

COMMON GROUND

Resources for Optional Additional Meetings

Discussion Questions

Prompt 1: Encounters with Difference

Check-in Question: In one word or phrase answer the following question: What is one thing/person that has been an anchor for you this week?

After completing the check-in question, allow each person 3-5 minutes to answer the discussion question, uninterrupted. Afterwards group members can ask follow up questions, clarification, offer appreciation or affirmations.

1. What is a significant encounter you've had with someone who orients around religion differently than you? What was significant about this encounter and what did you learn?
2. Share a time your worldview and assumptions were challenged. What did you do at this moment? How did this experience change your perspective?

Closing: In one word or phrase share what you learned about yourself and your group members.

Prompt 2: Religious Resources

Check-in Question: Name 1 or 2 songs that would be a part of your life's soundtrack? Why are these songs important to you?

After completing the check-in question, allow each person 3-5 minutes to answer the discussion question, uninterrupted. Afterwards group members can ask follow up questions, clarification, offer appreciation or affirmations.

1. What is your favorite religious story, prayer, or song?
2. How does music play a role in your spirituality?
3. What do you find most meaningful in your prayers or services?

Closing: In one word or phrase, share what you learned about yourself and your group members.

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Resources for Optional Additional Meetings

Exercises/Activities

Prompt 3: Sacred text sharing

Share a text (i.e. scripture from your religious tradition, passage from a literary work, song, poem-no longer than a page) that is meaningful to you. Invite the group to read the text together. You can choose to take turns reading portions of the text out loud, read it silently, or have one person read it for the group.

After the group has read the text, the person who chose the text is invited to answer the following questions:

1. Who introduced you to this text?
2. What importance does this text have in your life right now?
3. What new insights did you gain by reading this text with the group?
4. What does this text reveal about you?

Discussion questions for the entire group:

1. What questions and curiosities do you have for the person who shared this sacred text?
2. What words or phrases stood out to you in the text?
3. What meaning did you draw from this text?
4. How is this text different and similar to the text you chose?

Closing: In one word or phrase share what you learned about yourself and your group members.

Prompt 4: Storytelling as Remembrance

Find a picture of yourself as a child. Bring this picture with you to share with the group. Take 5 minutes each to introduce this person in the picture, as if they were a close friend:

1. What are their interests?
2. What are their fears?
3. What do they want to be when they grow up?
4. Who do they admire?
5. What do they understand about God, faith, religion, spirituality?

After each person has shared, open the floor for comments, questions, appreciations or affirmations.

Closing: In one word or phrase go around and share one thing you learned about yourself and your group members.

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Exercises/Activities

Prompt 5: Spiritual Practice Sharing

Before you meet as a group, reflect on spiritual practices from your tradition that are meaningful to you and you can share with the group. When you meet, explain what the practice is and why it is meaningful to you. If appropriate and members feel comfortable, invite the group to participate in the practice with you. (If the practice requires materials please ensure everyone has access to the materials.) After engaging in the practice, reflect on the experience.

1. What was your experience engaging in this spiritual practice?
2. What were you surprised about?
3. What were you curious about?
4. How was this similar or different from some of the spiritual practices you engage in?

Closing: Share one thing you learned today.

Prompt 6: Storylistening around Civic Issues

Before the group meets, review the video: [How to have difficult conversations around civic issues of importance?](#)



As a group choose what civic issue is important to you and you would like to have a conversation about. Once the group has chosen a topic, reflect on these questions. Each group member will have a chance to be the “storyteller” and the “listener.”

1. How are you personally experiencing this issue?
2. How does your religious tradition shape how you experience this issue?

As the listener you will listen for and reflect back the values, feelings, thoughts, and opinions shared by the storyteller.

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Resources for Optional Additional Meetings

Video/Topic Discussion

Prompt 7: Are we good? discussion

Before your group meets, review the Sliber-Obrecht lecture video: [Are we good?](#)



Discussion Questions:

1. Rabbi Dr. Mikva points out that human beings are the only creatures that ask questions about their identity and existence. In light of this, how do you view human beings? Are we good? Are we evil? Are we both? Where do you agree or disagree with the religious perspectives presented? How does your religious tradition inform your perspective?
2. How do you think the quest for self-understanding ("know thyself") shapes how humans interact with one another in groups (e.g. families, neighbors, and political societies)? Do you think this quest to answer the question 'what does it mean to be human?' inherently leads to a moral responsibility to act ethically toward others? If so, how?

Closing: Share what you learned from this discussion.

Prompt 8: Why Pluralism Matters discussion

Before your group meets review the video: [Why Pluralism Matters](#)



Discuss the following questions as a group:

Check-in Question: What is one question you have after watching the video?

1. Kleinfeld names three levels of pluralism: equal treatment, seeing difference as positive, and working together across differences. Where do you see your congregation/community currently operating? What concrete steps could help move toward collaborating across differences?
2. Thinking about her argument about the importance of engaging with those with whom we disagree, how do assumptions show up in congregational conversations about identity and equity? What strategies can religious leaders model to help congregants/community members replace judgment with curiosity?
3. How can religious leaders hold onto their values while still making space for complexity and partial agreement?

Closing: What is one thing you will take back to your community after this discussion?

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Video/Topic Discussion

Prompt 9: Lived diversity: Ramadan, Lent/Easter, Passover

Before you meet at a group, review the video: [Lived Diversity](#)



Discuss the following questions as a group:

1. Share what makes your observance special to you. Maybe it's a memory or tradition. Maybe a lesson you've learned.
 - a. If you're dialoguing with someone who shares your religious background, what similarities and differences do you share in your observances? What do you appreciate about the differences?
 - b. If your conversation partners are religiously different from you, what did you learn about their religious background from what they shared? How has that enhanced your understanding of their religion?
 2. How do each of you find meaning in these times?
 3. What do you wish other people knew about your religious observance?
- How can learning more about each other's religions help us combat growing religious bias and bigotry?