

**MAINE MISSION TRIP
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Picture this- You and your friends are in line for your very first roller coaster ride.

As you get closer to the front of the line, your adrenaline takes over-your palms are clammy and your heart rate is speeding up with every slow step you take inching up to the front of the line. Turning to your friends, you laugh and discuss how much fun the ride will be, but secretly you are thinking the roller coaster is looking a whole lot more inviting. As you reach the coaster's cars, you realize there's definitely no turning back now. The ride starts. With every clickity clack of the metal chain pulleys, you get more and more excited, but equally as nervous. Images of drastic scenarios you could create to stop the ride flash in your mind, but then you realize none of them are possibilities, so you accept your fate. As you are pulled up to the first-and overwhelmingly steep-drop, the acceptance sets in and all of the sudden, you can't wait to get to the top.

Finally, you are there. Taking a deep breath and saying a quick prayer, the coaster weightlessly shoots down the hill. At the bottom, your nerves are calmed and you are having way too much fun to even remember your once stressful state. Walking away, a feeling of pride and accomplishment fills you for getting through something you could very well have walked away from.

Sometimes, to get through stressful situations, we need the courage to forge ahead and see what's on the other side of the big drop. Other times, however, stepping away from those situations to regroup and see the bigger picture works one hundred times better. It is as if you were in the middle of a parade. You can't see it in its entirety until you are off to the side observing it.

A word for this action of stepping out of stressful situations is retreat. The word retreat can be a noun, as in a place of privacy or safety, or it can be a verb, as in

withdrawing from that which is difficult. It can be a positive action or a negative one depending on how you use the time you are given.

One retreat I went on that wasn't as productive as it should have been was a mandatory school retreat at the end of eighth grade. Granted, I didn't mind missing school for a full day, but a forced retreat seemed the hardest to appreciate. We had many friendship building activities and at one point received and read letters our parents wrote to us. I loved my letters, but I didn't know why I was being forced to contemplate life.

On the other hand, a retreat that has always been a positive one for me is my youth group. It didn't matter what happened Monday through Saturday, as long as on Sunday nights, I got to have fun with these crazy friends of mine. The laughs and the jokes got me through so many tough weeks and I only wish this wasn't my last year.

The awesome thing about our trips to Maine, however, is that you can keep coming back way past your senior year and be an advisor. I don't know why anyone wouldn't want to. Every year, we pile into the vans for the sixteen hour car ride in which we are getting away from our hectic lives for eight days. Time stops spinning up there. There are no televisions, computers, or cell phones for us to pass time with. We enjoy each other's company and even work hard and have fun at the same time. Though I am sure I am probably the guiltiest of complaining about one thing or another while working, it really is rewarding to know you put everything you had into something. We so enjoy meeting all of the people in Maine, especially going back year after year to see the same familiar faces. During those eight days, I learn so much about other people. Even people I thought I knew all too well. The second I get home I feel refreshed, as if I had a reset button on life, and I am able to face anything. This feeling of rejuvenation is the core of a retreat and is exemplified in the first reading.

The first reading explains that God doesn't put us into situations we aren't able to handle. We are not alone in life because we have God behind us and we are all exactly where we are supposed to be. He draws us out of mighty waters, delivers us from our strong enemy, and then delivers us back when we are better able to handle it. So, in other words, retreat isn't running away. It is something we all must do-and by God's will, we all will do in our lives. Similarly, the second reading expresses God's presence in our lives. He is our help in troubled times and our worries should be calmed by that. Many times people delay taking breaks in life out of guilt. Somewhere along human existence, the sanction of taking a deserved break became less and less acceptable. How can we be expected to take care of anything else-friends, family or work, if we are not taking care of ourselves?

It seems distressing that we need to physically remove ourselves from the environment we live in just to take a break. I guess, though, in a sense that is the point. We are called to be completely removed from trying times to refresh our souls. Going to another place allows us to see another world. Like our trip to Maine. The feeling of community in the town we stayed in is something we most likely cannot experience at home. At times it's shocking how different the two locations are. One day on our trip to the Buckfield Mall, we were waiting in line and Nick mentioned to Chad that he needed one more dollar to get some candy. Just then the man in front of them turned around and handed them a dollar before walking out of the store. I was beside myself. In fact, my initial reaction was, "It's got to be a trick." You don't see that often-if ever-in Buffalo. In years to come I will remember these situations.

The difference between a positive and negative retreat has a lot to do with the people or person retreating, however, it's that kind of situation that inspires you.

What we take back from a retreat is our own personal choice; whether we took a break to lend a helping hand to people who already work so hard or we just wanted to take a week away from our daily lives to spend time with valued friends. An important component of retreat is in not stressing about what's at home, though. Keeping your mind focused on the act of relaxing and being away from stress will benefit the person in retreat. It's all about perception. Thinking positively about your return will most likely yield positive results. Remember- do not feel guilty for taking time to get away. If we want to change the environment we come back to, to a more positive one, we should start small. Coming back to Buffalo and being as kind as the man from the Buckfield Mall was, to a complete stranger, would not change Buffalo to the town of Hartford, but it would make a difference in at least one person's life. If I had not been on this retreat, I would not have gotten the chance to see something I might not have seen here at home. Besides, I bet that man had no idea that his thoughtless generosity would end up being in a sermon heard by all these people, but look how many have heard his story.

We have no idea where we will end up in life; which fork in the road we will take; but retreat, taking some time to think about our choices for the future allows for more comfort in the matter.

For me, going to Maine this year was a chance to give it one last shot; to try hard, and to laugh even harder. This whole summer has, and will continue to be, somewhat of a wrap up for me and I am trying to soak up as much as I can before I face the daunting move to college. I am so glad I got to experience all that I did with amazing people, who were so helpful in making this year one of the best. You are all irreplaceable. To sum everything up: "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it."