SACRED GROUND: A film-based dialogue series on race (& beyond)

RECOMMENDED FORMAT FOR SESSIONS

What follows is a suggested format or structure for your dialogue sessions. You are encouraged to adjust as you see fit. For example, the size of your group may incline you to periodically break into small groups. And whatever the size of your circle, please consider when it might be helpful to break into pairs or triads. If you have access to a labyrinth, then you can determine how often to make walking the labyrinth a part of your time together.

The structure below assumes that participants will watch the films either alone at home or in small sub-groups in each other’s homes. If you opt to watch the films *all* together as a group, then you can decide whether you want to watch them at the outset of the session directly after prayers and scripture, or to discuss the readings first.

These recommendations include generic dialogue prompts that can apply to all sessions. Since each session in fact covers different terrain, use your judgment to tailor or add to them. In the 10 session-by-session pages of the website, which form the core of this *Study Guide*, you will find the assigned films and readings, along with a short set of reflections and framing. Those reflections may help you create specific questions or exercises for the respective sessions.

1. Prayer and, if desired, a hymn to begin each session

See the “Religious Resources” section for suggested prayers, or find your own. Perhaps the role of reading a prayer can rotate. Some people may feel called to write their own prayers for the group.

1. Scripture reading

See the “Religious Resources” section for suggested Bible passages to read, organized by theme. The passages are not designated for particular sessions, as each dialogue circle will have its own spiritual trajectory and need different words at different times. Sensing that need will be one of the roles of the facilitator(s).

1. Group dialogue
   1. Format

In the spirit of equal time, and to ensure that the louder voices don’t dominate, you can consider using the following: For each set of prompts, begin by going around the circle, inviting each person to share answers to the set of questions. Consider using a talking stick or stone, to establish that only one person speaks at a time. Once everyone who wishes to has shared, you can open it up for discussion and cross-conversation. Then, you can move to the second set of prompts and go through the process again, and again with the third set of prompts. You may try this process for a few sessions to see how it goes. Another idea is to have just a single round of one-at-a-time no-cross-talk sharing, with each participant speaking for longer and responding to whichever or however many of the prompts desired, and then moving to open discussion from there. One other alternative process is to take turns inviting each other to speak. That “mutual invitation” approach is described [here](http://www.kscopeinstitute.org/mutual-invitation/) by the Kaleidoscope Institute. As indicated earlier, there is also the option to form smaller groups or pairs for discussion at any point.

* 1. Dialogue prompts

The overarching question: What “aha” moments arose for you from the film(s) and from the readings? Here is a further breakdown.

1ST SET OF PROMPTS: REFLECTIONS ON THE HISTORY COVERED

* + What history did you learn that you hadn’t been aware of?
  + What spoke to your heart? How did it feel to take in this material?
  + What new (or reinforced) understandings do you have about the past?
  + Did any of the history covered in the film(s) and/or readings tie to your family history in some way? If so, how? Are there elements of your family story you’d like to learn more about?

2ND SET OF PROMPTS: REFLECTIONS ON PRESENT-DAY LEGACIES

* + Please share how any of the present-day legacies covered in the core books and/or in the session-specific film(s) and readings spoke to you and perhaps to experiences you’ve had.
  + Did you find yourself struggling with or wanting to push back against any of what you saw, heard, or read? If so, what caused that reaction?

An alternative way to organize the first and second prompts is for the first set to be on the session-specific history and legacies, and the second set to be on the readings from the two core books.

3RD SET OF PROMPTS: LOOKING FORWARD

* + How does what you’ve seen, read, or heard from other participants affect the way you understand “becoming beloved community”? How do these reflections relate to the quadrants of the labyrinth: truth-telling, proclaiming the dream, practicing the way of love, and repairing the breach?
  + *Optional:* Given what you’ve seen, read, and heard, what are you inspired to do?\*\*

\*\* Note: It is recommended not to strongly emphasize “action” during the earlier sessions, as this series is an invitation to be in learning, reflection, and dialogue modes, which can then lead to action from a more profound place. However, some of you may feel called to take steps during the course of this series, and that should be honored. Some action steps can be part of the learning process, such as visiting a local museum or memorial together, conducting oral history interviews, checking how a local school teaches racially loaded history, or getting involved in a local racial justice effort.

1. Housekeeping

You will want to save time at the end of each session to discuss any logistical matters. This also can be a time to address any problems with group dynamics that participants may raise. If issues arise that are more heated or charged, however, it likely is best to address those in the moment, rather than waiting until the end of the session.

1. Closing prayer
2. Eucharist

You may wish to consider sometimes holding the liturgy of Eucharist as part of your time together. It will likely take on more meaning as time passes in the series.