

Creating an Online Environment of Hospitality for an EfM Seminar

Cheri Winter, Diocese of Colorado
cherikwinter@gmail.com

1. Part of a mentor's role is to help provide a space that encourages thoughtful interaction through sharing and heart listening between participants. How do we create this space? Through preparation that begins during the first visit with a potential participant to help that person discern if Education for Ministry is the place for them at this place and time. We begin a mentor/participant relationship in a conversation that asks questions to better understand that person's interests for learning and shares how our particular seminar group works.

During this first interview, it is important to ask the participant's comfort level with technology and what type of device the participant is planning to use. (desktop/laptop, tablet, smartphone, landline) **This is important if the group is face-to-face with the addition of virtual meetings as needed.*

- How comfortable is the participant with e-mail?
- How comfortable is the participant with using the internet?
- How comfortable is the participant with Zoom (or other online meeting/learning platforms)?

These questions are important for you, as the mentor, to understand how you can best guide this person through the meeting room basics moving forward.

2. Moving from face-to-face to Zoom-inars
 - a. What does the ideal face-to-face seminar setting offer?
 - i. A welcoming environment that encourages community, thoughtful conversation, few distractions for better focus, and whatever else you feel creates a sacred space.
 - b. How do we create this welcoming environment? We plan ahead!
 - i. We, as mentors, arrive early to greet our participants and prepare the space for the session.
 - ii. We prepare the room by arranging chairs to accommodate the group size or activity, ensure that needed resources for study are on hand, provide refreshments, place a candle on the table, etc.
 - iii. What other things do you do in preparation for your face-to-face seminars?
 - c. What might preparation look like in an online environment? Some things to consider:
 - i. How would you enter a face-to-face meeting? Why would you enter in this way?
 - ii. How would you like to admit participants?
 1. Waiting Room or entry into the Zoom meeting before the host (mentor)
 2. Audio on "mute" or "unmute"
 3. Video on or off
 - iii. Why might these decisions be important?
3. Before the first online seminar:
 - a. Decide how deeply you, the mentor, want to go within your online platform of choice.
 - i. Will you learn ALL of the possible options available for interactive experiences or just the basics to keep it simple?
 - ii. Choose which options you believe will work best within your seminar group and understand WHY you chose them. Keep in mind the amount of time you have available to learn about the options as you make this decision – understanding a few things very well is better than knowing about a lot of options, but not being able to use any of them smoothly, creating disruption in the flow of conversation. *This doesn't mean that you never learn the other things, just that you prioritize your learning.*

- iii. Connect with all of your seminar participants in the week or two leading up to the first session (individually or as a group) in order to ensure everyone knows how to use the components you believe are important for your seminar group. Are the participants able to:
 - 1. log in
 - 2. mute/unmute
 - 3. use video on/off
 - 4. find the chat log
 - 5. use "Share Screen" *
 - 6. annotate a shared screen *
 - 7. move in and out of breakout rooms *
 - 8. respond to polls *

** These items can be taught later, but are great tools to have available for a richer seminar experience.*

- 4. Suggestions for creating an online experience that invites conversation (mentor and participants)
 - a. Consider what is happening around you:
 - i. How much background noise is there? HEADPHONES
 - ii. Will there be other people in the room with you? HEADPHONES
 - iii. Are you sitting in front of a window and does the background put you in silhouette? LIGHTING
 - iv. What do people see behind you? Is it calming or distracting?
 - v. Have you positioned your video camera at an angle that is distracting? (Please, take time to look at what others will be seeing.)
 - vi. What other things can one do to create a calming online environment?
- 5. In the first session
 - a. Discuss Group Norms.
 - i. To mute or not to mute and when?
 - ii. Attention to time/schedule (Remember that check-in and worship are crucial components of building community within EfM Groups, so don't skip these things in order to save time.)
 - iii. Will seminar sessions be recorded? Why or why not?
 - iv. What is different during online sessions that may not be necessary when gathering face-to-face?
 - v. How will the chat log be used? Can everyone send individual texts to members of the group, or just to everyone? Consider this "side chatter." How do you handle side chatter during a face-to-face session? What might it look like online?

Additionally, pay attention to what you are experiencing in other online situations. Is there something that you would like to use with your EfM group? What was it and how was it done? Not sure? Connect with the person or group to find out. Not only does reaching out benefit your group, it also lets those who have created whatever it is you are curious about know that their efforts have been appreciated – double bonus!

What you see here is intended as a way to get you thinking about your online EfM environment as a place where relationships can be built and sacred space can be created. This is not a definitive list of things to consider while preparing your online space, but I hope it will help you get started and set you up for a positive online experience.