

**SACRED GROUND, in partnership with
the UNION OF BLACK EPISCOPALIANS, presents:
A SHORT LIST OF RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICES
FOR ORGANIZING AND FACILITATING CIRCLES
Compiled from results of 2020-2021 evaluation efforts**

FORMING CIRCLES

- a. Logistics
- Circle size recommendation: 8-12 participants, max 12 (including 2 facilitators).
 - 59% of survey respondents recommended bi-weekly sessions; 20% recommended weekly; others preferred monthly or every three weeks. There are pros and cons as to whether to meet more or less often – more can help with community-building; monthly allows more time for homework materials to sink in fully.
 - Given the still predominant orientation toward meeting online, view videos ahead of time and allocate 90 mins or 2 hrs max/session. Online sessions are still highly impactful.
- b. Facilitators
- We recommend having co-facilitators if possible, as opposed to a single facilitator; for Interracial Circles (IRCs), if possible, a multiracial facilitator team is advised.
 - We do not recommend having a person of color facilitate or co-facilitate a White Work Circle (WWC). It's not ideal. That being said, we know there have been circles where that has been the case and it has been navigated well.
- c. Organizing and recruiting
- We encourage intentional discernment re: who hosts and who participates in circles: whether all Episcopal, and if so: just your parish, or several, or deanery-wide, or diocesan-wide; OR mixed denominational/multifaith. In an era of online meetings folks can participate who are more geographically dispersed.
 - Offer an “[interest/preview session](#)” prior to circle launch – a chance to promote the series, share info and inspiration, show some trailers/clips, answer questions, etc.
 - As part of discernment, view/share the SG/UBE invitational video, [“We Bless You.”](#)
- d. Types of circles vis a vis racial/ethnic composition
- We recommend very intentional discernment re: type of circle to form, i.e., White Work Circle or Interracial Circle. Please take time for this discernment (examples of processes are in forthcoming evaluation report).
 - We recommend IRCs more than we did previously as our evaluation research suggests that such circles are valuable to people of color, not just to white participants. We offer the caveat that it is best if white participants in IRCs have some prior anti-racism training/dialogue experience.
 - Racial/ethnic composition of IRCs: We do not recommend having a sole person of color in the group. It's not ideal. That being said, there have been circles where a person of color has chosen to be the sole person of color and it has been navigated well.
 - For those considering forming a circle for people of color only, please know that the curriculum was not designed for such circles so they are not recommended at this time; but we recommend offerings from the various [Ethnic Ministries](#) desks.

CIRCLE EXPERIENCE

- a. Race/ethnicity-related considerations
 - In IRCs, people of color should not be treated by default as the “experts in the room” – giving choice is key.
 - Affinity groups/caucus time: We recommend that facilitators of IRCs touch base with participants after a few sessions to see if caucus time is desired, for check-in/course correction purposes, for both people of color and white people.
- b. Supplementary materials
 - We recommend that facilitators and/or participants offer optional ‘current events’ supplementary materials to further bring home the reverberations in the present day of the history being studied – particularly later in the curriculum as the focus moves to present day.
- c. Levels of processing
 - Small group ministry: Consistency of circle composition and commitment to attending sessions leads to deeper, more profound experience of transformational community. We recommend maintaining group size and composition throughout SG offering.
 - For the facilitator and participant respondents to the evaluation survey, the type of processing that the highest number of people wished for more of was spiritual processing; we thus recommend that facilitators more fully utilize the [religious resources](#) offered and that they (and/or participants) bring additional resources to their circles.
- d. Effectiveness of and support for facilitators, and facilitation best practices
 - We recommend that facilitators have gone through some form of anti-racism training and some form of facilitation training prior to facilitating; *and* we celebrate emerging leaders with new gifts – waiting until one feels fully ready can lead to never stepping out.
 - We recommend that a relevant institution (congregation; deanery; diocese) or individual organizer organize debrief/support meetings for Sacred Ground facilitators.
 - A core best practice for facilitation is to BE beloved community: befriend yourself; your co-facilitator; your circle members – practice the way of love.
 - Dialogue norms & formats: Rely on the touchstone norms that the group establishes; we also encourage deliberate discernment as to what formats work best for your group – for introverts and extroverts, for people with disabilities, etc. – such as speaking one-at-a-time prior to conversational cross-talk; mutual invitation; using a timer; and other techniques.
- e. Next steps
 - We recommend that Sacred Ground circles meet to discern and take next steps after they complete the curriculum. A new Session 11 is coming soon! It will offer suggestions and tools for the process of engaging the fourth quadrant in the labyrinth: *repairing the breach*.

*More best practices will be available as part of
Indigena Consulting’s Sacred Ground Evaluation Report
being released in the first quarter of 2022.
These best practices will also be woven into the relevant “Getting Started” documents on the web pages.*