**SEEKING INTEGRATION AND WISDOM THROUGH THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES**

**SIWSE: Guidelines for Weekly Group Meetings 6/30/16**  *General Principles*

+ Different people are in different “places” in the journey of their lives. Everyone is entitled to be wherever she/he is. This is especially true where matters of faith/belief/doubt/uncertainty are the subject of discourse.

+ Telling parts of our past or current life-story to others in trust can be an important way to grow in appreciation and acceptance of ourselves and our lives. Such a positive sense of self can ground our ability to be there for others (“women and men for and with others”).

+ No one is obliged to disclose his/her “hidden life”; we are entitled to an intimate and private part of self. We say what we choose to about ourselves when and to whom we wish. When joining or forming a new group, people are right to exercise caution about self-disclosure and only gradually reveal themselves as the comfort and trust level in the group grows. . *More Specific Guidelines for This Group*

+ Although we hope that human and spiritual growth will happen for individuals and for the group, SIWSE does not exist to convert anyone to anything.

+ In the first half hour or so of a given meeting, each member of the group is allowed and encouraged to share something of her/his past week (limit: 2-3 minutes). It helps if the disclosure is related in some way to the matter introduced by the week’s reading and praying, but the final norm is that you are simply talking about your own experience. When someone is speaking, the role of others is simply to listen, not to respond.

+ In the remainder of the 75 minutes, further self-disclosure of one’s own is appropriate or comment that ties together some things already said, but in general “theorizing” is not as fruitful a form of discourse as narrative-- telling something of one’s story—“I-statement.” Raising an open-ended question can be helpful, but avoid questions where you know the answer and are simply “making a point.” Arguing a point is not appropriate.

+ An appropriate response to disclosure is one of affirmation and empathy (for example, to someone’s expres- sion of pain or difficulty the respondent might say “That must be hard”). Do not respond by bringing up a “similar” experience of your own (doing so may appear to be a form of empathy but it moves attention away from the person who has disclosed something of her/his unique experience and should have been able to stay with it). Giving advice or attempting to solve someone’s “problem” is not appropriate in this group setting.

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