# 2020 Annual Report



Our Lady of Bethesda *RETREAT* CENTER

A Place to Encounter Christ An oasis inside the beltway of Washington D.C.





#### A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT, FR. DANIEL PAJERSKI, LC

#### Thy Kingdom Come!

At a decisive moment in our Lord's public ministry, he challenged his disciples with an unexpected and unprecedented teaching that shook their faith. Many of them had recently witnessed Jesus perform a miracle by feeding thousands of hungry followers. Then, he revealed to them his plan to give them bread from heaven to eat: his very flesh. Because this teaching was too difficult to grasp, many disciples returned to their former way of life. In the midst of the ensuing chaos and confusion, St. Peter stepped forward and proclaimed, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

What allowed Peter to be so bold at such a crucial moment? He listened to Christ's call and followed it. He allowed Christ to reveal the love of his heart to him. That was the rock on which Peter built his faith. There would certainly be more challenging times ahead for Peter, but we know he ended up giving his life for his master. We at Our Lady of Bethesda have done our best to respond to the past year's challenges with this same firmness of faith, motivated by the love of Christ.

We hope this annual report will give you a glimpse into our efforts to help others nourish their souls by encountering Christ. In 2021, we hope to continue to be an oasis inside the Washington, D.C. beltway for priests and their parishioners as well as continue to be a beacon of hope and strength to those whom we serve virtually.

# History and Purpose

# HOW IT ALL BEGAN

In 1962, Gertrude and Evan Scholl donated their six-acre home to the Franciscans Friars of the Holy Name Province. With this gift, the cornerstone of the Villa Cortona Apostolic Center was laid in 1963. For the next thirty years, the center was dutifully run by the Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ, a Franciscan Secular institute.

In 1993, however, then archbishop of Washington D.C. Cardinal Hickey contacted the Legion of Christ asking whether they would be interested in buying Villa Cortona for their retreats and youth and marriage programs. Fr. Richard Gill and Fr. John Hopkins, LC visited a local coffee shop to discuss the offer.

"We remembered St. Teresa of Avila's famous quote," Fr. John Hopkins said. 'Teresa on her own can do nothing. Teresa with God can do a lot. Teresa, God, and money can do anything!' We had the first two parts of the equation, but lacked the third."

Fr. Richard and Fr. John teamed up with a group of Regnum Christi lay men and women to raise a down payment, secure a bank loan, and make it happen. The name was changed to Our Lady of Bethesda (OLB) to invoke Mary's maternal care for those who would visit the center seeking guidance and strength.

On the grounds of the retreat center Fr Richard Gill and Art Bennet also opened the Alpha Omega clinic, yet another means by which we provide spiritual and emotional care to our growing community. Staffed by clinicians who share our reverence for the Lord, the clinic helps individuals, couples, and families flourish through affordable mental health services that integrate with the fullness of the Catholic faith.

# OFFERING A SACRED SPACE

We aspire to reveal Christ's love to all those who enter this sacred space. Our center is nestled among mature trees in a quiet Bethesda neighborhood minutes away from major highways, airports, and of course, our Nation's capital. Our hope is to inspire the spiritual renewal of men, women, couples, and families with programming for every stage of life. Through an array of retreats, workshops, and experiences, we offer opportunities to have profound encounters with Jesus Christ.

At the heart of all that we offer is the charism of the Regnum Christi, which is predicated upon Christcenteredness, the living of charity, and a contemplative and evangelizing spirit. We aspire to reveal Christ's love to those who are ready to receive it. We yearn to form apostles and send them out in their God-given mission to help Christ build His Church.

We are living in providential times for personal holiness and the mission of bringing fellow souls closer to Christ. Now, as ever, Our Lady of Bethesda Retreat Center is committed to supporting our local parishes and dioceses in this transformative work. In everything we do, we strive to amplify the message of God's mercy — the good news so many are searching for.

# By the Numbers

Our annual budget for 2020 was \$644K. While we did not meet that goal, we came close to our 2019 actuals in this unprecedented year, with 2020 revenues at \$504K. The loss of our Outside Group rental revenue was made up by our many generous donors who help to keep the retreat center's mission alive. Also helping us keep open this year was decreased expenses in the areas of facility repair and maintenance, food, and utilities. Finally, we were able to procure support from the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) established by the 2020 US Federal government Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act. The PPP helped us in a very tight time to keep our staff working and continue to deliver our programs.

YEAR OVER YEAR REVENUES AND EXPENSES									
(\$)	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 Planned			
Annual Revenues	538,617	598,736	599,067	549,393	504,154	622,900			
Annual Expenses	514,546	576,104	612,020	628,501	444,084	622,900			

Revenue by (\$k):	Over/(Under) 2020 Budget	2020 Budget	2020 Actuals	2019 Actuals	Over/(Under) 2020 Actuals
Programs	-24%	\$305	\$233	\$230	1%
Outside Groups	-600%	\$126	\$18	\$122	-85%
Donations	-22%	\$115	\$147	\$50	193%
Other Revenues	-8%	\$98	\$107	\$102	4%
Total Revenue	-28%	\$644	\$504	\$536	-6%

The cost of technology and discounted prices for virtual programs led to financial strain in 2020. However, these virtual programs significantly amplified our center's reach, domestically and internationally.We added 46 online events to our rotation in response to the pandemic, allowing us to touch the lives of 2,246 people across 14 different countries.





# How We Are Fullfilling Our Mission



#### <u>RETREATS</u>

Our virtual and traditional retreats give people from all walks of life a chance to get away and grow in their spirituality. While we offer various retreats, most of our weekend retreats are offered using the dynamic of *The Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius of Loyola. This year we offered an additional 38 virtual retreats to supplement our challenges hosting in-house retreats. We saw no difference in response to the retreat's efficacy when offered virtually.



#### MARRIAGE

One of our greatest passions lies in shepherding engaged couples through the process of preparing for marriage. But our work doesn't end with the Pre-Cana requirement. A vast catalog of marriage strengthening workshops means we are uniquely equipped to help couples sustain their conjugal love. This year we offered an additional 8 marriage prep weekends virtually to supplement our in-house offerings during this pandemic year. Our satisfaction ratings for virtual sessions remained the same.



#### **OUTSIDE GROUPS**

When our programs aren't in session, we open our doors to schools, parishes, and professional organizations in need of a place to gather for meetings and events of their own. Our outside groups were down about 80% due to the pandemic. However, we had a few cases of new outside groups from the business world, as our large open space allowed for their small executive teams to safely meet face-to-face and work in-person together.

On the subsequent pages, we offer an overview of our program offerings and some testimonies with the hopes of giving you greater insight into Our Lady of Bethesda Retreat Center—as well as receiving your ideas to how we might better serve you, our parishes, our dioceses.

# **Spiritual Exercises**

Experience grace through one of our soul-opening silent retreats for men and women. Preached by Legionary of Christ priests and Consecrated Women of Regnum Christi (CRC), our Ignatian-style Spiritual Exercises challenge us to focus on the Gospels and our connection with Jesus Christ in ways we normally do not. An escape from the distractions of our noisy world, every retreat includes guided meditations, moments for private reflection, Mass, opportunities for confession, and individual spiritual direction. In 2020, retreatants reported a 100 percent satisfaction rate after completing the Spiritual Exercises through OLB.



This tremendous experience — and I've been through it twice — is like an exquisite garden, or a day in a historical holy place. That is: There are no limits on a great experience, except perhaps the limitations a person may be clinging to as he comes in."

— Christopher H.

Grand! As always, it is difficult to get away, but so worth the trouble and time here to be renewed and to reconnect with the Lord." — Iris P.

It is ordering and restorative to cut out all the noise of life and to contemplate Christ and your place in His plan."

— Mark M.

Incredible opportunity to grow spiritually and be quiet for once, without distractions."

— Andriy V.

# **KEEPING IT CLASSIC**

For those who have never attended a silent retreat or done the Ignatian spiritual exercises before, we recommend the classic **three-day experience**. This format is similarly ideal for those with busy schedules or those who are still learning to incorporate daily prayer. We guide the retreatants through meditations and practical talks, followed by ample time for personal prayer. We tend to **offer these monthly**.

## DIGGING DEEPER

The **four-day experience** is best for those who are already familiar with silent retreats and accustomed to daily mental prayer. This format sets aside even more time for contemplative prayer. Meanwhile, the guided meditations delve deeper into the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. We tend to offer these **3-4 times a year**.

# STRETCHING THE SOUL

Spend an entire week speaking and listening to Him. Our **six-day experience** gives seasoned retreatants the time, space, and freedom to take ownership of their relationship with the Lord. OLB invites expert preachers from across the country to this special retreat, which is geared toward those who are already familiar with mental prayer, longer periods of silence and the Ignatian spiritual exercises.

In this retreat, moments of preaching are limited and retreatants spend the majority of their time in personal prayer. This is by design, as we are trying to foster an atmosphere in which His love can be felt more acutely. Like in all of our retreats, spiritual direction and confession are always available and encouraged.

This retreat is becoming more and more popular. It is offered at the moment once a year in the summer.

## SEIZING THE DAY

Here you will find solace in a day of silent prayer with limited guidance. An experienced retreat master will guide you to a place of rest with Christ, but cede total control over prayer time to you. We believe this allows the faithful to follow wherever the Holy Spirit leads.

Personal retreat days can be scheduled at your convenience, but generally take place over the course of on a weekday, beginning in the morning and concluding in the late afternoon. One-on-one spiritual direction and guidance from a trained spiritual director is available if desired. For the duration of the experience, the retreatant will have access to a private room outfitted with a bed, desk, and bathroom.



## INSTILLING FAITH IN OUR YOUTH

Weekend retreats for high school students allow young men and women to cultivate a relationship with God and our center from an early age. Organized in conjunction with the Leadership Training Program (LTP) of Washington, DC, these retreats include guided meditations based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, time for personal prayer, mass, and opportunities for confession and spiritual direction.

Typically, teenagers attend these retreats with their peers. Once per year, however, we host retreats for fathers and sons, as well as mothers and daughters.

## WALKING IN HIS FOOTSTEPS — RETREATING IN THE HOLY LAND

Peel back the layers of more than 2000 years of history as you embark upon this uniquely Christ-centered pilgrimage to the Holy Land led by a Legionary priest and sometimes paired with a Diocesan priest and his parish. This trip follows the life of Christ, from where he was born to where he rose. In the Holy Land, we move through the guided meditations in some of the most sacred places on earth — the very place He prayed, walked, and readied himself for the Cross. A typical itinerary for this physically demanding destination retreat includes stops in Bethlehem, Jericho, Nazareth, Jerusalem, Mount Zion, the Western Wall, and much more.

# VIRTUAL SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Covid gave us the opportunity to bring this retreat to many new and experienced retreatants, virtually. We help participants create a sacred space in their home and we help them stay focused during the retreat that spreads over 36-hours from Friday evening to Sunday morning. This offering has allowed for couples to retreat together and in some cases, parents with more mature children. Albeit unconventional, we have learned from our feedback that virtual retreats, like all retreats, have the potential to transform the soul. This past year, we offered a series of silent virtual retreats with themes like creation and redemption, the seven sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the lessons of St. Joseph.

An at-home virtual retreat is a great way for those who may hesitate to dip their toes into this rich font of Faith. Having attended retreats in the past, my initial concern was 'What will it be like to do this from home?' Well, it was wonderful! Despite being amidst my usual surroundings, I was still able to 'retreat' from them. And now I feel my HOME has been extra blessed because the retreat took place here!"

— Suzanne S.

# **Spiritual Direction**

To select participants who leave our retreats hungry for more, our cadre of trained spiritual directors can supply personalized instruction and guidance. The beauty of spiritual direction lies in its potential to heighten our awareness of God's will, even (and perhaps especially) in seasons of life where His plan feels unclear.

Spiritual Direction takes place through an ongoing, one-on-one dialogue between a lay person and an experienced, trained spiritual director, who then work in tandem to realize a closer, more attentive relationship with Christ. Spiritual direction is now offered via Zoom or as tradition, in-person as conditions and schedules allow.

# Other Formation Highlights

### FEEDING YOUR SOUL WITH MONTHLY EVENING RETREATS

To keep people continually engaged in their own spiritual formation, we offer monthly mini-retreats for women, and evenings of reflections for men. All of these gatherings can be enjoyed in-person, when permitted by local mandates, or attended remotely via Zoom. Attendance for our evenings of reflection doubled after we decided to make these talks available online.

# SPIRITS AND SERVICE

Spirits and Service isn't one of our headlining programs, per se, but it should be. Drawing men from various corners of the Washington D.C. area— even those who are marginally living their faith— these men with a mission come together semi-regularly to enjoy a meal together, stay overnight on our campus, and spend the following day working side-by-side in service of the Lord. Thanks to the Spirits and Service crew, thousands of dollars of maintenance and repairs for the Center were mitigated and two new confessionals were built in the chapel at OLB in 2020. For years, our chapel had only one confessional, leading to a long line of penitents. Often, this forced us to create makeshift confessionals in offices and hallways throughout the building.

## STUDY WITH SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

We hope to be offering a speaker series on the horizon at OLB. This builds upon a series of events we've hosted in the past by welcoming subject matter experts from across the globe to share their knowledge at our center. Some of our previous speakers include Father Jacques Phillipe, the beloved French priest and prolific spiritual writer; Steve Auth, the acclaimed author of The Missionary on Wall Street; Andreas Widmer, author of The Pope and the CEO; and Dr. Janet Smith, the influential ethicist, author, and family life expert.

# "Three to Get Married" Marriage Preparation Program

# ONE WEEKEND CAN LAY THE FOUNDATION FOR A LIFETIME OF LOVE.

It's not about planning a wedding. It's about planning a joyful, faith-filled life together, centered on Christ. Our program, stretched across four days, is an immersive way for couples to meet the Pre-Cana requirement and deepen their mutual understanding of the Catholic marriage, its calling, its possibilities, and its challenges.

Boasting an impressive 98.4 percent satisfaction rate, our program draws upon our team's deep well of theoretical, practical, and spiritual wisdom gleaned through years of helping more than 10,000 soon-to-be brides and grooms prepare for the sacrament. We blend the best insights contemporary psychology has to offer with forthright advice from married couples to underscore the centrality of the Catholic Church's teachings. After all, we know that a person's love and knowledge of their future spouse is intimately related to their love and knowledge of God. As one love grows, so must the other. That's why it takes three to get married.

The weekend is peppered with a series of talks, questionnaires, and structured periods for personal reflection and private discussion before concluding on Sunday with a day-long spiritual retreat for the couple. To those who attend, we offer opportunities for confession and Sunday Mass.

You guys have touched our lives in so many ways, we can't even begin to describe since that day we set foot [in] the Three to Get Married program. Since then, we have not been able to stay away, returning for Three to Stay Married, Monthly Women's Reflections, NewlyWeds, and Spirit(s) and Service!"

- Seb and Samantha
- It was such a great experience and led us to wanting to have faith play a greater part of our lives and our marriage."

- Ashley and Andrew

## VIRTUALLY THE SAME

We offer an online "Three to Get Married" program that mirrors the in-person experience, right down to the live speakers and guided discussions. The only difference is that all of the couples and presenters involved are participating remotely via Zoom Pro.

# "Three to STAY Married" Workshops and Retreats LOVE IS PATIENT, LOVE IS KIND.



Like all things beautiful and sacred, a marriage is something to cherish, prune, and protect. Whether you've been married six months or sixty years, it is never too early (or too late) to fortify your bond. "Three to Stay Married" is a curriculum filled with practical and spiritual instruction for couples who want to cultivate a love that grows stronger year after year.

We offer retreats for couples that deepen and strengthen the marriage bond, refresh the elements learned in Three to Get Married, and teach couples to pray together. We even partner with parish priests, bringing our retreats to the couples inside their parish.



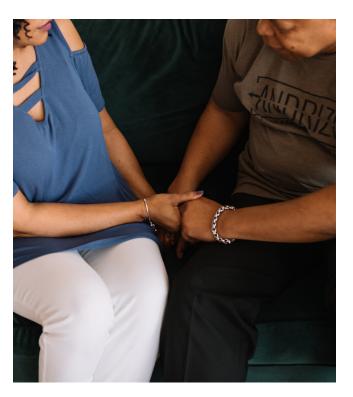
The Three to Stay Married program is a wonderful opportunity for all married couples to deepen their relationship with God and each other. Thank you for providing my husband and I the space and guidance to strengthen our marriage." — Allison
This program exceeded my expectations and I know it will help my marriage." — Connie

These are tools that can lead to a long, happy marriage." — Hank W.

## BACK TO BASICS RETREAT

Our signature marriage program, the "Back to Basics" weekend is a two-day refresher course for couples embarking on their next season of life together. Think of it as a deep-dive into the foundational skills we teach during marriage preparation. It's a chance for couples to laugh, learn, and leave feeling realigned on the essentials: their confidence in the Lord, their love for each other, and the glory of the sacrament.





## COUPLES PRAYER RETREAT

"Solving the Mystery of Prayer in your Marriage" is a two-day retreat created for couples seeking an even deeper level of spiritual intimacy and trust in their marriage. Packed into a convenient weekend itinerary, this program supplements a mix of speaker sessions, questionnaires, and breakout discussions with scheduled time for Eucharistic adoration, celebration of the Mass, and confession. Some of our favorite topics to cover during this retreat include developing your personal prayer style and how to feel more comfortable praying with your spouse.

This retreat has really opened the communication between my husband and I. After 16, almost 17, great years. We needed help in this area. I can say that this retreat has allowed us to become more emotionally intimate than EVER! We were provided with essential tools for communicating our feelings without hurting the other. I was finally able to be vulnerable and we both learned the importance of empathy. This retreat was a GAME CHANGER in our relationship!"

— Angel R.

# GETTING DIGITAL

Adapting to the challenges of a global pandemic is no easy feat. That said, it led our organization to devise new ways for couples to participate in OLB programming while remaining socially distant. From virtual evenings of reflection for married and engaged couples to daylong virtual marriage retreats, we are thrilled to be able to accommodate couples who want to reap the benefits of our workshops and retreats from the comfort and safety of home.

# GO DEEP AND REDISCOVER

A Christ-centered, two-day experience, our "Strengthening Your Marriage" Communication Workshop condenses years of counseling into a single weekend. Offered twice per year, our marriage strengthening workshop has reached 100 couples since its inception in 2019. Guided by an expert team of Catholic therapists, the workshop is a roadmap to healing old wounds, overcoming relationship "ruts," and putting an end to patterns of behavior that leave both parties feeling frustrated and hurt. For couples who are ready to reconnect, forgive, and move forward, this workshop is the perfect place to start.

Adapted for the Catholic couple, this workshop is inspired by Dr. Sue Johnson's best-selling books Hold Me Tight: 7 Conversations for a Lifetime of Love and Created for Connection. Grounded in the tenets of emotionally focused therapy (EFT), this approach creates space for couples to lovingly examine, and eventually repair, broken lines of communication. Opportunities for confession, celebration of the mass, and renewal of Marriage Vows are included in the workshop as well.

# BRING A MARRIAGE RETREAT TO YOUR PARISH

Host one of our daylong marriage enrichment retreats at your parish. We'll assist with promotion for the event, provide printed materials, and supply a roster of expert speakers in subjects such as communication, understanding your spouse's needs, building intimacy in your marriage, and fostering forgiveness.

Many parishes use this event as a stepping stone to usher in a more meaningful level of engagement from couples. For the event, the hosting parish is asked to provide volunteers to plan and carry out the logistical details of the day, including room set-up, and refreshments.



# **Outside Groups**

We create additional opportunities for fellowship by opening our doors to schools, parishes, and professional organizations. Allowing these groups to occupy meeting spaces across our campus enables OLB to make the best use of our center and grounds on days and weekends when our programs aren't in full swing. Our venue can be rented for an evening, a half-day, a full day, or a few days — with or without overnight stay. Schools regularly host day retreats and confirmation retreats on our property. Meanwhile, executives affiliated with the Catholic Business Network continue to meet on a monthly basis at OLB. The pandemic led to a 79 percent decline in reservations for outside groups in 2020, but we remain optimistic about our ability to curtail this downward trend in 2021.

A sample of the outside groups we've hosted in 2020 and previous years includes:

Catholic Business Network (CBN) Royalmont Academy Don Bosco Prep St. Bartholomew Catholic Church Women's Renewal Club St. Joseph Catholic Church Archbishop Carroll High School St. Jane de Chantel School Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church Schoenstatt Apostolic Movement Christ the King Catholic Church

Grace Episcopal Church St. Louis de France Church The Draley family Our Lady of Victory St. Patrick's Catholic Church Porticus Holy Redeemer Cathlic Church Agrupacion Catholica Universitaria Legionaries of Christ Territorial Council and Superiors Connelly School of the Holy Child Contemplative Outreach

# ADAPTING TO COVID-19

Due to the pandemic, we were forced to cancel five in-person retreats. These retreats were originally expected to attract 175 people, a sizable boost in attendance from 88 people in 2019.

Luckily, we found even better ways to reach our community, domestically and internationally. Rather than accept defeat, we supplemented our schedule with nine virtual retreats. Ultimately, these virtual retreats (not including the numbers from our Marriage Programs) attracted 731 registrants from 14 different countries, including Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Ghana, Guatemala, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Panama, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the Philippines, and Venezuela. To underscore this achievement, our pivot to virtual yielded a whopping 318 percent increase beyond our original projection for reach in 2020. Meanwhile, our email database grew by 15 percent to more than 7,600 contacts, who represent an exciting mix of potential customers, donors, and marketers.



#### A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR EMERITUS KATIE LUNDSTROM

In a word, my tenure as interim executive director at Our Lady of Bethesda for the last 18 months has been *illuminating*. Witnessing the determination of our priests, staff, volunteers, and retreatants during this tumultuous time reminded me exactly how loved and needed our programs really are. For many, OLB was a fount of hope in an otherwise challenging year.

In a normal year, the retreat center hums with activity as we prepare for our next event. Within our walls, rooms are being cleaned, food is being prepared, social media posts are being created, participant lists are being managed, marriage assessments are being mailed, homilies are being written, spiritual direction is being given, confessions are being heard, mass is being said, and prayers are being lifted up. If you were to walk around



our grounds, you might also see landscapes being manicured, youth running around, rosary walks meandering up the driveway, and wildlife roaming the many acres of our property. In a pandemic year, the same things had to occur virtually through Zoom meetings, email, and cloud file sharing. Face masks, of course, had to be worn while in person at the center. But our staff adjusted instantly and seized the moment to feed weary souls and take care of other needs at the retreat center.

That said, our small but mighty team relied heavily on volunteer support. To formalize our network of diligent volunteers, we launched an Ambassador program last year.

It has been a privilege to help the retreat center remain so alive during this time, amid ever-changing local and state mandates. It moved me to see how sacrificially our priests and staff cared for our mission and the people who encountered it. Without them, OLB would be little more than a quiet place of contemplation, if not just a beautiful plot of land with a building on it. Thanks to their dedicated love for souls and our Lord, it is so much more.

#### PAST EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

1993-2004 Fr. Richard Gill, LC 2004-2016 Fr. John Hopkins, LC 2016-2018 Fr. John Paul Durán, LC 2018-2020 Katie Lundstrom (interim) 2020 Fr. Daniel Pajerski, LC

# CONTACT

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# BECOME AN AMBASSADOR

As an Ambassador, you donate your time, talent, and/or treasure if you are called. Your donation makes it possible for us to continue providing exceptional marriage/retreat experiences for anyone. Your generosity allows our center to support our staff, priests, cover the cost of technology, and subsidize a variety of other fixed and ongoing needs. No donation of time, talent or treaure is too small to make a difference. If you support us financially, know that we spend every dollar with intention.

Help us secure a future for Our Lady of Bethesda. Together, we can share the gospel message of love, mercy, and grace with the world.

Give of your time and talents, find out how at: ourladyofbethesda.org/donate/join-olb-ambassador-team

Give via our <u>website</u>: Make a recurring monthly donation by visiting our website's donation page. Your donation will be gratefully received each month and it is simple to stop your recurring donation at any time. One-time donations are accepted and greatly appreciated as well.

Give via Venmo: Send your donation to @OLBinDC.

Give by mail: If you'd prefer to send a donation by check, please make the check payable to Our Lady of Bethesda Retreat Center and mail it to...

Our Lady of Bethesda Retreat Center, Attn: Fr. Daniel Pajerski, 7007 Bradley Blvd., Bethesda, MD 20817

# CONTACT

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