

Blaze Retreat

In preparation for the session, ask participants to bring two things: a particular question for discernment and a photograph or other image of someone who has acted as a beacon or guide for them in their lives. Make sure people know that they will be decorating/crafting with these images, so they shouldn't bring their only copy!



Opening Prayer

Welcome and Introductions | 30 minutes

- Have participants introduce themselves and briefly tell the story of a time they were at a crossroads or fork in the path and were unsure of which way to go. How did they decide what to do? What sources of guidance did they turn to? What do they think about how that went?

Illuminating our Beacons | 60 minutes

- Have craft supplies ready: decorative papers, washi tape, scissors, glitter glue and glue sticks, stickers, printouts or stickers of fires/flames. Consider playing contemplative music in the background as the group works.
- Talk about the ancient practice of beautifying, or illuminating, texts
- Invite participants to decorate the pictures of their "beacons," reflecting as they do on why this person has been a guide to them. Consider placing a flame on the part of the person with most significance to you: their brain, their heart, their mouth, their hands, etc.
- Once everyone is done, go around the room and have each person tell about their beacon, how they've been a guide

"Blaze" Short Film | 10 minutes

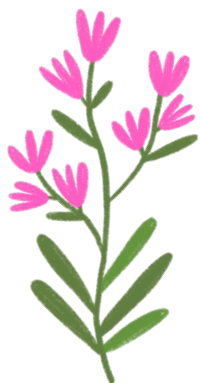
Discussion | 30 minutes

- Go around the room and have everyone lift up one word that describes how the short film made them feel.
- What blazes have the ancestors left to show the way in a general sense? Writings, practices, beliefs, systems, and organizations are some possibilities.
- What particular blazes have you used to guide you?
- Have you ever had an experience like Pascal or Hildegard? What happened next? How did you figure out what to do?
- Is "discernment" language that you've used before? How do you think it might be different or the same as "decision-making"?
- Have you ever had to find the way to a new place? What blazes did you leave behind?

Silent Journaling | 30 minutes

These questions are for you to reflect and journal on alone. No one will ask you to share your answers!

- What am I good at?



- What do I love doing (even if I'm not "good" at it)?

- What's a thing I did/loved/was criticized for as a child that *might* just turn out to have an important key to my future?
- What's an issue or need in the world that I find particularly compelling or moving?

Discussion | 30 minutes

- How did the above exercise make you feel?
- Did you notice or realize anything new as you were writing?

Discernment Disciplines and Discussion | 30 minutes

1. *Clearness Committee*—thanks, Quakers!

The person with a question asks a few people (~5, give or take) to gather with them and help them discern. The committee members aren't chosen because of their closeness to the discerner, but for their spiritual maturity. Over one or a few sessions, the members ask open-ended questions and listen hard as the person answers. At the end of a session, member briefly summarize what they saw and heard from the discerner. Together, they see if clarity has been achieved, and therefore whether more sessions are needed or not. As with all things Quaker, this method involves much silence and listening.

GREAT FOR: *Extroverts and people who process verbally and with other people. (But note that there will still be lots of silence!). People who have trouble noticing or identifying their own feelings. People who would like some scaffolding from others in their process.*

2. *Ignatian Exercises*—thanks, Catholics! (Really, thanks, St. Ignatius Loyola)

Ignatius has a spiritual practice for *everything!* For discerning the mind of Christ, he has a step-by-step process. This is a great option if you like order and flowcharts—BUT this method requires a great deal of imagination, as well as the ability to notice and identify your feelings.

GREAT FOR: *Introverts, people with already strong prayer/spiritual lives, those who love a step-by-step process, people who are skilled at noticing and identifying your feelings. Check out ignatianspirituality.com for their article, "An Ignatian Framework for Making a Decision."*

3. *Spiritual Direction*

An intentional, 1:1 relationship with a spiritually adept or religious professional who acts as a guide in deepening your relationship with God. Spiritual Direction can be an ongoing, open-ended relationship, or it can be highly focused on a particular question.

GREAT FOR: *Anyone, provided you have access to a Spiritual Director in person or online, and for people with a trusting relationship with a pastor, minister, or chaplain.*

4. *Discuss*

Have you had experience with any of these discernment disciplines? If yes, how did it go? If not, which ones sound most appealing?



Closing Prayer