



LIFE-GIVING Wounds®

Greetings!

We are grateful for your interest in Life-Giving Wounds! **Our mission is to help adults and adults with divorced or separated parents receive deep, lasting spiritual healing.** We do this by providing unique means for Christ to transform their life-draining wounds into *life-giving resources* of faith, hope, love, and joy for themselves, their relationships, and the Church. We also seek to help them make a life-long gift of love in either the vocation to marriage or consecrated virginity.

We accomplish this mission by offering the following ministries:

- **Life-Giving Wounds Retreats:** a three-day healing retreat for adult children of divorce or separation, initially led by an experienced traveling retreat team and designed as a starting point for ongoing diocesan, parish, or campus ministry to adult children of divorce or separation
- **Life-Giving Wounds Support Groups:** eighteen sessions with an established curriculum and format based on our book [Life-Giving Wounds \(Ignatius Press, 2023\)](#) and unique workbook we created for the support group
- **Training for Leaders:** distance consultations, materials, and in-person trainings on how to establish and maintain a permanent diocesan, parish, or campus ministry for adult children of divorce or separation; we also have a dedicated online community for Life-Giving Wounds leaders and alumni to grow this ministry together
- **Online Ministry, Community, Articles, and Resources:** online retreats and support groups, engaging social media pages, our own unique social media community, and a website, which has first-person stories and articles on our blog, a curated resource list, and a store where you can purchase our Life-Giving Wound book (Ignatius Press, 2023), LGW Rosary Booklet, LGW Sacred Art, and more
- **Talks, Presentations, and Webinars** on a variety of topics related to ministry for adult children of divorce or separation

Our long-term goals are to:

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- Make the spiritual healing of adults from divorced or separated families of origin a pastoral priority for the whole Church
- Establish the Life-Giving Wounds retreat ministry and support groups in *every* Catholic diocese in the U.S. and as many campuses as possible.
- Re-engage those who feel forgotten by the Church because they don't think the Church helped them enough following their parents' divorce or separation
- Strengthen current and future marriages and families by healing wounds that can lead to relationship-harming beliefs and behaviors
- Cultivate evangelizing missionary disciples by inviting participants to share in our work
- Revitalize parishes by equipping them to be a place of healing for adults from divorced and separated families of origin, who in turn will evangelize others

Thanks be to God, **the ministry of Life-Giving Wounds is already producing much fruit!** Here are a small sample of the positive feedback from men and women who have attended a Life-Giving Wounds retreat:

- “The retreat was life changing for me, like I didn't even think possible. Pretty amazing!”
- “It was such a time of healing for me. It really helped me to get to know others going through the same thing.”
- “The retreat sparked a journey of healing for me.”
- “After the retreat, I feel closer to God and can better understand the wounds that I have. I will totally recommend the retreat to others and had a wonderful experience.”
- “I came to the retreat thinking I might get one or two things from it but I'm leaving with a whole new perspective on how to live my life and with a bigger heart for my family.”

Our desire is to see Life-Giving Wounds grow, in order to reach more hurting hearts with God's healing love – and you can help us! This Start-Up packet provides some basic information for leaders who are curious about Life-Giving Wounds and wondering whether it will be a good fit for their parish, diocese, or campus ministry. We also have available **a full, comprehensive Leader's Guide** that details exactly what goes into implementing a Life-Giving Wounds retreat or support group.

If – hopefully when! – you want to take the next step and begin an effective, healing, Christ-centered ministry to adults from broken homes, please contact us at info@lifegivingwounds.org. We can discuss with you your needs and how we can collaborate together, and we can provide you with the full Leader's Guide.

Thank you again for your interest in this crucial ministry of healing! God bless you!

Sincerely in Christ,



Daniel and Bethany Meola

Daniel and Bethany Meola
Founders and Directors
Life-Giving Wounds, a 501(c)(3) charitable organization



Why is the Life-Giving Wounds ministry needed?

There is a *tremendous* need for ministry, pastoral care, and accompaniment to men and women whose parents are divorced or separated. Some basic statistics makes this clear:

- Every year, approximately *one million* children experience their parents' divorce.
- Since 1974, there have been "created" more than *50 million* children of divorce.
- *One quarter* of all young adults today have divorced parents.

And if you add in children whose married parents are separated (but not divorced), those whose cohabitating parents split up, and those whose parents were only fleetingly "together," then we are talking about many, many more people – perhaps the majority of Americans.

The wounds caused by parental break-up are many and deep:

- **The wound of silence:** being told that one's pain is not important, or that the divorce is the best situation ("happy divorce talk"); feeling frozen by the trauma of divorce, or hiding one's feelings out of concern for one's parents in crisis
- **The wound of a broken identity:** feeling torn between two worlds (mother and father) that are no longer united, and a deep sense of homelessness and disorientation about one's identity and place in one's family
- **The wound of loss of faith:** questioning God's goodness and providence because of feeling abandoned by one's parents, or seeing a parent's faith as deeply hypocritical, or struggling to see God as a loving Father in the absence of an earthly loving father
- **The wound of unhealthy self-protection and difficulty in relationships:** great anxiety about relationships and their permanence, a reluctance to fully trust a significant other or spouse, and (most tragically) a statistically greater chance of getting divorced oneself
- **The wound of unforgiveness and dysfunctional family dynamics:** struggles with extreme anger at one's parents, including long-lasting resentment; difficulties with proper boundaries in family relationships

- **For more research on the wounds and long-term effects of divorce on children**, please see our Life-Giving Wounds [book](#) (Ignatius Press, 2023), and www.lifegivingwounds.org/research .

The need for healing, then, is tremendous. *And there are no ministries doing what Life-Giving Wounds does*, providing Catholic, intensive, and specific outreach to adult children of divorce or separation through retreats, support groups, and other resources.

The effects of divorce are deep and long-lasting. And – praise God – the healing that can happen in the lives of these men and women is incredible, and can have exponential effects, reaching to their families, spouses, children, and communities.



Starting a Life-Giving Wounds Ministry Chapter at Your Diocese, Parish, or Campus

Our vision is that adults from broken homes can find ongoing accompaniment on their journey of healing. One way we see that happening is through the establishment of ongoing retreats and support groups. These are groups of men and women whose parents are divorced or separated, led by a fellow adult child of divorce or separation. Together through the retreats and support groups they can learn how the difficult wounds they have experienced can become life-giving resources of love and mercy.

To accomplish this vision, our goal is to implement the Life-Giving Wounds ministry in every Catholic diocese and many parishes and campus ministries. We aim to make the ministry a sustainable ministry run by local leaders by building in time for online webinar training before or after the implementation of the first ministry event, during the first retreat process, and consultation and support after the first retreat is launched.

After helping with the first retreat, our plan is for the host location to do a second retreat entirely on their own, followed up by running their first support group. Then on a yearly basis, each location would have at least one retreat and support group session. Our comprehensive Leader's Guide goes into detail about starting and maintaining a retreat and support group for adult children of divorce or separation. Here we will outline some basic information about cost and first steps to establishing this ministry.

How much does it cost to start Life-Giving Wounds Ministry?

When it comes to cost, remember that **bringing in the Life-Giving Wounds team to establish a retreat ministry is a *one-time investment* in a permanent ministry** that will bear fruit for many years to come, and that will reach a section of society with tremendous unmet needs. The costs for starting the ministry range from only **\$1200** (includes online training; must purchase print

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materials separately) to **\$5850*** (includes online leadership training and free access to future leadership trainings for onboarding new members, online leader resources, leading the first retreat with a skilled three or four person national traveling retreat team, all print materials for both the first retreat and support group, access to an online community space, etc.).

**Prices subject to change. Please contact us for the latest contract costs. This also does not include travel or consultation costs, but only for the materials and the stipends for work done by the Life-Giving Wounds staff to start a new chapter. A full breakdown of what this cost covers will be provided with the contract with the sponsor and can be further negotiated.*

Once a local leadership team is formed and trained, retreats and support groups can take place with a minimum of financial output (money would be needed still for food, materials, and [if applicable] leaders' stipends).

Also keep in mind that retreat fees charged to participants will cover some of the start-up costs. For example, a 25-person retreat, at \$150/person (typically the lowest rate charged), will net \$3,750. Likewise, support groups typically charge \$99 to \$150/person.

However, if possible, then it is desirable to be subsidized by a diocese, parish, or campus ministry budget, like any other annual ministry, to provide for scholarships, marketing, stipends, operational costs, etc. to keep costs low for those who financially need it and to make it as accessible as possible to 18 to 25 year olds. The amount needed for each location will vary, but we suggest starting with a requested budget of \$2,500 to \$4,000 per year and increasing the budget as necessary. Many dioceses/groups establish scholarship funds through Catholic Charities to save money as well. This budget can also be used to bring a national team member back to do 1-2 retreats as a chapter location continues to establish its chapter.

Is there anything we can do to reduce costs?

Our passion is to bring Life-Giving Wounds to every corner of the country. With that in mind, we're happy to work with a host location individually to see how we can fit the initial training retreat into their budget, which is why we developed a scale from \$1000 to \$4895 (prices subject to change; for the latest price please contact us for a sample contract).

General ideas to cut costs include holding the retreat at a parish or campus ministry center instead of a full-service retreat center (reduces "rent" for the retreat, and possibly gives more flexibility on food options); doubling up on retreat leaders' roles so fewer leaders are needed (less spent on stipends); eliminating the retreat musician; "farming out" some meals so that participants eat on their own at local eateries; and so on.

Or, a retreat host could opt to increase the cost of the retreat for participants, while keeping in mind that this could make the retreat inaccessible to some. Hosts can also provide case-by-case "scholarships" for potential retreatants for whom cost is a concern.

Further, soliciting donations for the local ministry is always a possibility and is encouraged.

What does the Life-Giving Wounds team provide (most comprehensive option)?

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- Detailed and comprehensive **Leader's Guide** that outlines every step of the process to implement a successful Life-Giving Wounds retreat and support group
- **Consultation** with ministry leader before the first retreat (to prepare for retreat), and after the retreat (to help grow ministry) and establish a support group.
- An **experienced traveling retreat team** to run the retreat: retreat leader, musician, presenters, priest, and small group leaders. The exact number of retreat team members depends on the needs of hosting team and the size of retreat.
- **Three training webinars** prior to or after the first retreat for local leaders. Access for free will be given to an online course and future training cohorts.
- **Hands-on training** throughout the retreat weekend for local leaders to be able to continue the retreat and overall ministry.
- **Retreat Guides and Retreat Journals** for each attendee and retreat team member.
- **Life-Giving Wounds Books and Workbooks** for each attendee and support group team member.
- Guidance on **marketing** the retreat and support group.
- First access to all **new materials** and **online resources** created by Life-Giving Wounds.
- Access to a **private, online community of Life-Giving Wounds leaders and alumni** across the nation to learn best practices and grow this ministry together as well as **online leader resources and videos**.
- **Setting up an online community space** within this private LGW online community if the host group desires to start one.
- **Promotion** of the local chapter of Life-Giving Wounds and future retreats/ministry on the Life-Giving Wounds website and social media pages.
- **Connection to and referral from the national, online ministry we host**, so as we get people signed up for our online retreats and support groups from your area, then we refer them back to your local chapter for ongoing connection and healing, building up your ministry.

What are the expectations and steps for the hosting team to fully start a new chapter of the ministry?

Here is a ten step guide to make it as easy as possible:

- 1.) **Secure permission and funding** from the relevant local leader(s) to run a Life-Giving Wounds retreat and/or support group. (We recommend starting with an initial launch retreat, as the support groups work best as follow-up accompaniment after the retreat.)
- 2.) **Select dates and book a venue** for the first retreat or support group.
- 3.) **Establish contract** with Life-Giving Wounds and **provide an initial deposit** to secure dates; remainder of cost due at end of the event.

- 4.) **Recruit and vet volunteers** to help facilitate the retreat or support group; these should be faithful Catholics who are adult children of divorce or separation. It is especially important to try to find a coordinator, chaplain, and team counselor.

- 5.) **Select whether you will do leadership training prior to or after the initial launch retreat or support group (the most popular is the latter and these ten steps are based on that order).** If choosing the former, then select dates for the three leadership training webinars in conjunction with the national ministry (as we try to coordinate multiple groups at once) before the initial launch retreat. **After the initial launch retreat or support group, you will start receiving leaders' only emails and resources.**

- 6.) **Prepare for and handle all registration and on-site logistics** for the support group or retreat (e.g., set up and run registration page, coordinate food, tech needs, and [if applicable] lodging arrangements, etc.). As part of the pre-retreat logistics, **secure lodging and transportation needs** for Life-Giving Wounds traveling retreat team if partnering with us to run the initial launch retreat.

- 7.) **Market the retreat or support group** in local channels (Catholic newspaper, radio, parish bulletins, social media, ask leaders to make personal invites etc.), 4 to 6 months prior to the event dates.

- 8.) **Order retreat guides and journals** for the retreat participants; materials for support groups are in a piloting phase. **Receive in-person training** on the retreat itself (led by our traveling retreat team), if partnering with us to run the initial retreat.

- 9.) *After the event*, **pay the balance of the contract and remaining travel expenses**, if any. **Schedule a follow-up phone call** with Life-Giving Wounds to evaluate the retreat/support group and plan how to move forward with the post-launch event logistics in step ten.

- 10.) Keep the momentum going by **recruiting and vetting further volunteers** from the initial launch retreat. **Schedule and attend the three leadership webinars** in conjunction with the national ministry (as we try to coordinate multiple groups in one training session) after the initial launch retreat. **Decide on the date of your next retreat and develop a timeline for implementing a support group before or after the second retreat**, which is the final phase of establishing a chapter. And **Invite participants and leaders** (after designating a chapter group moderator) to join our private online community to continue to grow together in formation and support.



Life-Giving Wounds Retreat Information

What makes the Life-Giving Wounds retreat unique?

Several things make the Life-Giving Wounds retreat a one-of-a-kind ministry.

First, there are simply *no equivalent ministries* providing this kind of intensive, directed pastoral care to adults from broken homes. We are sharing God's love and care with men and women who often feel forgotten by their families, by society, and even by the Church.

Second, the retreat is oriented toward an encounter with Christ, first in Eucharistic Adoration and the Sacrament of Reconciliation on Saturday, and then on the "grand finale" of Sunday Mass. We believe the deepest healing comes from encountering our Lord and experiencing his boundless love and mercy.

Third, the retreat fosters peer evangelization and witness by featuring the retreat leaders' own stories of healing and by providing ample time in small groups for attendees to walk alongside each other in their sorrow and their path toward healing.

What topics are covered on the retreat?

The pedagogical content of the Life-Giving Wounds retreat is delivered in a series of six talks given by members of the retreat team. The talks both provide valuable information about navigating life, faith, and relationships as an adult child of divorce or separation, and also give the speaker's own witness to finding healing in Christ. The topics covered are then "broken open" in the small group meetings, which are guided by team members.

Topics include:

- Naming and grieving the wounds experienced as children of divorce or separation
- How our parents' divorce or separation affected our identity and our relationship with God
- Embracing our deepest identity as a child of God
- The effects of our parents' divorce or separation on our own relationships
- Moving from a pattern of self-protection to one of authentic self-giving
- Dealing with anger and anxiety
- Authentic Christian forgiveness

- Appropriate boundaries with family members
- The Christian meaning of suffering
- How our wounds can become life-giving for ourselves and for others

What does a typical retreat schedule look like?

The Life-Giving Wounds retreat takes place over three days: Friday evening, all day Saturday, and Sunday until early afternoon. This is the general flow of the retreat:

- **Friday:** meet and greet, overview of the weekend, one talk, and time for personal prayer and journaling
- **Saturday:** optional daily Mass, four talks, two small group meetings, time for prayer and journaling, optional one-on-one meetings with a team leader, and prayer/sacramental moments: the Divine Mercy Chaplet, Eucharistic Adoration, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation
- **Sunday:** one talk, one small group meeting, a guided Scriptural meditation, time for prayer and journaling, optional one-on-one meetings with a team leader, large group “graces received” sharing, and all culminating in Sunday Mass

Who can attend a Life-Giving Wounds retreat?

We welcome to the retreat any young adult (18+) or adult whose parents are no longer together. This includes people whose parents are divorced, separated, or had never been formally together (such as cohabitation situations that ended). This also includes people whose parents received a declaration of nullity (annulment) from the Church. While acknowledging that there are a wide variety of experiences included in these situations, the retreat is designed to speak to the commonality within them all: *losing the love of your parents together*.

The two situations that the retreat does *not* address are the death of a parent, or the loss of a biological parent(s) through being placed for adoption. On a case by case basis, sometimes people do attend whose parents are still together but in a highly contentious relationship.

Who are the traveling retreat team members?

The Life-Giving Wounds traveling retreat team consists of lay and ordained people who are passionate about bringing God’s healing to adults whose parents have divorced or separated. Most are adult children of divorce themselves who can speak personally both to the wounds caused by parental divorce or separation and the deep healing that is possible in Christ.

Full bios can be found on the Life-Giving Wounds website:

<https://www.lifegivingwounds.org/retreat-team>.



Life-Giving Wounds Support Group Information

What are the goals of Life-Giving Wounds support groups?

- To allow people to process and grieve their wounds
- To give people a chance to discover in a new profound depth God within their story of suffering and healing; to give them further content for healing
- To hear from peers about similar stories
- To offer and receive ongoing compassion and support
- To build up friendships with others who have experienced these wounds

Who can attend a support group?

The criteria is the same as for the Life-Giving Wounds retreat: anyone who has *lost the love of their parents together* will benefit from the support group. This includes situations of divorce, separation, annulment, and cohabitation dissolutions, among other things.

There are pros and cons to making the support group open only to “alumni” of a Life-Giving Wounds retreat or not. Local leaders should decide which approach is best for them.

What is the format and content of the support group?

While there is flexibility in the format and structure of the Life-Giving Wounds support group, in general we recommend a group of 8-11 people (not including the leader[s]) who meet together for 18 sessions of group study and sharing. These meetings could happen weekly or bi-weekly over the course of several months, or on a two year or two semester basis with 9 sessions happening each year. In general, the meetings last about an hour and include a time of sharing joys and sorrows with each other, optional goal sharing, small group discussion, and a time of prayer together. There are also special sessions with the team counselor and team chaplain.

In terms of the content for the support groups, we use our book [Life-Giving Wounds \(Ignatius Press, 2023\)](#) and workbook specifically designed for the support group.

The main differences between the retreat and the support groups is that the support group is goal-focused for specific healing rather than primarily contemplative and meditative like the retreat, goes deeper into the material discussed on the retreat, and allows for more time to process wounds, build community and friendship, and accompany one another in the suffering.



Leadership Team of Life-Giving Wounds

Please see our website for more information on our wonderful board of directors, co-executive directors, and many others who assist us at www.lifegivingwounds.org/our-leadership-team

Thank you for your time to get to know our ministry and to consider starting it!