

Letter to Facilitators

Dear Facilitator:

On behalf of the Canadian Council of Churches, we would like to thank you for taking on the role of facilitator for this "Faith and Genetics" curriculum. You are doing important work and we are grateful for your generosity.

We have prepared this resource to help you, but you should feel free to make it your own. Each group that uses it will have different interests and concerns and, as the group's facilitator, you should respond to the needs of the people in your group and adapt this resource to suit them.

Here is some information we think you will find helpful.

Organization of the Resource

The program consists of five different sessions:

1. Genetics, Faith, and Human Dignity
2. Genetic Technologies, Information, and Personal Identity
3. Genetic Technologies and Research on Human and non-Human Subjects
4. Genetic Technologies and the Engineering of Future Generations
5. Genetic Technologies and Social Justice

Each session follows the same simple structure.

Introduction

The introduction to each session is a brief orientation intended to set the stage for what follows. This sometimes includes background information and questions for consideration about the scenarios to be presented.

Question to Think About

After the Introduction, a question is presented that is meant to provide focus and inspire thought and reflection at the beginning of the session as well as highlight a foundational principle that is meant to help ground the discussion.

Narrative

Each scenario includes a narrative that provides a human context for approaching and considering the ethical and scientific issues that the session focuses on. Each narrative allows the group to explore a different facet of the session's topic. Usually the reader is given a role to play in these narratives.

Discussion Questions

After the narrative, a number of discussion questions are suggested to help guide and direct the responses and ideas of the group to the issue they are considering.

Neither you nor anyone else is expected to have a scientific background or expertise. For that reason, the Resource also offers additional material as a help to you and the other participants: several relevant background articles on genetics and a glossary of terms.

Genetics Background Information

Seven brief genetics background information sections have been prepared to help the participants understand some of the science involved in the session issues.

Genetics 101: The Molecular Basis and Implications of Genetic Variation

Behavioural Genetics

Inherited Disease and Genetic Testing

Transgenics

Embryonic Development and Genetic Engineering

Population Genetics

Genetics for Guiding Therapy

References to this science information are included at the point in particular sessions where they are most relevant, but participants will benefit from reading these sections ahead of time on their own.

Glossary

The resource includes a glossary of science and genetic terms for quick reference.

Time Lines

For most people who have used the resource, a session lasts for about two hours, including time for a break. This might seem like a lot, but the time will pass quickly. The sessions raise important, difficult, and often complicated issues. Everyone who participates is interested in them, but some people will have a strong personal interest in a particular topic or have strong opinions about what is raised. Here are some suggestions to help everyone make the best use of the time.

- Encourage people to read the material for each session and especially the science material before the session begins. If people are familiar with the material and prepared with questions and discussion ideas ahead of time, everyone will find that the time they spend together will be very fruitful.
- Each session is full of ideas and issues, far more than you can cover in one meeting. Before the first session, try to find out what your group is especially interested in and choose the narratives and the discussion questions that explore those issues. Feel free to adapt and modify them to match the needs of your group or to take into account something current in the news. (For example, you may wish to discuss at the beginning of each session whether the duration of the session should be fixed, given a flexible end time with extra time available if further discussion is needed, or even whether to schedule an additional session so the discussion can continue later.)

Participants

You will find among the people who come for the sessions those who have a deeply personal involvement in an issue and those who have an intellectual curiosity; those who have at least some scientific expertise and those who know little science except for the realization that something important is happening; those with a strong theological grounding and those whose religious connection is less secure. In short, each group will be unique because each person in it will be unique.

It's important that you make everyone feel that they are personally welcome and that their contribution is welcome, too. Here are some suggestions.

- At the first session, make sure participants are invited to introduce themselves and say what they are looking for from the sessions. This allows each person to feel part of the process from the beginning and also allows you to make sure that particular interests or concerns are included. If nametags are available, they may be helpful for the first couple of sessions.

- Make sure there is a break. Not only does this give everyone a chance to relax but it also creates an opportunity for the kinds of unscheduled and unexpected conversations that often are the most important part of a meeting. If possible some kind of food or refreshment would be a wonderful addition.
- The discussions will be greatly enriched if you encourage those who have prior or specialized knowledge about a topic or issue to share that knowledge with the group. Be careful, though, that those with specialized knowledge of genetic science, ethics, or theology do not dominate the discussion.
- Be sure that everyone is invited to speak. Some people thrive in group situations; others find speaking in groups difficult. But all participants should have an opportunity to ask a question or say what they think.

Role of Faith Communities

These scientific developments are so dramatic and their social, political, personal, and religious implications so profound that the Canadian Council of Churches believed it was important that its members work together on this curriculum. We hope that by sharing our expertise, our experience, and our prayers, we will be helpful to all Christian people and all people of good will.

We want anyone who takes part in these sessions to feel that not only have they personally gained from the experience but that they have also grown as members of their faith community. If the question, "How do we, as a Christian community, understand and respond to these issues?" is one they feel they have at least begun to answer, then one of the goals in offering this curriculum will have been met.

- An important component of this Resource is the appendices that the individual Christian communities have prepared for their members. These reflect the particular responses of individual churches to some of these



difficult and challenging issues and can offer helpful guidance to participants, who are strongly encouraged to read and make them part of the sessions. Participants are also invited to connect with the national office of their church community or with a Biotech Reference Group member of their denomination who helped develop this Resource.

- Make sure that your pastoral team is a partner when offering this curriculum. Keep its members informed and draw on their experience and strengths to help you in your role as facilitator. For example, you can expect that some of these issues will have immediately and directly touched some participants. Some may have used IVF; some may have had to make genetics-based life decisions. Be prepared for this yourself and if something comes up in a session, be ready and willing to speak privately to the person. You can also invite a pastoral team member to get involved.

Success

This is not a school program with a test at the end and marks that measure levels of accomplishment. The curriculum will be a success if all the participants, including you, feel that they know more than when they started; that they have shared time with others in a respectful and supportive way; that they can afterwards participate more fully, both as individual citizens and as members of a Christian community, in some of the major ethical and religious issues of the day.

Thank you again for your generosity. We hope you find the experience of leading these sessions to be enriching, educational, and rewarding.

Yours sincerely,

Biotechnology Reference Group