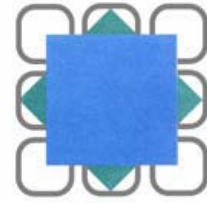




Walking God's Paths



ORGANIZATIONAL TIPS

WALKING GOD'S PATHS might be sponsored by leaders in synagogues or churches or academic institutions that are relatively near to one another. Ideally, rabbis, ministers, priests, or other congregation leaders should be active participants if not the actual hosts. They can be on hand to welcome participants, facilitate small groups, introduce the sessions' topics, and offer guidance when there is uncertainty about some teaching in one or the other tradition.

When a collaborative decision is made to conduct WALKING GOD'S PATHS, a schedule for the six sessions must be agreed upon. It is probably best if sessions occur on consecutive days or weeks so as to maintain continuity and build momentum. Be sure to take both Christian and Jewish holydays into account. Advertising can then begin within the participating communities.

Registration in advance is a necessity for several reasons. A fairly accurate participant count is needed to prepare materials, to arrange for the facilitation of the number of small groups that will be required, and to try to maintain some parity between the numbers of Jewish and Christian participants. In order for a true dialogue to take place, there should be as close to an equal number of Christians and Jews as possible. If it happens that there is one Jew for every two Christians, then the dynamics begin to change from an equal dialogue to a question-and-answer session directed at the minority group. On your registration form, there should be a space for the participants to indicate their religious affiliation.

In the promotional materials, it should be stressed that a six-session commitment is being requested. Frequent absences will negatively affect the interpersonal dynamics of each small group and disrupt the gradual building of trust and openness that should be building from session to session.

There are two special categories of persons who may be attracted to this sort of interfaith dialogue. Persons who are themselves married or who have relatives who are married to a member of the other tradition will frequently find this an appealing opportunity to learn more about the other religion in a safe and welcoming environment. Provided that the discussions do not digress to the particular concerns of trying to live out an interfaith

marriage, their involvement in the process should be beneficial because of their high degree of motivation. A small group consisting of people in this circumstance might be helpful if the small group facilitator has experience in their typical issues.

Another potentially interested person is someone who has converted from Judaism to Christianity and considers him/herself to be a "messianic Jew". Occasionally, some such people have a proselytizing agenda which would disrupt or sidetrack the main purpose of interfaith dialogue between Christians and Jews. The complex dynamics that this would create could be quite upsetting. The hosts and organizers of the process must see to it that an individual with this background agrees to the ground rule that conversionary agendas are not part of interfaith dialogue before accepting their registration.

Once registrations have been gathered, participants should be sorted in advance into small groups for the actual conversations. The ideal number of people in each small group is around ten, not including the facilitator. Again, there should be as close to an equal number of Jews and Christians as possible. People should stay in the same groupings for all six sessions. With shifting group compositions, a new group identity and comfort level must be re-established each time. Name badges displaying name and small group number or color code should be prepared and used at each session. A master list of participants and group assignments should be prepared and distributed to all facilitators at the first session.

The meeting space itself is important. Ideally, there should be a large space to accommodate all participants for the opening and closing of each session. Small groups would be most at ease in smaller, separate rooms where their conversation will not interfere with the other groups.

WALKING GOD'S PATHS provides "Focusing Questions" and "Discussion Questions" for each session. The purpose of Focusing Questions is to direct the attention of the viewing audience to specific issues in the film for the discussion period that follows. These could be read aloud or distributed as the video is being introduced. The Discussion Questions provide the framework for the dialogue that occurs after viewing the videos.

Finally, it would be beneficial for the hosts and facilitators to meet before the first session to become better acquainted with one another and with the process. They might meet briefly after each session for a review of the conversation and to plan for the next gathering.