

# Frequently Asked Questions about Solitary Retreats

## **What do people do on solitary retreats?**

Your daily practices and meditation schedule on retreat will be determined in consultation with Fred prior to retreat or upon your arrival. Generally, one does eight or more hours of meditation and focused study in four sessions a day, i.e., before breakfast, mid-morning, mid-afternoon, and evening. There is time for sleep, meals, relaxation, bathing, and exercise. On retreat you maintain complete silence, except when talking with Fred. You will not leave FCM grounds during your retreat.

## **What is the length of a solitary retreat? Arrival/Departure?**

The minimum retreat is three nights, while the maximum is seven nights. Retreatants arrive mid to late afternoon on their first day and depart by late morning on their last day. You need to arrange your arrival and departure times in advance with FCM's Resident Caretaker, David Braasch, who will meet you at the center, give you the code for entering Great Cloud Refuge, and orient you to the building. Once your arrival time is set, you need to share it with Fred so that he can set a time for your initial meeting with him.

## **What kind of support is available for solitary retreats?**

There will be at least a once daily consultation with Fred.

## **What are the accommodations at Great Cloud Refuge?**

You will be assigned your own room in Great Cloud Refuge, where you will spend most of your time. Typically 2-4 people will be in residence for solitary retreat at GCR at the same time, each with their own room. Each room has 2 twin beds with pillows and comforters; clothes hangers & rods; towel rods; vanity sink with several drawers below the sink; zafu, zabuton, and chair for sitting meditation. Rooms do not have an altar. **No burning of incense or striking of matches is allowed due to the sensitivity of the fire alarm system.** Each floor of GCR has several restrooms (toilet & sink) and shower rooms. You will be assigned one restroom and one shower room to use and keep clean during your stay.

Each floor of GCR also has a "solo-meditation" room equipped with a reclining lounge chair and tray table. These solo-meditation rooms are for sitting meditation and for eating. Eating is not allowed in assigned rooms where people stay during retreat. All solitary retreatants will eat either in a solo-meditation room or on the GCR screened porch. When not in use for eating meals, you may bring your zafu and zabuton into a solo-meditation room temporarily for a period of sitting meditation.

You will store and prepare food in the GCR kitchenette, which is equipped with a refrigerator (including freezer compartment), microwave, 2-burner hotplate, pitcher to filter drinking water; cookware, tableware, utensils, etc.--the basics needed to prepare a simple meal, store left-overs, wash dishes and clean up. The refrigerator in FCM's main kitchen may be used for overflow food storage when more than 2 people are in residence for solitary retreat at a time. You will eat either in one of the two solo-meditation rooms in GCR or outside on the screened porch. Eating in assigned rooms where people stay during retreat is not permitted. Except during scheduled meal times, first and second-floor solo meditation rooms also may be used for sitting meditation.

## **What other indoor & outdoor spaces on the FCM campus may be used?**

You may meditate in the main meditation hall during daylight hours when the hall is **not** being used for other FCM programs, such as morning, evening, or Sunday meditation. The two "solo-meditation" rooms in GCR (one on each floor) may be used for meditation except during scheduled meal times. There is also a lovely space at the third-floor level of GCR where one person can sit for meditation, and this space is available 24/7.

You may do walking meditation outside anywhere on FCM grounds, including the garden and GCR screened porch. You may do sitting meditation outdoors in the garden using plastic sheeting to protect cushions.

**What do I need to bring (and not bring) with me?**

Adequate **vegan** food and drink for your entire stay. Pitchers with filtered tap water are provided in the GCR kitchenette. Please note that no dairy or animal products other than honey are permitted on campus.

Unless you are arriving by air, bring your own **linens** (sheets and pillowcase) for a twin bed and **towels**. Each bed has a pillow and comforter, but you may bring your own blankets and pillow, if preferred. If coming from a distance that does not allow you to bring your own linens and towels, supplies available in GCR linen closets may be used during retreat and laundered before departure.

Bring personal **cosmetic and hygiene articles**. If needed, bring your personal **meditation paraphernalia** (a mat and cushion are provided). Due to highly sensitive fire & smoke alarms, **incense and burning of incense is not allowed**.

All **electronic devices should be powered off** before being brought into GCR for safe storage out-of-sight during your retreat. Cell phones may be used during retreat only for true medical, safety, or building emergencies. Family members and work colleagues should be told that you will be unavailable during your retreat stay. An emergency number will be furnished to you for sharing with family members or emergency contacts.

**Do not bring** extraneous reading materials or journals. No alcohol, drugs, smoking/vaping paraphernalia, or pets allowed. With the exception of honey, no food or beverages containing meat or animal products.

**What are the food and cooking arrangements?**

Retreatants are expected to bring adequate **vegan** food (no animal products except for honey) for their retreat. Obviously, foods that are simple, nutritious and easily prepared are best. You will store and prepare food in the GCR kitchenette, which is equipped with a refrigerator (including freezer compartment), microwave, 2-burner hotplate, pitcher to filter tap water; cookware, tableware, utensils, etc.--all the basics needed to prepare a simple meal and store left-overs. The refrigerator in FCM's main kitchen may be used as needed for overflow food storage when more than two people are in residence for solitary retreat at a time. You will eat either in one of the two "solo-meditation" rooms in GCR, which are equipped with a tray table and lounge chair, or on the GCR screened porch. Eating is not permitted in assigned rooms where people stay during retreat.

**Will I be alone in Great Cloud Cottage?**

You will have your own assigned room (no roommate), but there may be others staying in GCR for solitary retreat or in residence at the same time as you. When more than one person is in solitary retreat, times for meal preparation, cleanup, and eating in the "solo-meditation" rooms will be assigned to you when you enter GCR, and the meal prep/eating schedule posted in the kitchenette and outside the 1st floor "solo-meditation" room. **All solitary retreatants are expected to keep noble silence at all times.** If absolutely necessary to communicate with someone, you may hand that person a short written note.

**What are cleaning arrangements?**

On the morning of departure, retreatants are expected to clean their rooms, their assigned bathroom and shower room, and the solo-meditation room that they used for eating. All food and beverages stored in the kitchenette and refrigerator must be removed. The kitchenette should be tidied, and the sink and countertops cleaned. All FCM linens, towels, cleaning rags, etc. used should be laundered and put back where they were found. As there is no staff, we are trying to minimize costs by making solitary retreat spaces "self-cleaning."

**How much does a solitary retreat cost?**

The daily rate is \$35, with a minimum stay of three nights and a maximum stay of seven nights. The daily rate covers expenses of maintaining the retreat spaces and does not include Dana for the teacher, which may be given directly to Fred by check or offered online. Limited scholarships are available for those with financial need and may be requested as part of the retreat scheduling process.

**Where is Great Cloud Cottage?**

Great Cloud Cottage is located in Tampa on the campus of the FCM Practice Center at 6501 N. Nebraska Ave, 33604, which is at the corner of N. Nebraska Ave. and Lambright Street.

**How do I schedule a solitary retreat?**

You may ask to schedule a solitary retreat at any time during the year. Please see detailed instructions for requesting a solitary retreat on the Solitary Retreat Page of FCM's website.

Updated January 2024