

Rabbi Laura Geller Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills
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Helpful Hints for House Meeting Hosts

1. Invitations- The best house meetings have 10-12 people in attendance. It is the responsibility of the host to invite, friends, fellow congregants, family and interested and interesting people from the broader community. It is often necessary to invited 20-30 people to have a group of 12 or more.

2. A personal phone call or face-to-face invitation is recommended. If people commit to attend, be sure to remind them just prior to the event. This reminder will make a difference.

-When inviting others, share some of your interests in the topic; get some of their thoughts. Invite them to join others in an hour long discussion.

-Let them know the temple is holding a number of meetings and the rabbi is encouraging the discussions.

3. Be clear about the parameters of the meeting and stick to them. The meeting is for one hour. It is very important to keep that deal when the meeting is held. Be sure to adjourn after an hour; conversations may (are likely) to continue informally, but those who need to leave can do so.

4. You will run the meeting, unless there is another designated leader coming in to do so. If someone is coming in to lead the meeting, make sure to connect with them a day or two ahead of time.

5. It is not recommended to serve refreshments during the meeting. It's also important that people not feel they have to make elaborate preparations. Simple serving of coffee, tea, etc. before or after is sufficient. It is important that all have a chance to be attentive during the hour long meeting-----so it is recommended that you not continue serving during the discussion.

6. A good meeting will involve a sharing of stories and experiences through which people will connect their interests. Point of the meeting is to create this energy and for ideas to emerge. The meeting is not intended to solve problems! The stories that are recorded by a recorder (staff or volunteer) will be gathered and the core group of leaders will have an opportunity to think about directions for next steps. People in the meeting who demonstrate a vibrant interest should be invited to participate in these deliberations. The leaders will let the group know that this follow up will occur and that there will be pragmatic outcomes. All should know they are welcome to participate.

The leaders of the house meeting discussion should be aware of the “three movements” of a community discussion:

I. Opening Business and Establishment of Theme (5-7 minutes)

A. Welcome by the host and introduction of the leader

B. Theme: Introduced by the leader. Answers: “Why are we here tonight?”

As the year 2011 began, the oldest members of the “baby boom” generation celebrated their 65th birthday. On that day, and for every day for the next 19 years, 10,000 others will reach that milestone.

Because we live longer lives, our generation has the opportunity to pioneer a new phase in life. A time period characterized by the accumulated experiences of full adulthood, yet endowed with health and energy where wisdom can be combined with activism for the common good.

Tonight we want to share our stories of the aspirations and challenges we experience as we begin this phase of life. There are several meetings of this sort occurring in our temple community. We’re sure some direction for future action will emerge from these discussions and invite you to be part of it if you are interested. Before we begin, I invite each of you to introduce yourself. (Name, connection to the temple or host).

Heart of the Meeting (40-45 minutes)

1. What does this time, this phase, this stage mean to you? What are you looking forward to? What concerns do you have? (In community organization jargon: what keeps you up at night? What gets you up in the morning?)

2. Was there a time when Jewish tradition and the Jewish community have been there for you at this stage? If not, can you imagine what “being there” might look like?

3. What kinds of changes would we need in the larger community to help us navigate this next stage?

Pointers:

-Allow the stories and experiences to emerge organically—don’t go “around the circle.”

-Be prepared to share your own experience at the beginning.

-Interrupt when necessary if someone dominates the discussion. This is best done by inviting those who haven’t participated to speak up.

-Be attentive to comments that are analytical, that attempt to “solve” “a problem.” Ask people to provide an “example or experience,” to explain what they mean.

II. Summary and Next Steps (5-7 minutes)

A. Brief review of the stories, themes and topics that emerged

B. Articulate what the temple community plans as a next step