

## Diversity Dinner Suggestions--*Getting Acquainted & Starting Discussion*

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**Personal Quick Introductions.** Groups have better discussions of issues that they care about and introduce if they first begin (and continue) to get to know something about each other -- "where this person is coming from" -- some background and experiences, along with one's world view and reasoning that have shaped the individual's "take" on the issues being discussed.

Toward this end, at the first (or second) dinner, it is helpful to take turns using about three minutes each to give only cryptic "headlines" for Personal Profile points 2 - 7. Speak in key words and phrases, not paragraphs for this quick introduction. If and whenever you do this, have one person with a watch serve as timer -- to call time at 3 or 4 minutes -- so this exercise won't take more than about 45 minutes total. Some people like me will want to take notes -- which can be done right on the roster. If any members of your group are missing, be sure to arrange at the outset for who will take notes and send photocopies to the DD Director and to the absent ones -- along with this sheet, the roster, planner, and guidelines.

After you have gotten around to everyone quickly within the 3 or 4 minutes personal time limit, take perhaps 10-15 minutes to discuss together the composition of the group as a whole and aspirations for it: Is this much variety usual, unusual? What kinds of perspectives do you hope to bring to and get from the group? What kinds of subjects do you hope the discussion might get into over the months ahead?

**Personal Page Option.** In years past, some people also have shared a written sheet about themselves. This is very helpful in remembering "who is who" as the series of dinners gets underway. The easiest way is to make copies of a sheet you have already written for another purpose, such as a personal summary for a class reunion. If you are writing out something from scratch, address the eight personal profile categories below. Supply a copy to each member of your group, and mail an extra to the Diversity Dinners Director.

### Personal Profile Information

1. Contact Information: Correct/add all addresses, phones, faxes, emails
2. Homes: Where born, raised, lived to date
3. Education: History, areas, interests
4. Work Specialties: Employment, domestic, civic
5. Ancestral Heritages: Ethnic cultures/languages/religions
6. Current Involvements: Org'n memberships, political parties, belief/religions
7. Household & Family Situation: Location; Relations, languages,
8. Other Salient Identities, Interests, Hobbies

### Diversity Dinners Discussions: Basic Ground Rules for Civil Multilogue

**Share the "air time".** One person speaks at a time, everyone listens. Stay on topic and let all who want to speak address it before moving on. Share responsibilities for scheduling/arranging, facilitating, inputting, etc. Periodically compare feedback on group process and plan improvements. Be considerate of all -- taking turns doing organizing, hosting, food service, clean up, etc. -- including everyone.

### Talking to Get Acquainted

**Sharing Narrative Answers to Acquainting Questions.** An interesting and entertaining way to build acquaintance among group members goes beyond the "quick personal introductions" in headline form: Pose a question that the group might spend up to an hour on -- sharing answers. Each person takes a few minutes to offer his/her detailed, colorful, personal answers. Some examples are presented next -- and B. is a good one to use first. During this, people may ask a few brief questions of each other. Then, after everyone has shared, take a few minutes to comment together on differences, similarities, patterns, feeling about this process, etc. And as inclination guides and time permits, people may pursue questions and ideas sparked by this whole exercise.

### Acquainting Questions -- Examples

- A. What is your earliest memory? Why do you remember it? How do you feel about it? How may it have affected your life?
- B. Where were you living and what was your family and home like growing up? What was expected of you as a child? What are some of your happiest memories of being a youngster?
- C. How were you educated? In your schooling/learning, what were your most and least favorite subjects? What did you learn growing up, as a teen or young adult that has been particularly helpful or unhelpful in your life since?
- D. What kinds of work did you prepare for and have you actually done? What employment, domestic, and/or civic work are you currently doing? In the best of all possible worlds, how would work work?
- E. What is your current household situation -- your location, type of housing, your relationships and routines? How have your earlier life stages and styles been different? Relatively speaking, what are the pleasures and aggravations and challenges in your current situation?
- F. What is most salient for you at this stage in your own philosophy of life? What values and beliefs seem particularly important now -- perhaps because they are threatened, tenuous, newly achieved, ardently appreciated . . . ? What processes and resources and influences have brought you to this set of insights and feelings?
- G. What are your personal patterns and preferences for use of reading matter, broadcasts, recordings, the internet. What do you choose to attend to, and why? What might you like to modify in these regards?

### Talking about Issues

In addition to wanting to know and understand others and their points of view, Diversity Dinners participants have "civil multilogue" about the important issues of our time, including about matters sociological and psychological, political and economic, philosophical and religious. Our discussions are about what we care about and enable us to air and develop our own views. We agree that each has a right to one's own opinions; we are not trying to persuade/convert; we need not concur. We strive to understand -- avoiding rudeness, monopolizing, cutting humor and so forth. We extend the courtesy of both *explaining* candidly and concisely and *listening* carefully to the others. You can expect fascinating, enlightening discussions! A topic of great interest to one of us might be introduced as follows:

#### Generic Discussion of an Ongoing Critical Issue

We've been getting /failing to get news of the \_\_\_\_\_ issues/problems/crisis. How/from where have you been getting your input about this -- and *what is your take* on it. What is the history and context in which this is occurring? What do you think are the strategies and steps that make the most sense? Are you trying to do anything about this?

Issues Examples: Use of violence and war as means to achieve security, peace? What's going on with mass media now and how is it affecting us? What is God all about? What is justice and does it matter? What's getting better/worse about our society? What gives you great insight; concern; satisfaction; pleasure; . . . ? How are the generations different?

Your Ideas. What kinds of considerations that affect you and the identity groups you relate to do you wish you could examine more closely and perhaps with others? As they occur to you at any time, jot them down -- so you won't forget. You decide whether and how to introduce any of these at Diversity Dinners. It's fine to bring along an article with a *short stimulus quote* to read aloud to the group. Your Diversity Dinners experiences will be what you and your group make them! Bring your curiosity and ardor and appetite!