

Start Here

A short introduction for whoever is going to run these gatherings — including if that turns out to be you, and you have never done anything like this before.

BEFORE YOU READ ANY FURTHER

Try this on yourself.

Think of someone who accompanied you well. Not a saint, not a famous spiritual director, not the person whose name would impress anybody. Someone ordinary — a friend, a relative, somebody in a parish — who was with you in a season when you needed company.

Don't list their qualities. Don't describe what they said to you. Just remember what it was like to be in a room with them.

Now — what did you carry away?

That feeling, the one that arrived before you could put words to it, is the entire subject of this material. You have just felt somebody's spiritual footprint.

What a footprint is

Something is left behind after every encounter. A conversation, a meeting, even a rolling of the eyes — something remains, and it changes the atmosphere the way smoke does in a room. You carry other people's traces and they carry yours. You have carried somebody's kindness for years. You have carried somebody's contempt like a bruise.

That is your spiritual footprint: what you leave in people after you have gone. You cannot opt out of leaving one. You can only opt out of noticing it.

These gatherings are an hour, once a month, in which a small group looks at theirs.

What this is, and what it is not

This is not a course and it is not a curriculum. It is one series of gatherings, written down as it has actually been run, so that you can copy it and then change it.

Take it as a benchmark to get started, not as the correct version. Cut sessions, reorder them, replace the questions with better ones, run three instead of six. If you find yourself worrying about whether you are doing it properly, you have misread what this is.

What kind of evening this is

This is the part most groups get wrong, so it is worth being plain about it.

This is not a discussion of an interesting topic. The questions are not debate prompts and there are no right answers to be collected. It is an hour in which people look at something about themselves, mostly in silence, and say only as much of it out loud as they want to.

*The standard for the whole evening is curiosity, never verdict. Not **I am failing at this**, but **huh** — I wonder if that is true.*

If your group is used to going round the circle so that everybody contributes, let that habit go for this hour. The silences are not gaps to be filled. They are where the work happens.

What you actually have to do

Less than you think. You are not teaching this material and you do not need to have mastered it.

- Read the passage aloud — or better, ask somebody else to read it.
- Ask the question, and then stop talking.
- Let the silence run longer than is comfortable. It will feel like a mistake. It is not.
- Do not summarise what people say, and do not try to fix anybody.
- If you get it wrong, and you will, say so in one sentence and carry on.

That last one is not housekeeping. It is probably the most useful thing the group will see you do all evening.

If you have not read the book

You can run the first gathering from this pack alone. It asks nothing of anybody in advance, including you, and it is built to be dropped into a retreat, a formation evening or an existing group as a one-off.

By the third gathering you will want a copy of *The Practice of Sacred Noticing*, because the sessions cite pages and read passages aloud. That is not a rule. It is just how it works.

The smallest possible start

Three people, one copy of the book, and an hour.

That is the whole requirement. You do not need a fraternity, a parish, a retreat house, a budget, or permission from anybody.

Two places not to begin cold

Some of this material goes deep, and two cases deserve care rather than enthusiasm.

The gatherings on crisis and loss draw on a real death — the author's infant son. Do not run that one without having read the whole chapter first and knowing exactly what is coming, and make sure somebody is free afterwards for whoever needs them.

And if your group is in live conflict at the moment, the gathering on relationships will be heard as an accusation whatever you intend by it. Wait, or choose another.

Everywhere else, begin.

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If you run a gathering and something works better than what is written here, I would like to hear about it.

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