



Greetings!

We are grateful for your interest in Life-Giving Wounds! **Our mission is to help young 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:** guidance for running ongoing support groups for adult children of divorce, including suggested formats and content
- **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 will also have an exclusive Facebook group dedicated to Life-Giving Wounds leaders to grow this ministry together
- **Online Ministry, Articles, and Resources:** online retreats and support groups, engaging social media pages, and a website, which has first-person stories on our blog, articles, video, a store, and helpful links
- **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:

- 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

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- 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 *48 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 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 the implementation of the ministry, 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 **\$1000** (includes online training, leader resources, and online leader's community in 2021; must purchase print materials separately and phone consultation may cost extra) to **\$4595*** (includes online training plus optional in-person training, online leader resources and community in 2021, leading the first retreat with a skilled three or four person traveling retreat team, robust phone consultation pre-and-post-launch, \$25 Facebook ad credit, all print materials for the leadership training and the first retreat, etc.).

**This does not include travel costs, but only the stipend for work done by the Life-Giving Wounds staff. 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 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 (a typical rate), will net \$3,750.

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. The amount needed for each location will vary, but we suggest starting with a requested budget of \$2,500 to \$5,000 per year and increasing the budget as necessary. This budget can also be used to bring our traveling retreat team back to do the retreat on an annual basis if a diocese prefers to go that route.

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 \$4595.

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)?

- 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.
- **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.
- Guidance on **marketing** the retreat.

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- First access to all **new materials** and **online resources** created by Life-Giving Wounds.
- First access to a **private, online community of Life-Giving Wounds leaders in 2021** across the nation to learn best practices and grow this ministry together as well as **online leader resources and videos** on our website.
- **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 funding and permission** from the relevant local leader(s) to run a Life-Giving Wounds retreat and/or support group. We recommend starting with the retreat.
- 2.) Select **dates** and book a **venue** for the first retreat if starting a retreat. In either the case of starting the support group or retreat, receive **contract** from us.
- 3.) Sign **contract** and provide an **initial deposit** to secure leadership training and/or retreat dates (remainder of cost due at retreat). Receive the Life-Giving Wounds Leader's Guide to give detailed instruction about how to start-up the ministry.
- 4.) **Recruit and vet** local leaders or students to participate in this ministry in consultation with Life-Giving Wounds in order to ensure it is a peer-based ministry and have the best possible leaders. **Select dates** for the three leadership training webinars.
- 5.) Handle all **on-site and registration logistics** for the support group or retreat (e.g., run registration page, coordinate food, tech, and [if applicable] lodging arrangements, etc.)
- 6.) Secure **lodging and transportation needs** for Life-Giving Wounds traveling retreat team if partnering with us to run the first retreat.
- 7.) **Market the retreat or support group** in local channels, 3 to 6 months prior to the dates.
- 8.) Attend the **three leadership webinars** prior to or after the retreat and the retreat itself.
- 9.) Receive **retreat guides** and **in-person training** on the retreat led by our traveling retreat team if partnering with us to run the first retreat *OR* if not then order print materials for the first retreat from us. Retreat journals are an additional fee to the base cost.
- 10.) **Pay retreat stipends and remaining travel expenses** if any. **Follow-up phone call** to evaluate the retreat/support group and plan how to move forward with your next retreat or support group. **Join** online leadership community and continue growing in formation through the resources we provide.



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 envision a group of 6-10 people (not including the leader[s]) who meet together 6-10 times for group study and sharing. These meetings could happen weekly, monthly, or on a different schedule. In general, the meetings could include a time of sharing joys and sorrows with each other, discussion/presentation of a pre-arranged topic, and a time of prayer together. If it's possible, sharing a meal together is a great way to build camaraderie, and also planning for one or two social events, such as an Advent party or summer cookout.

In terms of the content for the support groups, our comprehensive Leader's Guide includes a full list of suggested topics and readings for the support groups. One option is to invite a speaker to present on the chosen topic; another option is to simply discuss together, like a study group, led by the group leader. The content is the same as the retreat sessions as that forms the foundational core of our programs. However, we also provide content suggestions that go beyond that core and can be separate sessions and modules on more particular topics

for your support groups. We often do these separate modules during our online support groups. Further, we expect to create more content and written, small-group study materials in 2021.

A main difference between the retreat and the support groups is simply that the support group, by continuing on over several weeks or months, has the ability for participants to truly accompany each other through the ups and downs that come from being a child of divorce or separation. It can also go more in depth into a particular topic if focused upon over the course of a few meetings.



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!