

Facilitator Prep Exercise #1

What is my role as an *Into the Fields* facilitator?

Stretching before the exercise:

What do you hope the outcome of this learning process will be for your participants? Do you hope your group of participants will become a close knit group? Or do you hope they will grow deeper in their faith? Or do you hope they will all become stronger in their ministry? Or for what do you hope? Make a list of three or four such hopes.

How can you help move your group in the desired direction? What traits must you possess to be a successful facilitator?

Trait #1: Your own heart must be open to God. Are you oriented toward God's love and can you see it around you? Can you pause to hear God's voice in the midst of your busy life – coming from those in your household, your colleagues, your fellow parishioners, and even from unlikely sources such as the daily news, feedback from your detractors, and the things that keep you awake during the night? At www.intothefields.org you will find an exercise called Opening Your Heart to God. Click on the “training” icon on the home page and then on “open your heart.”

Trait #2: You must be committed to your participants. Are you ready to give up your life for them? Can you share your own self in appropriate ways as you lead and facilitate their journeys of faith? You are like a potter, forming clay into a new shape. With the gentle touch of your guidance, your participants will be re-formed into persons more deeply committed to Christ and the Church. Write a one page “commitment statement” to use as your personal promise to your participants.

Trait #3: Your motivation should be mainly to help those who come under your care in the *Into the Fields* process. Indeed, you are helping prepare workers for the vineyard, helping people get more ready to go into the fields and bring back the harvest of faith. Do you see and understand this, and are you ready to make the sacrifice necessary to allow the Holy Spirit to work? On a quiet walk think this over and ask God to help you desire the welfare of your students or participants.

Be aware of this.

No one has “perfect motivation” but when we pause and listen to our heart, we can detect our primary motivation, which is what we must monitor.

When you are ready, pray the Facilitator's Prayer at www.intothefields.org.

Click on the “training” icon on the home page, and then “facilitator's prayer.” You may print this prayer for your regular use.

Facilitator Prep Exercise #2

How can I best lead my *Into the Fields* learning group?

Stretching before the exercise:

What are the two greatest obstacles which you fear may stand in the way of being a successful group leader? Is it that you are unsure of yourself? Or that you don't feel you know the material well enough? Or that you are too busy already to add this responsibility? Or that you think the participants won't cooperate? Or what? Make a list of your fears.

What skills do you need as a leader?

Skill #1: Participate yourself in the activities, reading, and discussions of the group. Any groups of participants (of any age) can detect when its leader is not fully engaged, or when the leader holds him or herself above the group, as though all the learning going on is not for her or him. Instead, dig into the questions, topics, and activities along with everyone else. Let your participants see that you, too, have a lot of learning and growing to do!

Skill #2: Be an observer! A listener! Watch how the group members interact with each other, and become aware of how each member of the group processes and learns new information. By doing this, you will be better able to provide guidance to everyone. You will become skilled in keeping the group on track and in focus with the material.

Skill #3: Have a goal for each session. Go into each learning session with a personal goal which you hope to achieve. Your goal flows from what you want the outcome of this session to be. And your plan to reach that goal flows from how can you help make that happen effectively. It goes without saying that people who set goals like this usually reach them, while people who do not, often wander off in an unintended direction and fail to achieve what they want.

Skill #4: Be ready! Test any technology you plan to use, such as LCD projectors or video equipment. Make sure it's ready and that you know how to run it. Make sure all the materials you need are handy. You might even rehearse a little for some of the presentation work you plan to do. *Into the Fields* is a process driven process, with only a small amount of presentation work for the facilitator. But even this small amount should be well prepared and you should be ready to roll!

Evaluation!

Of these four important skills, which is your strongest ability? Take a moment as you prepare to write three or four sentences about how you express and use that ability.

Which of these skills is weakest for you? Again, write a few lines exploring how you can overcome this weak skill, and how you hope to compensate for it.

Facilitator Prep Exercise #3

What are the best practices I can follow to succeed with Into the Fields?

Stretching before the exercise:

When you're a member of a group yourself, what are the parts of the group activity which you like the most? Quiet reading? Discussion? Writing? Listening to presentations? And which do you like the least? In both cases, why? Make up a chart showing your choices and reasons.

What actual practices can I use to be most effective? What techniques can I use within the learning sessions to keep us on focus and on task?

Practice #1: Begin every session with Breaking Open the Word. Keep this short, but don't skip it, ever. By bringing the readings of the previous Sunday Mass into your session, you extend the liturgy into people lives in a powerful way. The Word, re-proclaimed and broken open like this, has a power of its own to touch hearts. This is how the Holy Spirit guides and forms us: through the Gospel. For more on this, visit www.intothefields.org and click on training on the home page, then on Question of the Week.

Practice #2: Begin on time. Do not get into the habit of waiting for the last straggler to wander in. It teaches the whole group that it's OK to be late. As a way of honoring those who are on time, start when the clock hits the announced hour.

Practice #3: Quit on time. *Into the Fields* is designed as a three hour process, with a fifteen minute break along the way. Don't hold people past the quitting time. As a sign of respect for your participants, stay on time!

Practice #4: Create a welcome learning space. Nothing is more uncomfortable than arriving for an event and feeling unwelcome. Arrive early yourself and have everything ready for the first to turn up. For the first couple of sessions, have name tags for folks so they can get to know each other (if they don't already). Make sure the lights are on and the heat or air conditioning, if needed. Have refreshments available suitable to the season and time of day. In general, treat the learning space or classroom as if you were inviting these folks into your own home.

Brainstorm!

What other practices create an effective learning atmosphere? Think about the room you will be using for your *Into the Fields* learning sessions. What does it need to make it comfortable and welcoming? Spend a little time reflecting on your learning space and list the things you want to do to make it as effective a space as possible.

Facilitator Prep Exercise #4

What effective group methods should I use for *Into the Fields*?

Stretching before exercise:

Under what method do you learn best yourself? And how does this differ from how others learn? For example, do you (or others) learn best by reading? By hearing? By seeing PowerPoint? By talking it over with others? Or in some other way? Think about a specific class, presentation, lecture, or even TV show where you were learning. What elements of it worked for you? Make a list of these here and reflect about how to emulate them.

How do I teach, and how do I learn? What is the best way to communicate the large amount of material presented by *Into the Fields*?

Method #1: Use a variety of ways to present and lead the *Into the Fields* process. You will surely have participants of all types in your group – those who want to read and those who don't; those who want to talk, and those who don't; those who want to just listen, and those who listen poorly. By using a variety of ways of treating the material, you are able to link up with almost any learning style.

Method #2: Listen to your students carefully. They are using speech, tone of voice, body language, eyes, and even facial expressions to express their response to the material. Be open to what they are telling you. For example, you may ask someone to do something they really don't want to do, and they may say "yes" with their voice and may even conjure up a smile. Meanwhile, their posture, eyes, tone of voice, and the rest of their body may be saying "NO."

Method #3: Encourage your participants to discuss the material by saying what they themselves experience in their ministry. Encourage them to use the language of "I" as in "I experience this or that" or "I prefer this or that" rather than "Everyone does this" or "You do this." By using the personal language which expresses what they themselves really experience and believe, the whole group benefits. You can model this, and you can ask them to repeat generalized statements with more personal ones.

Method #4: Build a community of love among your participants. As the process of conversion is lifelong, so building a community of love is an ongoing process. In your sessions, you will want to foster certain qualities that will allow sharing and learning to flourish more easily because a community of love is established. The community won't be perfect but will be in process. Four essential qualities to building this community are understanding, respect, communication, and collaboration.

Visit www.intothefields.org and click "training" on the home page for much more on this. Under "resources" you'll find excellent materials to augment what is here.