

■ Basic Introduction Exercises—Getting to Know One Another

Here are a few basic introductory exercises that work well either with a local group or a group gathered from various places.

■ Hi, My Name Is . . .

- Have everyone line up according to their first names, A to Z. In line, ask them to share briefly one fact about themselves (how many children they have, the work they do, their favorite television show, whatever) with the person to their left. Have the first one in line give his (or her) name, plus one fact about himself, and then introduce the person next to him. The second person introduces the third person, and so on.
- Have everyone line up according to last names and repeat the process as before.
- You can do this with any number of characteristics: middle names, oldest to youngest, birth dates, etc. Each time the line forms, people meet a new person and names are spoken, heard, and affirmed. In a local group, you may be able to skip the name sharing and concentrate on producing some bits of personal information that will give participants a “handle” to hang on to for other people, a means of connection. Even within a congregation folks may not know more than one another’s names, if that. Even with folks who know each other well, this can be a way to share some fun facts that will evoke laughter. Laughter is a great community builder!
- A variation on this theme is to name a particular interest, such as music, and gather the lovers of classical in one corner, jazz in another, country in another, pop in another, new age in the middle, etc. This gives people an opportunity to discover several folks with a common interest.



■ Where We've Been

Delineate an imaginary map of the United States, pointing out a corner of the room to become Maine, one to become Florida, one to become California and one to become Washington state. You may also designate a place in the room to represent places in the world beyond the United States. Ask people to place themselves approximately in the place they were born and then to share, with others near them, their names and one memory from childhood. Shuffle folks by asking them to move to the place they spent their high school years. With those around them invite them to share their names and one funny thing that happened to them in high school. Shuffle one more time and ask folks to place themselves

where they currently live (local groups may want to skip this or invent a different option—or just go with everyone in the same spot). Share names and ask them to tell one “fast fact” about their life in the present (number of pets, last vacation spot, favorite book or movie).

■ What We’ve Done

Gather the group in a circle. Ask people to share their names as you go around the circle, and to divulge two or three “fast facts” about themselves (a favorite sport, the last book they read, who their current “hero” is). Give out small slips of paper. Ask each person to write one more “fast fact” on a slip of paper and put it in a hat or bowl or envelope. Pass the envelope around the circle and have each person retrieve one slip of paper. It doesn’t matter if they draw their own. Go around the circle and have people read aloud what is written on the slip of paper. Ask the group to guess who fits the “fast fact.”



■ What’s in a Name?

Ask participants to clump themselves in groups of three or four. Invite them to tell one another about their names: first name, last name, middle name, nickname. They might tell if their name has a special meaning, or if they were named for someone or something. If they don’t like part of their name they can tell why and what they think would be better. They can tell how they got their nicknames. This would be a good opportunity for participants to make clear to one another what they prefer to be called.

The intent of each of these “games” is to use names as many times as possible so that people are able to put names and faces together and to begin to connect with one another and discover their common interests. On trips where there is lots of time spent traveling in a van from place to place or on a work trip when no work is done in the evening, such pieces of information may become building blocks for deepening community ties.

■ Community-Building Activities

■ Invite Participants to Share Their Reasons for Coming on the Trip

Early in the orientation period, whether it is before the actual departure, or is on the day of travel, or is the first day in the context of the trip, reserve an adequate amount of time for this sharing. You may want to ask people to prepare for this sharing by considering one or two of the questions listed in the journal writing preparation section, pages 96–97, and focusing their sharing as a response to that question. You may want to offer participants a time frame for this sharing, for example asking them to take 3–5 minutes to make their response. The time frame equalizes the experience for those for whom talking out loud in a group is easy and for those for whom public sharing is difficult.

■ Share Pictures and Prayer Concerns for the Country You Will Visit

Ahead of time invite participants to select one article or picture that represents their prayer preparation, and to bring it with them to share with the group. You may do this at a local orientation or at the beginning of the trip. It is one way of introducing one another and building a community from the group of individuals who are praying in common for the health and wholeness of a particular place.

■ Construct an Experience the Group Can Do Together

Here are two activities you might try; or use your own ideas.

■ *Collage Commentary*

Invite the participants to make a group collage that expresses the group's understanding of its mission for the trip. Provide poster board or fabric on which individuals may glue their contributions. Have lots of different items that people may work with, such as different kinds of paper, fabric scraps, paints, markers, pipe cleaners, odds and ends. When it is complete, ask the group to stand back and look at it. Invite participants to comment on what they see. You can use this activity as a springboard for discussion.

■ *Purpose Points*

Ask each person to write a sentence about what he or she understands the purpose of the trip to be. Then ask the participants to work together in pairs or threes and to develop one statement, which they all can agree to, about the purpose of the trip. Invite the small groups to share their statements with the large group. The final step is to construct a statement that belongs to the whole group. The key is that all the individuals must be willing to agree to the common statement that emerges. This will evoke significant conversation and clarification. What at first might have seemed like a clear purpose—for instance, to build a school—may be deepened through this exercise. It may emerge after the exercise as “to build bridges with another culture while building a school.” This activity can be done either at an orientation prior to the trip itself or on one of the first days of the trip.

In both these experiences, you lay the groundwork for reflection throughout the trip. What you as a leader model here will influence other times of reflection during the trip. If you allow ample time for reflection and response at the beginning, you set that expectation for later. If you talk a little and listen a lot, you will communicate that you are open to others’ opinions and that there is not a set “leader agenda” with which participants must contend. You also will model a style of sharing that others may follow. If you are willing to be flexible with this time and are attentive to participants’ needs to share, question, explore, and clarify, you may find them more willing to share, question, explore, and clarify later.

■ *Share Hopes and Fears*

One further way of “going deeper” and connecting participants with one another is to ask the group to number off 1, 2, 1, 2 . . . around the circle. Then ask the ones to form a circle in the middle of the room, and ask the twos to form a circle around them. The ones then turn outward and the twos remain facing inward. Ask them to pair up—each person in the outer circle facing someone in the inner circle. Prepare a series of questions that relate to the trip such as the following:

- What is your deepest desire for this trip?
- What is your greatest fear about coming on this trip?
- Who among your friends or family will be most interested in your experience on this trip and why?
- What is it you had to give up in order to come to make this journey (what is the hidden cost of this trip for you)?
- What are you most looking forward to on the trip and why? (This may be a place or a person or an experience or simply getting away from home for a time.)
- What is the one word you would use to talk about your preparation for this trip and why?
- Of the material you have read as background for the trip, what has touched you most and why?

You may want to construct questions specific to your trip experience as well.

Ask one question of the group. Give the group two minutes of talking time. The ones share first with the twos for one minute. Then the twos share on the same question for one minute. The outer circle then moves one person to the left and everyone has a new partner. Ask a second question and repeat the process. Ask enough questions so that the outer group has an opportunity to talk with everyone in the inner group. If you have a group of twenty, this takes only about 30 minutes. When you are finished, each person has had at least a moment of in-depth connection with half of the group.

Community is built on willingness to experience and to share at a deep level. The trust that begins in such activities is an investment in trusting one another with “not-knowing” and other vulnerabilities as the trip progresses. It is in such times of sharing that individuals grow and that the miracle of community really happens!

■ Inner/Outer Journey Activities

■ Journey Inward: Meditation

Going a level deeper, you may want to invite the group into a time of meditation. After a brief silence in which persons may center themselves, becoming aware of their breathing, the breath of God's Spirit in them, you may ask them to move backward and to silently describe themselves to themselves—in physical, external terms of race, gender, and ethnicity—as they knew themselves at age five, representing childhood. For some, this may mean only a description of being a boy or a girl. Ask how they felt about themselves. Invite them forward to age thirteen, the beginning of adolescence. Ask them to describe themselves by external categories and how they felt about themselves. This may now include an awareness of race, ethnicity, and sexuality. Move ahead again into the early twenties and invite them to describe themselves and their feelings about their identity. Finally, ask them to locate themselves in the present and to respond again to the external descriptors and their feelings about those descriptions. At this point ask two questions, allowing a moment of silence following each of them: What are the gifts of being who you are according to this description? What are the limitations of being who you are according to this description? Now ask participants to think beyond the categories and select at least three descriptions of themselves that do not relate to the "categories." Finally, ask participants to think of themselves as a whole person, not ignoring the specifics of their identity that are "given," but also including the aspects of themselves that they have chosen to emphasize or develop. Ask participants to think about any issues they bring with them to the trip because of who they are, issues that may or may not be problematic for them or for the group. Ask them to identify what gifts of themselves they bring to the group because of who they are. Close the meditation by inviting them to visualize God's light surrounding them and God's love cradling them. Remind them that they are the beloved people of God and that at any time they can return to this visualization and restore the wholeness of themselves in God's Great Embrace.

This meditation may be used as a way of calling participants to awareness following the conversation concerning the journey inward/journey outward encounters with systemic injustice and its affect on us, in our lives. As such it can stand alone. This meditation may also be used to begin the conversation or to lead the conversation into some shared personal reflection about systemic injustice in our lives as you begin the trip. You may refer to it again if the group uses this lens as a way of processing the events and experiences of the trip.

■ Noticing

We go through life at a fast pace. The terrain around us becomes a blur. We eat fast food and hardly taste it. We talk to someone while “multi-tasking”; but our attention is scattered. We do not pick up voice nuances or visual clues to what is happening with the other person beneath or beyond the words. Stopping to notice becomes a discipline. This is true at home. This is also true on a trip. The outward journey is not just collecting information. It is gathering impressions, vignettes, “moments in time” which will be burned in our memory like a brand on cattle.

Noticing has two dimensions. First, it is slowing down enough to be truly attentive. Second, it is allowing ourselves to experience fully what is at hand. Noticing is savoring the now, letting it make an imprint on us like a thumb pressed into wet moss. It is receiving rather than acting.

If you are together for an orientation time prior to the trip, you may want to practice noticing with the group.

■ *I Spy*

With everyone seated comfortably, invite participants to notice inanimate, nonliving, things with their eyes. This would include things such as what they can observe of the weather outside the window, lighting indoors and out, furniture, walls, objects on the tables, shelves, the floor. Take turns with people mentioning something they see, or play the I Spy game. In the game the individuals give a mini-description of something they see—for example, I see something small and red—and the group tries to guess what it is. The individual may add clues one at a time until the group guesses. Invite the group to do the same thing again, this time noticing living entities.

■ *Sense-ational*

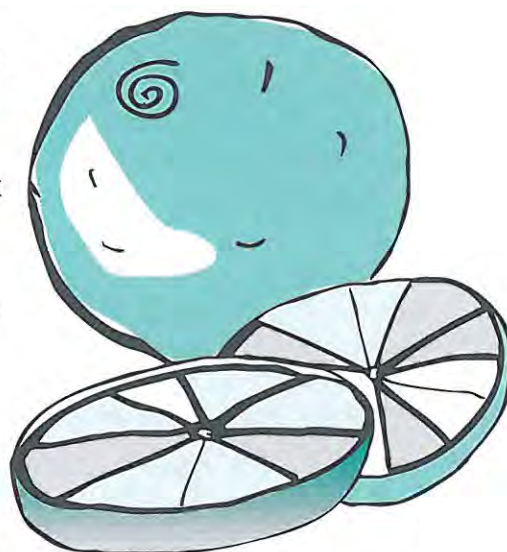
This activity involves noticing through hearing, touch, smell, and intuition. Invite the group to sit comfortably in a circle, hold hands, and close their eyes. Invite them to spend a few moments noticing what they can hear (both in the room and from the outside), what they can physically feel (such as heat/cold, humidity, the fabric of the chair, a breeze, the warmth of the next person), what they can intuit (for example: I’m picking up a lot of nervousness, or there’s an air of camaraderie in the room), or what they can smell. After a time of tuning-in, take turns going around the room with each person expressing one thing she or he hears, feels, smells, or intuit with eyes still closed. You might begin. After you have spoken, squeeze

the hand of the person to your left. That person may speak and then squeezes the hand of the next person. Anyone may pass by squeezing the hand of the next person. You may want to go around the room two or three times, depending on the amount of stimuli in the area.

Expand the group's noticing practice. Go to a busy street corner, or to a mall, or to another crowded area with a variety of sights, sounds, smells, things to taste and touch. Determine the amount of time for this activity and the place where the group will regather. Encourage participants to notice as much as possible in the given time, and then to report back with their observations.

■ *The Orange*

Invite the group to sit silently in a circle. Tell the group you are going to offer them an opportunity to eat an orange: fully, deeply, taking in all of the sensations that go with eating a textured, juicy, sweet, sticky, fragrant fruit. After a moment of quiet, pass the orange around the circle, inviting everyone to hold it a moment as it comes to them. Invite them to enjoy its color and to feel its shape and the texture of its skin. When the orange returns to you, take a knife and slice the orange into circles, then cut the circles in half. Place them on a plate or cutting board. Invite the participants to watch as you do this. Pass the plate or board around the circle, inviting each person to take a slice. Ask them not to eat it right away, but instead to enjoy its smell as they hold it until all have their slice. By this time, the aroma should be pervading the room. When each person has had the opportunity to take a slice and savor the smell, invite participants to slowly eat their slices, savoring the taste. Encourage people to lick their fingers if they'd like! Or not. For some the feel of sticky orange juice may have a particular sensate pleasure all its own. Finally, pass around napkins or wet cloths to let them wash up.



You can use this experience by itself, or you can group it with the next two exercises done in sequence. If you choose to group it with one or both of the other “noticing” exercises, you may either process each exercise separately with the group, or you may talk about the experiences as a whole at the end of the series. In each instance simply invite people to speak about what the experience held for them. Go around the circle once, then allow the conversation to flow until it seems right to close this part of the time together.¹¹

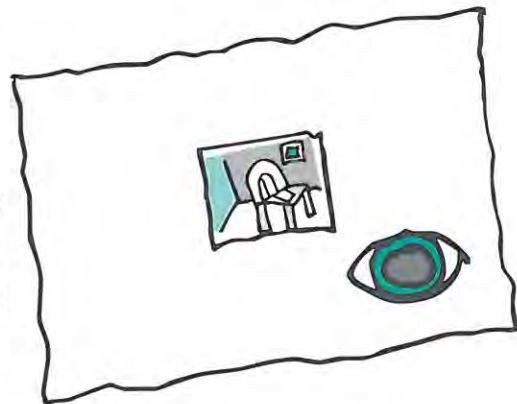
■ *Experiencing a Room*

Have a 3- by 5-inch card ready for each participant.

Cut an inch-square hole in the middle of it.

Participants will use this card to “frame” their experience of the room. Start with silence. When people are ready, ask them to put the card to one eye and wander around the room, looking at it from this narrow and focused perspective. You may also do this on the first day of the trip as you gather in a place that is new to everyone. Encourage participants to pay special attention to what they see and how it

looks different when seen through this “lens.” Ask participants to raise questions about how the room may be used, who uses it, what the room says about the people who usually gather here, and so on. Give them five to ten minutes to do this exercise. They will be playing detective to learn to see things “up close” that usually escape them completely.¹²



11. This suggestion is adapted from an article by Matthew Fox titled “Dancing the Orange” that first appeared in *Creation* magazine, March–April 1987, pp. 24–26.

12. Mission volunteer Bill McAtee uses this technique as part of an orientation for trips to Cuba. He begins with a daylong retreat in Nassau and uses this exercise as a means of inviting people to be aware of their total surroundings as they step into a culture that is not their own.

■ *What's in a Shopping Mall?*

If it is possible to do an orientation for the group in advance of the trip, take the group to a shopping mall. Ask them to use in the mall what they have learned from eating the orange and from the 3- by 5-inch card exercise. They don't have to take the card to the mall, but you can hope they take the heightened awareness they found through that experience. Ask them to try to step outside themselves and their relationship with our culture and to come to the mall as strangers to discover what it means to be "American." Give them an hour to NOTICE everything. Give them permission to taste the foods and to touch the marble walls or the water in the fountain. Ask them to collect the smells of the mall, everything from perfume samples to the wafting aromas of the Italian restaurant. Encourage participants to be attuned to the colors and textures and sounds that the mall provides. Tell them to take mental notes only. When they return, offer them paper and pencil to write down the most significant "moments," visuals, sounds, whatever struck them.



■ *Taking It on the Road*

When you arrive at your trip destination, you may want to repeat these experiences in that location. Use a specific food to practice the slow savoring of its taste. Take the group into a marketplace and ask them to "actively notice." Invite them to gather clues to the culture through this focused looking. You may also offer them some hints of what to look for in their observation. Invite them to consider questions such as these: Who are the shopkeepers? Who are the shoppers? Who are the service people? Who are the town officials? What ages are present in the public places? What do they notice about gender roles from watching the people in the market? You may think of other questions that are particularly appropriate to the place you are visiting.

■ Cross-Cultural Perspectives and Perceptions—Activities

■ Do You See What I See?

Place an object of some complexity (a flower arrangement, a small three-dimensional figure, a candle in a holder) in the middle of the circle. Give participants two minutes to look at the object. Then give them three minutes more to describe in writing *what they see*. Do not be specific about focusing on the object.

After the three minutes of writing, pass the papers around the circle, and say “stop” when the papers have traveled enough so that they won’t be identified with the writer. Or collect them, shuffle them, and start them around the circle again, each person taking one off the top. One by one, without comment, read the descriptions people have written. Ask the group to listen for what is consistently named and how it is described. Ask them to listen also for what is not named.

When all the papers have been read, ask the group to talk about what they heard. You may invite persons at this time to “claim” their description and say what they saw first and what they “see” now, after hearing the other versions. Ask people to consider how their own vision was expanded and augmented by other participants’ perspectives. Include an observation about whether they focused only on the object itself, or also included other things they saw when they looked at the object. For instance, did anyone name, as part of their view, the persons sitting directly across from them or, further, what was behind those persons in the room? Did anyone mention things that would be considered “peripheral” in their perspective, something happening to the left or the right of the circle as they were gazing directly ahead?

As you process this, you may point out that often in our experience of a new situation, place, or person, we see only what is directly in front of us. We consider only the current event or the “current person,” forgetting that this event or person has a context—a history, a web of relationships, dreams for the future. To judge this person solely on what is seen is unfair. To assess this event without knowing what came before is incomplete. Invite participants to develop larger perspectives, to include peripheral awareness in their way of encountering a place or person, to look, not just straight ahead, but also down alleys and up stone staircases, to notice signs on buildings and highways, and to notice the smaller signs of life in the marketplace and living scenarios of a neighborhood.

Point out how much we need each other in the group to adequately describe the experience we are having. One person's view or glancing or noticing may add a detail or observation to the whole group's common experience. It may also serve to raise a question that the total group has missed. Another person may have heard something others did not and may thus contribute that to the collective understanding of the group.

Duplicate Handout 2, "How We View the World," and give copies to the group, either as an item to be read with the preparation material or as a handout after this exercise. See page 99.

■ Mutual Invitation

Eric Law offers a different approach to conversation: mutual invitation.¹³

■ *The Technique*

As the leader, you will begin, not by talking, but by choosing one person in the group to begin talking in response to a question, a reflection piece, an event, or an experience the group has had. This person has permission to maintain silence long enough to think about what she or he will say. The person may decide to speak or to remain silent. After speaking or after deciding to remain silent (passing), that person then chooses the next person to speak. This continues throughout the conversation. Always, there is permission to begin with a moment of silence before speaking; always there is the option to pass; always the person who has been chosen most recently is the one who chooses the next person.

For most of us this is an unusual manner of conducting a conversation. It may seem artificial, even awkward, at first. The group may need to practice this method of inviting conversation several times before it begins to feel more natural and the participants see the value of the process.

Challenge the group to give it a chance to work. Used wisely and well, this conversation mode opens up the conversation to people in a way that allows them to participate more fully and freely in the reflection times of the trip. For further consideration of this approach and detailed instructions for employment of it, see Eric Law's book, pages 113–114.

13. Eric Law, *The Wolf Shall Lie Down with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in Multicultural Community* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993), pp. 79–88.

■ *Uses of the Technique*

You may use this approach or technique with the participants at either a pre-trip orientation or as part of orientation upon arrival. You may also use it at other times during the trip, either as a way of expanding participants' perspectives or as an invitation to discuss conflict that has already arisen from varying perspectives. It will enhance, rather than corrode, the group experience.

This technique is highly effective when holding discussions with members of the host church or community. At an international church meeting, participants engaged each morning in Bible study in small groups. The groups were intentionally "mixed" with participants from different countries and cultures. Translators were provided. For the first two days, the small group discussion of the text was "open" to anyone who had something to say. During the remaining days, participants were instructed to use the "mutual invitation" technique. Participants expressed their surprise and joy at the difference the technique made to their discussion! Everyone participated fully by being invited to speak. All were enriched by the variety of insights and perspectives brought to the text.

In any group discussion, some participants are more at ease than others, more confident that they have something of value to contribute. Mutual invitation grants each a voice and also serves to limit those who sometimes talk too much.