

GATHERING SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL VOCATION INTERNSHIP

Overview

The following interview protocol is designed to gather data on the perceptions, values and wisdom of our partners in the Environmental Vocation Internship. We hope to better understand how lay people in local faith communities perceive Environmental Justice and Biodiversity Stewardship values and issues. We seek to understand how we can help these lay leaders bring these issues to the awareness of their communities. Data from these interviews is crucial to improving the internship experience for future years, and to generating scholarship reporting this experience.

For these interviews, we have only five substantial questions that allow the respondents to explain how they perceive the relationship between Environmental Justice, Biodiversity Stewardship, and their faith. Please plan to interview 8-10 lay (non-ordained) leaders each during the spring quarter. Once you gather some basic demographic data from them in the interview, you will ask these five questions, moving from more general toward more specific:

1. Does your personal faith shape the way you perceive environmental protection of endangered species, also known as biodiversity stewardship?
2. Does it shape the way you see the intersection of the intersection of environmental protection and concern for the poor and socially marginalized peoples, also known as environmental justice?
3. How has your membership in this faith community shaped your views of these topics?
4. Do you believe your faith community presents ethical duties to care for the environment?
5. What types of educational activities might help your faith community understand these issues and foster political participation?

The protocol is in two parts. The first gathers the basic demographic information, and the second qualitative data on their perceptions. These interviews will not be taped recorded, transcribed or coded. We will rely on you taking notes in the field, and then writing up short summaries of respondents' perceptions. Please use the back of the interview protocol to record handwritten notes etc. Then transcribe them onto one computer page. Please do this within 48 hours, while the data is still fresh in your mind.

Selection of participants

It is important to select participants consistently across these faith communities. This will ensure consistency in data collection. For the purposes of this project, we do not aspire to a random sample, nor a sample representing the entire local faith community. Instead, we are seeking to gather data from lay leaders who would be the most likely to perceive a connection between faith and environmental protection. Any environmental education initiative in a faith community will succeed or fail based on support from this sub-segment of the community.

Ideally, the 8-10 persons you select to interview should be lay volunteers or lay leaders, but in some cases, they may work for the church. Avoid interviewing people with specialized training, such as a graduate degree in theology – we are looking for the perceptions of ordinary lay participants. Interviewees may be catechists/volunteer religious educators, or participate in the

choir or parish council, or volunteer in some way for the community. Begin with contacts you already have at the faith community, and then ask them to refer you to others who they think would be open to giving an interview (snowball technique). Do not interview anyone under 18 years of age. Give potential participants a copy of the interview protocol so that they can understand what questions we want them to answer. This will help them figure out if they want to participate.

The Protocol

We have an ethical duty to ensure that the people we interview are treated with dignity and respect, and to inform participants of the purpose of this research. Do everything you can to be transparent about our intent, and help your respondent feel like they can share what they want to. A neutral site such as a coffee shop may help them feel more comfortable. Included on the interview guide is a script that may be altered to fit your personal preferences. Be sure to tell participants that there are no right and wrong answers – we want to hear their opinion. Also, they do not have to answer all questions. It is very important that the respondent is not only informed of the research but assured that they may stop the interview at any time they feel uncomfortable and no longer wish to continue.

Begin the interview by making sure the respondent has a copy of the protocol in front of them. This is designed to help them feel comfortable with where the questions are going. Make sure they have read or are familiar with the introduction. Then fill out Part II; questions 1-8 are demographic. The purpose of these questions is to keep track of important demographic information as well as provide the information necessary to organize data. These also serve as icebreakers, to create empathy and mutual understanding.

Questions A-E are the key questions. They are open ended, and you may receive quite different answers from different participants. Respondents may state initially that they do not have knowledge of these things, but chances are, if you engage them in a conversation, they will have some interesting insights. That is part of what will make these interviews interesting! They may ask you to define these terms: please do so without trying to influence the respondents. Remind them that we want to hear their opinions on these subjects, and they do not have to respond to every question.

Listen very carefully to whatever they say, and take detailed notes. The long term success of this internship and similar projects depends on getting accurate information about how ordinary members of faith communities perceive how these issues are connected. Take note of more than the words conveyed by the respondent. Note also the tone, the sense of ethical responsibility, and the kinds of metaphors and comparisons they use. Finally, be sure to ask respondents for any ideas they may have for educational activities. We will incorporate some of these into this year's report, and might be able to implement some of these ideas in future years.

Please type up notes to answers A-E within 48 hours. You will begin to forget details if you wait more than two days. Email these to KDW as you get them.