

# LIVING SCHOOL *for* Action *and* Contemplation

## Guidelines for Spiritual Support Groups

### **Overview:**

Members of a spiritual support group share leadership. The group chooses who will fill each of the following roles (roles may change from time to time).

- Convener:
  - opens each meeting with prayer or a meditation;
  - holds the group to the guiding principles;
  - closes the meeting in a prayerful way, honoring what has transpired.
- Presenter: offers something from his/her own life for the group to reflect upon.
- Time Keeper: reminds the group of the pre-determined schedule as needed.
- Listeners (all but the Presenter are Listeners):
  - receive what is presented with open hearts and minds;
  - listen deeply and respond with questions or comments;
  - do not problem-solve, give advice, analyze, criticize, or go into their own issues;
  - are each responsible to attend to their own awareness of what is rising in themselves and remain a prayerful presence to the Presenter.

Group sessions generally last about two hours, allowing time for two people to present with a short break between them.

The group is bound by confidentiality regarding the presentation and ensuing conversation.

Each group should have 3-5 members. The group is closed to new members until the group decides to open membership again.

### **Content of the Meeting:**

Each meeting is centered on the Presenter's concerns regarding his or her faith journey, work in the world, contemplative life and practice, or any other issue as it relates to their own embodied spirituality. The Presenter discerns what they will share with the group.

Listeners are reverent in their responses, focusing on the Presenter rather than themselves. They should not speak for the sake of speaking; questions and comments should be brief and focused. It is not the Listeners' job to fix a problem, but to mirror what they hear and to invite the Presenter to deeper reflection.

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## **Flow of the Meeting:**

1. Opening: Convener reminds group of intended focus and attitude
2. Opening prayer: about 5 minutes, led by Convener
3. First presentation: 10-15 minutes, with group listening silently
4. Questions for factual clarification (if necessary)
5. Silent prayer and reflection: 2 minutes
6. Response of the Listeners through deeper questions, observations
7. Break: 5 minutes
8. Second presentation: 10-15 minutes
9. Questions for factual clarification (if necessary)
10. Silent prayer and reflection: 2 minutes
11. Response of the Listeners through deeper questions, observations
12. Reflect on the meeting process:
  - a. How well did we stay focused on the Presenter and his/her questions?
  - b. Did we get off-track through problem-solving, analyzing, diversion into others' experiences, etc.?
  - c. What was the quality of the silence and prayerful attentiveness?
13. Closing prayer: 2-5 minutes

(The above is adapted from "Peer Group Process and Guidelines" from Quaker Spiritual Formation and Peer Group Guidelines as offered by The Shalem Institute.)