



Guidelines for Participant Interviews



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For co-facilitators of Engaging Spirituality.

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GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS

I will listen to what God will say; a promise of peace for the people. Psalm 85:8

Take a few moments to read and reflect on these pages
BEFORE interviewing potential participants.

A Gracious Demand

Engaging Spirituality is a gracious invitation, a gift and an opportunity. Like any precious gift it comes with a cost – it asks for a personal commitment to grow and change. This is not “spirituality-on-demand,” but rather a demanding spirituality which runs counter to cultural expectations of entitlement.

God is not only a power we depend on. Ours is a God who demands.
Abraham Heschel

Anyone wishing to participate in an Engaging Spirituality group needs to schedule a short interview with the co-facilitators.

Ideally both co-facilitators are present for each interview.

A Personal Invitation

The 15 - 20 minute visit with each applicant represents the culmination of the discernment process. Engaging Spirituality participants are *personally invited* and expected to *personally respond*, offering clear indications of their readiness, and an awareness of the challenges and possibilities involved in making this commitment.

An Enthusiastic Response

During the **Introductory Presentation** remind everyone that a follow-up interview is required for those hoping to participate in Engaging Spirituality. Offer some dates and times when both co-facilitators are available (*such as Sundays after church*).

The personal interview is scheduled at the behest of each applicant, upon his or her own initiative. It should not be necessary to pursue applicants or remind them about the interview requirement. Trust in the impetus of the Spirit at work in our lives to motivate candidates who are ready.

Encourage candidates to schedule their interviews no later than three weeks before the intended start date of your Engaging Spirituality group.



Outline for Participant Interviews

Participant numbers are limited for this small-group process (8 - 10). Rather than making decisions on a first-come basis, candidates enter a process of discernment; consciously opening their hearts, to probe the urging of the Spirit amid the exigencies of their lives.

Aims of the Participant Interview

Over the course of this prayerful conversation applicants communicate:

- *the result of their discernment*
- *their interest in Engaging Spirituality*
- *their questions about the process*

The interview also helps co-facilitators gauge the level of commitment, motivation and appropriateness of each candidate.

Before the Interview

Make a Listening Space

Listening is the highest form of love. Paul Tillich

The interview is an exercise in prayerful listening. Choose a location (at church or at home) where you will be undisturbed.



Have a candle, a Bible and a copy of these pages and the **Participant Discernment Process** on hand.

Anticipate the arrival of the applicant by spending a few moments together in quiet preparation.



During the Interview

Set the Tone

All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ. St. Benedict



Light a candle and invite everyone into silence.

Read a Psalm or share a short prayer.

Introduce yourselves to the applicant.

Spend time getting to know each other.

Describe how you came to make the commitment to be co-facilitators.

Share some of your hopes and expectations as well the challenges involved in making this commitment.

Explain ...

The purpose of the interview is for applicants and facilitators to get to know each other, and help discern together whether Engaging Spirituality is a fit for the applicants.

Invite Sharing

Focus on listening attentively to the person who has come with expectations and concerns. Invite the candidate to respond to any of these questions:

- *What prompted you to attend the introductory session?*
- *What would you like to share from your discernment?*
- *What questions or concerns do you have?*

Leave room for silence.

Be gentle and direct with questions.

Candidates should feel invited but not pressured to share.

Give clear indications that you are listening and attentive.

Share the dates and times you have scheduled for Engaging Spirituality sessions.

If time permits open a dialogue on the following:

- *Who would you define as a spiritual mentor, saint, role model?*
- *What has been the focus of your personal prayer in these days?*
- *What scripture passage or spiritual reading sustains you?*
- *What current social reality has captured your heart?*

After 15 - 20 minutes, close the interview with a moment of silence and a short prayer of thanksgiving.

Inform the applicant that you will be in touch in the coming days.



After the Interview

When the applicant leaves, spend a few minutes in silence before sharing your reflections on the interview.

What did you hear?

- *receptivity*
- *excitement*
- *personal openness*
- *a desire to grow mixed with holy anxiety ...?*

Pay attention to your intuition.

Test out your feelings with each other.

and your thoughts in prayer and dialogue.

Make no decisions in the afterglow of the moment.

Talk to each other after a day has passed.

Indications of Readiness

- *motivation and emotional maturity*
- *desire to grow in faith*
- *flexibility*
- *commitment to spiritual awakening*
- *developing social awareness*
- *willingness to be led and surrender to a group process...*

Causes for Concern

- *rigidity*
- *struggle with over-commitment*
- *clearly-stated theological or social agenda*
- *a domineering personality*
- *claims of personal authority*
- *difficulty in sharing...*



Responding to Applicants

Engaging Spirituality

- ... is an invitation into mystery that clarifies our sense of self, reinforces our link to God, deepens our connection to others.
- ... is a voluntary response, an intention to live more spaciously and gracefully.
- ... weaves people into community to walk the discipleship path of personal AND social transformation.
- ... demands a commitment of time, an openness to grow together and the desire to be compassionately involved in this world.

Keep in Mind

This process is challenging and counter-cultural. Applicants should demonstrate enthusiasm for spiritual deepening as well as serious interest in Gospel justice. Motivated people tend to over-commit and spread their lives thinly. Avoid accepting applicants to bolster the number of participants – better 6 committed people than 10 willing to “give it a try.”
Respond to the applicant within the week following the interview.

What if an applicant is clearly not a good fit?

Discernment involves sounding out our perceptions and self-deceptions with other caring and committed people. Begin with the assumption that the applicant is responding to the movement of the Spirit in his or her life. Occasionally someone will express an interest without being fully aware of the demands and focus of the process, and may not be ready or willing to surrender to a group process.

If someone expresses...

- *serious concerns about the time commitment*
- *distaste for outreach ministry*
- *disinterest in action for justice*
- *low regard for the value for of prayer...*

...gently but clearly invite the applicant to consider other options.

Be caring and truthful when informing someone who has not been accepted.

Seasoned by Life

Since it deals with the losses and longings that often surface in mid-to-later life, Engaging Spirituality is most suited to adults who have accrued some significant life experience.

**Remember: Engaging Spirituality is an invitation, an opportunity, a gift.
No-one is required, nor is anyone entitled, to participate.**