kind of retreat experience for men. It recognizes a need for commitments and changes from within a man, rather than more seminar or workshop learning. It is the difference between a lecture and a laboratory; a movie and a real-life adventure.

Insanity can be defined as "doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results." When UMMen offer the same retreat format year after year and only the speaker/lesson content changes, the event is usually attended by the same individuals.

The conventional retreat looks like this, with few variations:

- Friday PM: check in, meal, opening gathering including singing, and a speaker.
- Saturday: meals, several plenary gatherings, some workshop or optional periods, evening service or event.
- Sunday: early event, worship service, pack up & go.

At the conventional retreat, a man spends most of his time listening to and learning from others. The retreat quality is defined by the quality of the speaker and program.

In contrast, the new retreat shifts away from a speaker-centered program or learning theme. Instead, men learn and experience together in small teams, while they build trust and relationships. The speaker role shifts to guide, as he leads men in small teams to deal with issues together in discussions that are open and honest. Men are encouraged to "get real" with each other, and experience the blessing of male friendship as God intended it.

Even the term "retreat" becomes inappropriate to describe the new experience. It is more aptly called an expedition or journey. UMMen has adopted the term "expedition" to convey the sense of journey and adventure with the new retreat. Several versions of UMMen Expeditions are under development;

- Men's Expedition - geared toward personal transformation of men. Men are challenged and equipped to examine their values, actions and motives. Encouraged by others in small teams, men discover those things that **MUST** change before God's purpose can be fully realized in their lives. Time is divided in group gatherings [30%], team activities [50%], and solo time [20%].
- Connection Expedition - men are encouraged to build relationships within their family and other loved ones. Men can invite sons, daughters, dads, uncles, mentors, and other special persons to an expedition geared to building strong relationships with loved ones.

- Passage Expedition - a "Rite of Passage" for boys gives young men what they really need. God's blessing is passed to boys through men who love and guide them. Men who care enough to bless young men model authentic Christian manhood. Ideally, mature men organize a Passage Expedition for younger fathers with teenage sons. This vital ministry is performed as a service to families and youth. A female version of the passage expedition for daughters can be coordinated with the women of the church and mothers.
- Clergy Expedition - men and clergy unite in an experience that builds a partnership relationship. The expedition has two treks; one for clergy and one for laymen. The treks merge together as men become servant leaders for their pastors, working together as a team in ministry partnership.

These and other expeditions will be developed for the purpose of building men spiritually, and serving others as servant leaders.

Here are a few questions for those considering new retreats:

1. Have past retreats for men been "conventional" retreats?
2. Are men attending your retreats in growing numbers?
3. What is the average age of men who attend your retreats? What are the age-related trends?
4. What are men under 40 looking for in a retreat?
5. Are men in quite comfortable at retreats? If yes, is this good?
6. Do men need more "seminar learning," or do they need to start making some changes in their lives?
7. Do your men really know what is going on in each other's lives, and what to pray for?

UMMen Expeditions can reach men in new ways, but they are a departure from the past. Groups who decide to try them must believe that reaching new men, and transforming all men, is worth moving out of the comfort zone.

An outline of the Men's Expedition is provided to offer a taste of the new format. Expeditions are much more flexible than conventional retreats, and this description is only a rough sketch of what might develop.

FRIDAY EVENING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather as a group, for inspirational praise and worship • Expedition Briefing - Guide offers general description of the expedition route, hazards, provisions, and destination. • Team Formation - men are organized in small teams for the expedition. • Team Trek 1 - Guide gives teams their first checkpoint. Teams launch out independently.
SATURDAY AM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide Briefing - teams gather to review progress, and be given next checkpoint assignment. • Teams launch out on Trek 2 to next checkpoint. • This pattern of guide briefing and team treks is repeated throughout the expedition.
SATURDAY AFTERNOON	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least one trek will have a physical dimension, such as a hike. Teams will be expected to accommodate the physical condition of every team mate as part of their challenge. • At least one trek will be solo, where men spend time alone with God in meditation over a question posed by the guide, such as <i>"What is it that you could begin or stop that would radically improve God's ability to use you to His glory?"</i>
SATURDAY EVENING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evening meal is a celebration feast in which men are extensively involved in the preparation and serving of the meal. Food can be rather Spartan until this event. • The evening gathering is likely to include some or all of the following: bonfire, elder story telling, ballad / guitar type songs, relaxing, witness experiences, reflecting.
SUNDAY AM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sunrise trek, solo or in teams, where the purpose is to determine what must change in men's lives as a result of the expedition. • Commitment trek - where men in teams share their change commitments as openly as they are able. • Consecration trek - where elders bless men, and present the men's commitments to God. • Worship - a holy communion service in which men serve each in a worship celebration event.