



People of the Book Groups

History

This group format emerged in Spain during the 1940's in response to the secularism and cynicism sweeping Europe. A few people created a process for forming small Christian communities, a method eventually known as "Cursillo." This Catholic movement has been adapted to a variety of settings and a number of Christian denominations. The group format has been transforming lives for more than 70 years and is currently active in over 60 countries. Some groups last for 20, 30 or more years. We are using the unchanged format in a new setting: interfaith groups.

Purpose of People of the Book Groups

Jews, Christians and Muslims differ significantly in their beliefs, but the heart of each religion is the same: to surrender to God and align our hearts, spirits and actions with God's love and guidance.

Interfaith dialogue, in the sense of seeking to intellectually understand the faith of others, is important. But we can also turn and face God shoulder to shoulder together. Standing together, conscious of God's presence, we are reminded of the common struggle we share to find God in an often confusing world.

The purpose of these interfaith groups is

- to build relationships that engage head, heart and spirit
- to provide gentle accountability for our individual growth in faith and our efforts to integrate faith into daily life
- to create opportunities to learn from and be inspired by the faith expression of others

Format

The genius of these groups is in the simplicity of the format. Group sessions revolve around four simple questions:

1. Prayer

How has your prayer been during the week? Have you found adequate time to pray? Has prayer flowed easily? been difficult? Has there been a particular focus to your prayer? New insight or awareness? Have you felt stuck in some way?

2. Study

What have you been reading/listening to this week? How have you found inspiration and/or learning this week? Have you spent time with Scripture? A book? Speaker? Time spent preparing and reflecting on a proposed action also qualifies as “study.”

3. Action

What has been your outreach this week? Have you borne witness to your faith in word or action? Have you spent time in service to those in need? How have you served your community? Family is important but in most life stages should not be the only recipient of our service.

4. Moment close to God

What was a moment when you are especially aware of God’s presence? These moments may be joyful or sad. Often we see God’s presence only in retrospect. This is an opportunity to scan the horizon and recognize those moments for our benefit and that of the group.

Guidelines

- Groups are generally made up of all men or all women.
- “Grouping” is not a time for proselytizing or giving heavy-handed advice. Accountability comes primarily from naming our commitments and choices out loud to a group of fellow pilgrims. In a mixed-faith group theological differences are a given. Debate is welcome, but not during group time.
- Stick to the format. Thousands of groups have dissolved over the years because they gradually morphed into socializing. Many successful groups socialize before or after the more formal group format.
- Most groups meet weekly, in homes, restaurants, church basements, over lunch at work, you name it. Bi-weekly meetings can be successful, but greater intervals are likely to result in a weakened group.
- Starting and/or leaving a group can be awkward. Members should ask permission from the group before inviting a new member to join. Finding a successful group may take time, prayer and trial-and-error.
- Remember - we are not in this alone. God honors our intentions even when the way is not clear.