



Facilitator's Guidebook

For

Faith in Action

In-Home Study Groups

Fall 2019

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VISION STATEMENT

Journey to Transforming Lives

*Spiritual Life Center is a loving, vibrant family that welcomes home
All people and accepts everyone—no exceptions.*

*Weaving ancient spiritual traditions with emerging wisdom,
We cultivate a spiritual deepening with The Divine,
each other and our planet.*

Mission Statement

*Spiritual Life Center is an Interfaith Unity Ministry
dedicated to the following mission:*

Love, Serve and Remember

Love

Love God, ourselves, each other and our planet.

Serve

*The love of God is expressed through service to
others and by preparing conscious leaders who will
inspire future generations.*

Remember

*We are one with God. All life is sacred. Each person
is empowered to fulfill his or her divine purpose
while living passionately, loving generously
and serving joyfully.*

VALUES STATEMENT

Spiritual Life Center is a spirit-led ministry.

We embrace the following values:

LOVE

We celebrate the Divinity and interconnectedness of all life.

Practicing unconditional love, we experience

Oneness with God, each other and all creation

INTEGRITY

*We live consciously, aligning our thoughts, words and actions with
spiritual truths, contributing to a peaceful world*

GRATITUDE

God is our source!

*Trusting in the unlimited abundance of God's resources,
we freely give and gratefully receive.*

HOME

*As a community, we are all One in Spirit, and together
we create a place of belonging. We commit ourselves to
connect spiritually, serve actively, love deeply and play passionately.*

TRANSFORMATION

*Ever evolving, we transform lives through the teaching and practice of
universal spiritual principles and by tending to the needs of each other and the
planet.*

Purpose of Spiritual Study Groups

1. To experience principles of practical spirituality on a personal level.
2. To create opportunities for people to interact in small groups that are focused on spiritual topics and that bring Spirit into daily life experiences.
3. To expand and share this spiritual experience within the church community.
4. To create a common experience within the church community through:
 - The book study and in-home circle groups
 - Sunday messages related to the study
 - Special songs, music and additional activities as planned.
5. To provide opportunities for service and leadership.

Purpose of Facilitator Training

The purpose of this training is to develop competent group facilitators for spiritual study groups sponsored by Spiritual Life Center.

The goal is to train facilitators who can:

- Create a safe, loving group environment based on the teachings of New Thought Principles.
- Hold the group energy in order to explore spiritual development through shared discussion.
- Lead from a place of integrity, authenticity, and humility by coming from the heart.
- Understand the role of the facilitator, the purpose of the group, and when to seek outside assistance for challenging participants.
- Use facilitation skills to enhance the level of group discussions.

A Few Words about In-Home Spiritual Study Groups

The In-Home Spiritual Study Groups are a very exciting aspect of the spiritual growth program. We can all go to church, read a special spiritual book, pray at home and begin to transform our lives. The power of the In-Home Spiritual Study Groups is that power “when two or more are gathered in my name” There is a special synergy that occurs in the peer-facilitated groups that gives people a deep sense of belonging, lasting friendships and the sense of community which many people long for today.

We hear much about the movement toward “small group ministry” and we all know that, in order for our church to grow and to prosper, we need to provide a structure within which people can feel seen and valued as individuals. We need to provide a sense of belonging to a smaller group community in order for people to stay engaged in the larger community.

The wonderful thing about the multi-week spiritual growth program is that the study groups are facilitated by lay leadership. The groups are self-contained and don’t require “experts” to teach or give a lesson. The groups are spiritual groups that provide a gathering time each week, for 6 or 7 weeks – a time for prayer, listening, support, discussion and sharing about the feelings and powerful movements of the soul.

The study group participants are expected to read the study book and go over the questions in light of their own personal life experiences. We are teaching practical Christianity and New Thought, and this is the focus of the group questions and discussion. How is spirit working in YOUR life today? This is personal sharing about the practical application of tools and ideas that transform us; it is not about “getting the right answer”.

Study group participants will want to attend church every Sunday to hear the Minister’s talk on the weekly theme. They will have a deeper understanding of their reading and the meaning of the subject if they approach it from several different angles. The combination of many different opinions, experiences, and levels of understanding in each group makes for a lively and dynamic gathering.

Above all, this is a grand opportunity to create a spiritual community within which we can all learn and grow!

Creating the Sacred Circle Experience

Spirit
Share
Safety
Structure
Support
Spirit

We begin each gathering by invoking Spirit – opening prayer

We invite each participant to Share – check in

We create an environment of Safety – shared agreements

We create a format and Structure – group discussion and study

We each feel free to ask for and give Support – through prayer

We close our gathering in celebration and gratitude of God’s Spirit ever present in our gathering – closing prayer

Format for the In-Home Spiritual Study Group Meetings

(Meetings should be 1½ to 2 hours in length)

- Welcome** Greet participants. Ask that all participants sign in, obtain a nametag, and have a Spiritual Study Guide. Let them know where the restrooms are located and where to find refreshments, if provided by the Host. Music and meditation (from the SLC recording, if any) may be played as participants gather and prepare to meet. Remember, your intention is to create a safe, loving space for participants to learn and grow.
- Opening Prayer**
(Spirit) For the first meeting, the Facilitator should lead a spoken prayer followed by two minutes of silence. In later meetings, this can be done by other group members using the opening prayer located on the back page of this training manual.
- Introductions And Check-in**
(Share) Invite participants to go around the circle and share their names and a brief statement about their SLC participation. The first week would be a good time for participants to share how long they've attended Spiritual Life Center and what drew them to the church. In later weeks, participants share the impact of the lesson on their daily lives.
- Review Shared Agreements**
(Safety) Each participant refers to the Shared Agreements in the Study Guide. They form the basis of your group agreement on how to interact with one another. One way to review the shared agreements is to invite participants to each read aloud one section, and then ask if there are additions, questions, or discussion before the group moves forward.
- Group Discussion**
(Structure & Support) Refer to the key topics or study questions to begin the group discussion. Allow the group to facilitate itself. Assume your role and use your skills as Facilitator to move discussion forward. Remember, your intention is to create a safe, loving space for the group to learn and grow. Some groups choose to offer support to participants through the use of a "prayer box". Be conscious of the time, allowing enough time at the end for the closing prayer.
- Closing Prayer**
(Spirit) Close with a prayer led by the Facilitator or a group member, using the closing prayer on the back page of this Guide if desired. You may also play a-recording of the series theme song in addition to the prayer. Remind participants of the next lesson, which will be presented at next Sunday's service and discussed at your next group meeting.

Study Group Shared Agreements

Purpose: The purpose of shared agreements is to create a safe and healthy environment for the group. It is important that the groups review these guidelines and that there is consensus before beginning any spiritual group.

Confidentiality: Everything shared by group members is confidential. What is said here, stays here.

Compassion: Group members relate to each other with unconditional compassionate acceptance of each other as human beings. Judgmental comments, and even unspoken thoughts, threaten the group process.

Truth and Integrity: Group members are encouraged and supported by the group to honestly and authentically be who they are. Speaking the truth involves risk and can only occur safely in a compassionate environment.

Respect: We practice sacred listening, refrain from giving advice or trying to fix or solve others' problems and also avoid judging or projecting our own interpretations of what others say

"Listen to others with inward stillness,
without opinion, assent or dissent, without criticism;
hearing through the words into the soul of the other."

Rudolph Steiner

Sharing Time: Group members demonstrate respect by avoiding interrupting others, arriving on time, and allowing everyone time to share their thoughts and ideas with the group.

Participation: Group members agree to participate in discussion and group activities; however, each person has the right to ask to sit out or to modify his or her participation

Conflict: Whenever people come together and speak truthfully the potential for hurt feelings, misunderstanding and conflict exists. If such a situation arises, group members agree to address it within the group process or one-on-one with the facilitator. Unresolved conflict is toxic to the whole group and not just to the parties involved.

Role of the Facilitator

Facilitator-Coach:

- Conducts group interaction
- Makes things easier
- Invites and supports excellence
- Establishes trust, creates a safe environment to allow others to express feelings
- Is non-judgmental
- Utilizes coaching empowerment skills such as listening, acknowledging and inquiring
- Supports group processes
- Influences the dynamics of the group

Therapy-Counseling:

Is professionally trained to:

- help the client fix problems
- assist the client in overcoming issues
- manage mental illness
- focus on the client's past
- analyze behavior
- explore internal conflicts

***“Unconditional love is the true nature of who we are.”
~~ Institute for Professional Empowerment Coaching***

Listening

Level 1 – Subjective Listening

- Self-centered listening
- Relating to your own experience
- Listening with your own agenda
- Listening to understand what it means to you

Level 2 – Objective Listening

- Focus is on the person talking
- Relating completely to the person talking
- Listening for the speaker’s agenda
- Listening to understand what it means to the person talking

Level 3 – Intuitive Listening

- Listening for the whole message (verbal and nonverbal)
- Listening between the lines
- Listening for tone of voice, body language, energy level, feelings, silence, pausing

“What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say.”

–Ralph Waldo Emerson

...

Acknowledging and Validating

Acknowledging:

Acknowledging is letting the other person know that we are really listening to what they say.

Acknowledging is mirroring back, or paraphrasing what was just said. Sometimes the simple act of acknowledging relieves stress and frustration.

- What you are saying is ...
- I'm hearing you say ...
- In other words ...
- What you're telling me is that ...

Validating:

We all have feelings, and many people feel guilty for having them. When we validate others, we let them know that they have the right to feel the way they do. This is not a judgment to say they are right or wrong for feeling that way, just that we can see things from their perspective.

- You have every right to feel that way.
- It can be very (upsetting, exciting, sad, wonderful) when something like that happens.

“Anyone’s journey is as unique and valuable as any other’s journey.”
~~ Institute for Professional Empowerment Coaching

Asking Questions

The primary tool for leading a home study group discussion is simply asking questions. There are two types of questions that will assist you: questions about the content of the book found in the Study Guide Workbook, and what are called “*empowering questions*.” Both are designed to move the group energy forward and to deepen the spiritual experience of the participants.

Examples of *empowering questions* include:

- What other insights do you have?
- What’s another way to look at that?
- How does this fit with your experience?
- What did you experience?
- What does your intuition tell you?
- Why is that important to you?
- What value is that to you?
- How do you feel about that?
- What really excites you about that?
- How does that have meaning for you?
- What part of that relates to your spiritual journey?

“Transcending the ego is a grand achievement.”
~~ Institute for Professional Empowerment Coaching

Redirecting

It may seem rude to interrupt (redirect) someone in normal conversations. However, it may be appropriate (necessary) in the context of a home study discussion group in order to keep the group moving forward, to stay “on purpose”.

Some examples:

- Excuse me ...
- I’m going to interrupt ...
- I think I’m hearing some advice giving...
- Let me stop you there ...
- I want to remind you of our shared agreements...
- It seems we have strayed from our shared agreements
- Ask an empowering question
- Let me jump in here?

“A purpose can be found in everything that happens.”
~~ Institute for Professional Empowerment Coaching

Preventions

To provide a working foundation for the study group, facilitators can use prevention techniques to help the group work more effectively. Preventions are the understandings and agreements that a group makes at the beginning of the series about how they want to interact with each other. These are particularly helpful if something comes up during the meeting that is not productive and needs to be addressed. It is easier to deal with concerns or conflict if the group has previously discussed and agreed on how to handle such situations.

Some examples of the things that are helpful to discuss are listed below.

- Describe the role of the facilitator. In addition to the items listed in that section, the facilitator helps the group stay focused on the purpose of the study group and operate according to the Shared Agreements.
- Get understanding and agreement to use the Shared Agreements. Ask the group if they would like to add any agreements they think would help the study group be more effective.
- Let the group know that as a facilitator you may interrupt if the discussion has strayed off the purpose of the study group, if someone is monopolizing the time, or if someone is not using the Shared Agreements. (Please refer to the "Redirecting" section.
- At times when individuals come together, they may have differences of opinion or conflicts. Discuss how the group wants to handle conflicts. If there is conflict between individuals, either ask them to talk directly and privately to each other to resolve it or, if they cannot get it resolved, they may want to ask for assistance. If you do not feel comfortable helping them, call a facilitator trainer.

"If you want to be happy, put your effort into controlling the sail and not the wind."

~~ Anonymous

Interventions

To ensure a balanced, harmonious, successful and growing experience for all participants, it may be necessary to implement one of the following interventions.

Level 1- Low-level intervention: directed to group as a whole

- Remind participants to follow the
- Limit talk-time to 5 minutes
- Redirect group focus to the issue at hand.
- Utilize coaching skills such as redirecting and/or empowering questions

Level 2 – Intermediate Intervention: Initial intervention with an individual

- Speak to the individual at a break
- Use “I” messages to specifically state what the problem is and what impact it is having on the group.

Remember: “I” messages have three parts-

- Behavior (describe the situation) *When ...*
- Feelings (state how the situation makes you feel) *I feel ...*
- Effects (describe the impact or results of the situation) *Because ...*

Example:

“When I hear side conversations, I feel confused because I cannot hear what the speaker is saying.”

Level 3- Intensive Intervention: If subsequent reminders to an individual are ineffective, seek outside assistance from facilitator trainers.

“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of intervention.”
~~ Interaction Associates, Inc.

Facilitation TIPS

- Be authentic and genuine.
- It's "OK" to be vulnerable by sharing your personal experiences.
- Let people experience and be with their emotions.
- Model the behavior you want the group to exhibit.
- Be aware of participants' needs and expectations.
- If you do not understand, ask for clarification from participants.
- Give group participants an opportunity to express themselves first before adding your own comments.
- Direct the focus of the group.
- Keep the discussion moving forward
- Follow the agenda.
- Acknowledge the progress participants make.
- Have fun, relax and enjoy yourself!

***“Let us build the earth by building one another.”
~~ Teilhard de Chardin***

STUDY GROUP PRAYERS

Opening Prayer: The Co-Creator's Prayer

Loving Presence, with grateful hearts we join together as co-creators and friends. We come together to support each other as we learn, share, and explore how to live life more intentionally. We open our minds to receive your wisdom. We open our hearts to express your love. We open our souls to radiate your light.

May each of us hear what we are meant to hear and speak as you direct us. Now may each of us speak your intention or prayer for this gathering.

(Intention or prayer from everyone who wishes to speak them)

We now enter into sacred agreement with each other to honor our intentions as we support each other in our spiritual growth. We listen to others with inward stillness, without opinion, assent or dissent, without criticism; hearing through the words into the soul of the other.

Thank you, God, for your loving presence with us and within us; may all we say and do be in harmony with you. Thank you, God!

Closing Prayer

Thank you, God, for your loving presence that has guided and directed us tonight. We honor each person in this group and trust in the process of each other's unique spiritual journey.

We hold in sacred trust the personal matters we have shared in this gathering. We go forward in positive expectancy of ever-increasing good as we remain ever mindful of your presence, power, and love within us.

We thank you, God. Amen.