Shaped to Serve

A Retreat for Church Staff and Volunteers
Jane L. Fryar
The mission of CTA is to glorify God by providing purposeful products that lift up and encourage the body of Christ—because we love him.

Shaped to Serve
A Retreat for Church Staff and Volunteers

Jane L. Fryar

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If this retreat planner proves to be helpful to you, we would like to hear from you. Your words will encourage us! If you have suggestions for us to consider as we create ministry helps like this in the future, please send those, too. You can reach us at:

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## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting Started</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggested Schedule</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening Worship and Prayer Time</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leader Notes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 1: What Are You Making?</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 2: Shaped to Serve</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 3: Tools of the Trade</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 4: The First Firing</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 5: The Final Firing</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Setting for Life-Changing Ministry</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant Handouts</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 1: What Are You Making?</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 2: Shaped to Serve</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 3: Tools of the Trade</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 4: The First Firing</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 5: The Final Firing</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Setting for Life-Changing Ministry</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Getting Started

This guide will help you plan a simple, one-day retreat for any staff or volunteer servant group in your congregation or Christian organization. It will take between five and seven hours to present. It can be shortened or expanded to fit your needs. See the suggested schedule and ideas for adapting it on page 5.

The retreat is based on the book *Shaped to Serve* (Item #STS7SC), which you can order by calling 1-800-999-1874 or going to www.CTAinc.com and typing the title in the search box. **Each participant will need a copy of this book.** As a treat for your participants, consider the added value of the book packaged with the pen (Item #STS7DGS) for use during the retreat and as a reminder of the overarching theme and its encouragement after the retreat concludes.

While intended for groups from 8 to 30 participants, the materials in this retreat guide can be adapted for larger or smaller groups. Church councils, professional ministry staffs, elder or deacon boards, Sunday school or Christian day school teams, and a variety of other groups in the congregation will benefit from participating in this retreat.

**Retreat Goals**

Under the Holy Spirit’s blessing, participants will

- explore the ways the Lord shapes them for the service to which he has appointed them;
- gain new skills useful in their own personal faith journey and as they serve and lead others;
- be encouraged in their service and more eager to pursue it;
- set specific goals for the upcoming year of ministry (optional); and
- support and encourage each another as they serve the Lord Jesus by serving his people.

**Details, Details**

If you and your group are new to retreat planning, many helpful guidebooks will walk you through the details. Visit your local Christian bookstore or log on to your favorite online bookseller and type “Christian retreat planning” in the search engine.

On the other hand, if you have participated in a few retreats or have planned them previously, you will probably be able to think through the accommodations aspect of the retreat on your own.

In either case, someone will need to arrange for these amenities:

- Reservations at a suitable location (for example, a retreat center, motel meeting room, lakeside cabin, or, if you have no other options, your church fellowship hall)
- Prayer for leaders and participants before, during, and after the retreat
- Transportation to the location, if appropriate
- Hospitality, including setting up tables, chairs, and other necessary services—note that round tables would best facilitate the small-group discussions outlined below
- Goodie bags with mementoes of the event and gifts to keep the experience alive in their memory (see page 6 for some suggestions; for gift items, go to www.CTAinc.com and type “Shaped to Serve” in the search box)
• Signage to be posted in the retreat area, as necessary

• “Welcome packets” including the retreat schedule, pen(s), paper, appropriate contact phone numbers (as necessary), information about the retreat center, and other necessary “housekeeping details”

• Meals and snacks

• Invitations to be extended to the appropriate participants

• Program, including coordination of a presenter or facilitator and plans for worship and music

As you think about leadership responsibilities, consider engaging an outside presenter, especially if you intend to use the retreat as part of your yearly planning process. That way, church staff and volunteers can all participate more fully.

You will also need one local go-to person who is willing to coordinate the details listed above and answer questions as they arise from potential registrants.

**Suggested Schedule**

This retreat guide assumes the schedule below. By adjusting the schedule a bit, you may shorten or lengthen the retreat to meet the needs of your group.

To extend it, plan to include a “getting acquainted” activity or icebreaker as the day begins. (If you need ideas for these, search for “Christian icebreakers” online.) If you plan an overnight stay at the retreat site, schedule the icebreaker and some extended worship time after all (or most) participants have arrived.

To shorten the schedule, omit one or more of the sessions or allow only 30–45 minutes for lunch.

If time allows and your getaway purpose includes yearly planning, you may want to use the optional session “Goal Setting for Life-Changing Ministry.” Depending on the scope of the planning you intend to do, this session can take from one to three hours or more. It will probably fit best between Sessions 4 and 5. Adjust the schedule below to accommodate this. If you decide to omit one of the other sessions to make more time for strategic planning, consider working through Session 4 in some other setting after the retreat or leave it out altogether.

**Saturday Morning**

8:15    Continental Breakfast
9:00    Opening Worship and Prayer Time
9:20    Session 1: What Are You Making?
10:10   Break
10:40   Session 2: Shaped to Serve
11:45   Lunch
Saturday Afternoon

1:00 Session 3: Tools of the Trade
2:00 Session 4: The First Firing
2:45 Break
3:00 Goal Setting for Life-Changing Ministry (optional)
4:30 Session 5: The Final Firing
5:00 Departure

Opening Worship and Prayer Time

*Large-group session—15–20 minutes*

Read the Ministry Message “Shaped to Serve” found at www.CTAinc.com/FreeResources or adapt the content to your purpose and present it.

If you intend to present mementos of the retreat to participants, this would be a good time to distribute them. For example, in addition to the devotion book *Shaped to Serve*, which each participant will need, you may want to give other items from CTA’s *Shaped to Serve* line. See your CTA catalog or visit the CTA website at www.CTAinc.com for details. Type “Shaped to Serve” in the search box.

Shaped to Serve Mini Clay Pot Gift Set #STS7GS

Shaped to Serve Mug with free devotion book #STS7DM

Shaped to Serve Travel Mug #STS7MG

Shaped to Serve Pocket Piece #STS7PC

Shaped to Serve Clipboard w/ Notepad #STS7NP

Shaped to Serve Tote Bag #STS7TB

Shaped to Serve Pen and Bookmark Gift Set #STS7ST
Leader Notes

Session 1: What Are You Making?
50–60 minutes

The discussion guide for this session is printed on pages 11–12 of this guide. You will need to duplicate one copy for each participant present.

Unless you have preassigned small groups, participants will need to form them (four to six individuals in each group). Be on the lookout for participants who seem unconnected to others. Introduce them to peers they may not know and with whom they have something in common—personally, professionally, or in their service for your church. Do what you can to help everyone fit into an appropriate group.

Then distribute the discussion guides for this session. Make sure each group has roughly the same number of people. Explain that the groups will have about an hour to complete this activity.

Have each group choose a discussion leader and explain that this person will guide the group through the questions, keeping track of the time. Other group members are responsible for listening carefully to one another's comments and adding thoughtful, helpful responses themselves. Stress that this “leader” is not the “teacher” but someone to keep the group moving along through the material.

When about five minutes of the session remain, announce this for the benefit of all the groups. When time has fully expired, call for everyone’s attention; ask for insights, comments, or questions; and respond appropriately.

Leader Notes

Session 2: Shaped to Serve
50–60 minutes

The discussion guide handout for this session is found on pages 13–14. Duplicate copies of this guide, one for each participant.

Participants will work in the same small groups throughout the retreat, so if you’ve taken a break, ask that all rejoin their group.

Distribute the handout for this session. Explain that the groups will have about an hour for this activity.

Encourage group facilitators to keep track of time and keep discussion moving along as per the “time budget” indicated on the discussion sheet. Remind everyone that the other group members are responsible for listening carefully to one another’s comments and adding thoughtful, helpful responses themselves.

Note: You may want to encourage groups to share the facilitator role, changing leadership from session to session. That way, everyone can more fully participate and, we hope, derive maximum benefit from your time together.

When about five minutes remain, call everyone’s attention to that fact. Then, when time has fully expired, call for everyone’s attention. Ask for insights, comments, or questions. Respond appropriately.
Leader Notes
Session 3: Tools of the Trade
50–60 minutes

The discussion guide handout for this session is found on pages 15–16. Distribute one copy to each participant.

Have each group identify a facilitator for this session and remind group members to listen carefully to one another’s comments, adding thoughtful, helpful responses themselves. Remind everyone that facilitators are not “teachers.” Rather, they are to keep discussion moving along as per the “time budget” indicated on the discussion sheet. They should invite everyone to add thoughts and comments as time will allow.

Note that the first part of the session is designed for small-group work; the last 30 minutes or so are set aside as an opportunity for participants to read, think, and pray individually. You might invite participants to find a comfortable place to do that somewhere in the building or on the retreat grounds where they can work through the material more privately.

Set a time at which you want them to return and let them dismiss themselves when the small-group portion of the activity is finished.

Ask everyone to reassemble when about 5 minutes of the session remain. This will allow for the “partnering up” discussion described on the handout.

When the partner prayer time seems to be completed, call for the group’s attention. Ask for insights, comments, or questions. Respond appropriately.

Leader Notes
Session 4: The First Firing
40–45 minutes

The discussion guide handout for this session is found on pages 17–18. Distribute one copy to each participant.

As before, have each group identify a facilitator for this session and remind group members to listen carefully to one another’s comments, adding thoughtful, helpful responses themselves. Facilitators are to keep discussion moving along as per the “time budget” indicated on the discussion sheet.

Leader Notes
Session 5: The Final Firing
Small-group session—about 30 minutes

Proceed as in previous sessions, distributing one copy of the discussion guide handout from pages 19–20 to each participant.

Then, as this session ends, sing a hymn or song of thanksgiving to God as a wrap-up for the entire retreat experience. If a pastoral leader is present and wishes to speak a blessing over the group, by all means take advantage of this!
Leader Notes

Goal Setting for Life-Changing Ministry (optional)

Depending on what you want to accomplish, this session can take from one to three hours or more.

Before the Retreat

Think and plan carefully for this session. Unless you lay a careful foundation ahead of time, the strategic planning portion of any retreat will be the least satisfactory part of the event. With some advance planning, however, a retreat setting can prove one of the best ways to evaluate various strategic options, choose one, and begin its implementation. Here are some steps you can take to heighten the value of this session:

1. A week or two before the retreat, give each participant a copy of what you hope to achieve when you are together. (For example, “We will develop a vision for our shut-in ministry efforts, plan training activities for those who serve our shut-ins, and make assignments to individuals based on our plans.”) Or, if you want to involve participants in shaping the goals for the planning session itself, in your pre-retreat publicity ask participants to “bring along the one or two big issues you want us to address in your area of responsibility.”

2. As you open this session at the retreat, review what you hope to accomplish, outline the steps you will take as you address the day’s goals, and then follow your plan. Write each step on poster paper or on a whiteboard and post it in plain sight. If the group gets off-track during the conversation or begins delving too deeply into details, draw them back by pointing to the poster and inviting everyone to refocus.

3. Make sure each individual will leave the retreat with specific assignments, deadlines, and a reporting or other accountability process. (Note: intermediate checkpoints along the way will keep longer-term, more ambitious projects moving ahead.)

4. Before you print out the worksheet for this session (pages 20–21), adapt it to meet your group’s needs and goals.

During the Session

Depending upon the size of your group and your purpose for this activity, decide whether to work in small groups or as a “committee of the whole.” Let form follow function as you make this decision.

If you have six to twelve participants and everyone will work together to make plans for the same purpose (for example, this year’s approach to youth ministry or cementing in place a long-term vision for the congregation), you will likely want to work together.

If the group is larger or if various interests are represented (for example, leaders from your children’s ministry, members of the elder or deacon board, people involved in community outreach, and those who carry out shut-in ministry), you may want to form small groups based on ministry focus.

1. To begin, rehearse the goal(s) you have set and shared ahead of time. Answer any questions and allow participants to suggest ways to strengthen the goal(s) you have set.

If you haven’t already shared a preexisting goal, work with the group to brainstorm an appropriate goal for the time allotted.
2. Next, work your way through the handout you have adapted from the sample for goal setting (pages 20–21).

3. When about 15 minutes remain, ask that the group divide the tasks and set deadlines for each task. Be sure everyone who receives an assignment knows when and how to report progress. Larger tasks should include intermediate checkpoints and deadlines.

4. As you close this part of the retreat, flow as seamlessly as possible into Session 5: The Final Firing.
1. **(10 minutes)** Think about an experience you have had with clay. It might be drawn from that ceramics class you took at a local community college years ago. It might come from your battle to make the soil in your garden more usable. It might even relate to the teacup you created as a Christmas gift for Mom when you were in fourth grade.

   - Jot some notes about that experience here.

2. **(10 minutes)** The Bible is full of stories and imagery drawn from everyday encounters with clay, pottery, and the world of pottery makers. This is not surprising since nearly every village in Bible times would have had at least one potter. Still today in that region, archeologists unearth more pottery shards than any other artifact.

   - Ask a volunteer in your group to read aloud Isaiah 45:9 (above). Then, if possible, read this verse again, several times from several Bible versions, perhaps using the Bible app on your cell phone.

   - How would you explain what this verse means to someone who had never heard it before?

   - Do you see this verse as Bad News or Good News, as the Law of God that condemns us or the Gospel of the love that led Jesus to die for sinners? Explain.
3. (15 minutes) Find the devotion “What Are You Making?” on pages 5–7 of Shaped to Serve. Ask a volunteer to read it aloud while others in your group follow along or listen closely with their eyes closed.

- How would you summarize the author’s main point?
- When God created mountains, marine life, and monkeys, he simply spoke them into existence. When God created Adam, he “formed the man of dust from the ground” (Genesis 2:7). What does this difference imply?
- How does Isaiah 43:1 connect this personal act of “formation” and the love God has for his human creations?

4. (5 minutes) With this in mind, reread Isaiah 45:9.

- The question here is rhetorical. The obvious answer is a resounding “No!” The clay does not question the potter, nor does it critique his work. But God’s human creations do question and critique at times, don’t we?
- In what circumstances are you most likely to do so?
- How does the author describe the Creator’s two options in response to our rebellion?
- How does God’s gracious resolve to rescue, forgive, and restore you because of what Jesus did for you on the cross bring you peace of mind and heart?

5. (10 minutes) Our Lord has saved us, not to set us on a shelf, but to honor us by choosing to work through us to serve others.

- How does 2 Corinthians 4:7 picture this? How does this picture encourage you?
- Do you see your service as a “got to” or a “get to”? Explain.
- What difference does that perspective make?

Closing: Have a volunteer in your group pray aloud the prayer from page 12 of Shaped to Serve and then read the words of Psalm 139 printed on page 13.

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But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.  
Isaiah 64:8

1. (10 minutes) A lump of clay that lies on the shelf in the potter’s shed remains just that—a lump of clay. It’s not especially beautiful. It certainly is not useful. It must be formed, fired, glazed, and fired again to become a creation both strong and beautiful.

   • Think about someone whose “formation” process you have closely observed. Perhaps your thoughts turn to a son or daughter, perhaps to a member of your youth group or a co-worker, perhaps someone you have served in some other capacity.

In the space below, jot down some observations about the formation process the Lord used as he acted in that person’s life. How did the Master Potter work? How did he use his Word?

   • Without naming the person you have in mind, share the observations you just recorded.

   • Based on what everyone in the group shared, what generalizations can you draw about the skills and process of the Potter? about the responses of the “clay”?

2. (15–20 minutes) Listen or follow along as a volunteer reads the devotion “Shaped to Serve” from pages 15–17 in Shaped to Serve.

   • Summarize the author’s main point.

   • What happens when a pot or vase is not centered on the potter’s wheel? Why?

   • What happens when a life is not centered on Christ? Why?

   • What happens when our service for Jesus is not centered on Jesus? Give an example, drawn from your own experience. What did you learn from that experience?

3. (10 minutes) Skim back through the devotion you just heard, noting the Bible passages quoted there.

   • Explain how each passage is relevant to the centering process the devotion describes.
• What alternative “centers” do we as Christ’s servants sometimes choose? What can make these seem so attractive—at least momentarily?

• Tell about a time Jesus gently drew you back to himself, your true center.

• Read “Lumps of Clay” from page 19. What makes this truth essential for those of us whom God calls as his helpers in the faith formation process?

4. **(10 minutes)** Which of the promises from pages 20–21 encourages you most as you consider the Potter’s work in your own life and in the lives of those you serve in his name?

**Closing:** Read the prayer on page 22 aloud in unison as you close. Then read Psalm 62:5–8 from page 23 silently as you continue to pray individually.

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1. (5 minutes) Think about your work for pay or about a cherished hobby.

- What are the tools of your trade, the tools you use regularly as you pursue your work or hobby? List them here. These may be actual objects like wrenches or measuring spoons. Or they may be less tangible, like a software program or mathematical formulas.

- Share your list of tools with your group. Then describe the ultimate product that results from your use of these tools (for example, a well-tuned piano, fresh garden produce, thoughtful data analysis white papers).

- Who benefits from the ways you use the tools of your trade? Help each other make each of your lists as long as possible.

2. (5 minutes) Read Jeremiah 18:4 (above).

- What process does this verse describe?

- Why did the potter start over? What purpose did this new start serve?

- Does anything like this ever happen as you use the tools of your trade?
3. (10 minutes) The devotion “Tools of the Trade” (pages 25–27) in Shaped to Serve explores these ideas in more depth. Have a volunteer from your group read it aloud as the rest of you follow along or lean back and simply listen.

- Reread the four “discouragers” (bullet points) the author suggests as common among those who serve Jesus as church volunteers or staff. What others might you add to this list?

- As you serve, which of these most often challenges you personally?

- What comfort does the author suggest from God’s Word?

- How else does the Lord comfort you when you feel discouraged in your service? What Scriptures, people, or activities does he use? As you listen, make notes of new ideas you could plan to use yourself.

4. (25 minutes) “Listening to the Potter” on pages 28–29 of Shaped to Serve includes questions intended as thought starters.

- Move away from your group and find a quiet space where you can work on your own, writing responses to these questions.

- When about five minutes remain in this session, partner up with someone from your small group. Share with your partner one big idea and one big “Thanks, Lord” sparked by this process.

**Closing:** Pray with your partner, perhaps using the prayer on page 32.
1. (5 minutes) Read Job 23:10 (above). What does this promise mean to you personally? As you answer, consider what it would mean for you to be “golden.” How has Jesus made this possible?

2. (15 minutes) Ask a volunteer to read “The First Firing” from pages 35–37 in Shaped to Serve.
   
   • What key point does the author make?
   
   • When some Christians think about God’s refining fires, earthly troubles often come to mind first—sickness, unemployment, relationship struggles, and the like. In contrast, what does the author suggest about another way the Potter can “turn up the heat”?
   
   • Tell about a time the Word of God—in a sermon, through a Christian friend, or by a Scripture passage you explored on your own—produced a refining effect in your life.
   
   • What makes the refining process uncomfortable?
   
   • What makes the refining process necessary?

3. (5 minutes) All Christians undergo a process of refinement. What makes this process especially necessary and helpful in the lives of those who are actively serving the Savior by serving those around us?

4. (10 minutes) Think back to the incident you described in your discussion of question #2 (above). How did the Lord use that refining experience to form in you a more humble, more effective servant heart?
5. **(5 minutes)** Read the Scriptures on pages 40–41 in *Shaped to Serve*. What additional insights do you personally gain from them?

**Closing:** As you close, use the prayer and the Scripture verse from pages 42–43 as a starting point for prayer with the members of your small group. Take turns praying or ask a volunteer to pray aloud while the rest of you pray silently.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; 
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; 
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, 
and the flame shall not consume you.

Isaiah 43:2

1. (15 minutes) Begin this discussion by reading “The Last Firing” from pages 45–47 in Shaped to Serve. As we saw in Session 4, the Holy Spirit uses his Word to refine his servants. This devotion adds another dimension to the Potter’s refining fires.

- Troubles, temptations, and trials enter everyone’s life—Christians and unbelievers alike. Tell about a time you saw God’s Word transform a fiery trial into a time of strengthening for a believer, perhaps someone to whom you ministered. (Of course, you will want to maintain confidentiality as you share.)

- Where do those who don’t know Jesus find strength in times of trouble? Why is it a mistake to assume that trouble will necessarily crush or defeat them? What light does Psalm 73 shed on this?

- Someone has observed, “Troubles will make you either better or bitter.” Do you agree? Explain.

- What direction does this offer as we pray for and minister to people undergoing outwardly difficult challenges—believers and not-yet believers, too?

2. (10 minutes) Read “Team Works” from page 49 in Shaped to Serve. Talk about the questions there, especially sharing with one another thoughts about practical ways members of your small group can support and encourage one another in an ongoing way throughout the months ahead.

Closing: Use the prayer on page 52 as you close this session. Ask a volunteer to pray it aloud, or pray it aloud in unison.

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Our ongoing mission:

Our goals for the year ahead:
Note: Your goals for any given year should be designed in such a way as to advance the mission on which the Lord Jesus has sent you! They should do this in the best way possible, given the opportunities, challenges, and resources the Lord has made available.

Activities to achieve these goals:
Assignments, checkpoints, and accountability:

Communicating our goals:
Who will share the goals you have set and the plans you have made with your pastor, governance board, and others on the church or organization leadership team who need to know? How and when will this happen?

Note: Before you close, go back to assign leadership responsibility and deadlines. Ink these in, along with intermediate checkpoints for each significant action step. Remember, those in charge of the activities need not actually do the tasks themselves. Instead, these leaders serve by recruiting, equipping, encouraging, and coaching others who volunteer for the tasks.

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