



Walking God's Paths



SMALL GROUP FACILITATORS

Ideal facilitators are persons who are reliable, somewhat knowledgeable, and active in their congregations. The primary duty of the facilitator is to guide the discussion in such a way as to promote substantive, flowing interaction that includes everyone. Facilitators must resist the temptation to use their position to dominate the conversation. Instead, s/he should strive to create a safe and encouraging atmosphere that welcomes the voicing of people's experiences. A statement about respecting one another's confidences, both between Jews and Christians and within the Christian and Jewish communities themselves, should be made at the outset.

Urge all participants to familiarize themselves with the [principles for interfaith dialogue](#). The first session should begin with a review of these guidelines after individual introductions have been made. Encourage the group not to be so cautious about stepping on toes that they refrain from posing sincere questions. Stress that everyone's good intentions are taken for granted.

The facilitators should use their authority to prevent the monopolization of the discussion by outspoken people. One could say, "I'd like to hear from people who haven't said much yet," or "I wonder what participants from the other religious community think about that." Care should also be taken to avoid the role of the "expert authority" upon whom the group becomes dependent. This can be resisted, for example, by not sitting at the head of a rectangular table.

The dialogue unfolds by discussing topics found in the video. Do not simply go around the group one by one, but ask, "Does anyone want to offer their thoughts or ideas about this question?" As the conversation ensues, try to include everyone who wishes to speak and see that both Jewish and Christian perspectives are expressed.

If a digression occurs that captures the group's enthusiasm, feel free to "go with the flow" for a time before returning to the questions. Facilitators should be alert to the interest level of participants. If the conversation has taken a turn into an unpopular or exhausted tangent, move on. As the chat about a certain item peters out, or if someone naturally segues into the next question, move on.

If in the course of the exchange, a participant states something that the facilitator knows or strongly suspects to be an erroneous religious statement, and if no one else challenges it, feel free to interject a mild correction. If the speaker is adamant, you might say, "I really don't feel that what you've said is completely accurate. I'll check it out before our next session." This same could be said if a question of information is raised to which no one has an answer. After the session, consult with the organizers or hosts or other authority, and so inform the group at the next session.

As the dialogue time draws to a close, it might be useful to ask the group what struck them as most significant about the exchange.

It would be a wise practice to meet briefly after the session with any other small group facilitators to share your assessment of how things went and any improvements that might be made.