

RIVER OF LIFE: A LIFE REVIEW ACTIVITY¹

Begin with a blank sheet of paper. Before you put anything on the paper, think briefly about the course of your whole life. If you were able to compare your life with a river, what would the river look like?

- When and where are the smooth, flowing waters – those times when events and relationships seem generally positive or there is a sense of ease about your life?
- When does the river take a sudden turn (and what caused the turn), or change from smooth waters to rough, tumbling rapids or to an excited rush of water?
- Are there rocks or boulders falling into your river – unexpectedly landed there, changing its direction forever?
- Are there points at which it flows powerfully and purposefully or seems to slow to a trickle?

Instructions

A. Draw your river of life with its bends and turns, its smooth waters and rough spots, its strength/vitality, and its direction.

- Write in your approximate age, and/or dates, along the flow of your river.
- Identify on your drawing the various key “marker events” in your life – the boulders in the river, or places where the river changes course – that shape your story.
- If you were able to divide your life journey into sections, where would the section divisions occur? Give names to each of the sections of your life river.

B. Now think about the various people who have accompanied you along this river’s journey.

- What relationships have been the most significant at different point in your life?
- Who has most shaped you?
- Have there been significant losses of relationship along the way?
- What groups or communities of people were most important?
- Record these key relationships and losses in the appropriate places on your river of life.
- *If you wish, you might also want to jot down some of the thoughts and feelings that go along with these relationships.*

C. As you look over the diagram of your life river, think about the different ways you have experienced and understood God across your life.

- Who or what was God to you at the different times depicted in your diagram?
- What caused you to feel closer to, or more distant from, God at these different times?
- What places or situations were encounters with the Sacred for you?
- Have you faced situations or experiences devoid of any sense of God/the Sacred?

¹ Taken from Joyce Ann Mercer, *Girl Talk, God Talk: Why Faith Matters to Teenage Girls – and Their Parents* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 135-136. Used with permission of the author.

- *Decide on a way to note these matters, with words and/or symbols, and place them into your river.*

D. In relation to your life's journey,

- Are there times of significant pain or suffering – yours or others' – that shape the flow of your life river?
- What has happened along the journey of your life that you associate with evil?
- *Add these elements to your river.*

E. Rivers do not exist in isolation but are always part of a larger ecology. So, too, is human life situated in a larger world.

- What was going on in the world – local, regional, and world events – that shaped the flow of your river?
- *Using words and/or symbols, place these events in the appropriate locations on your river.*

F. As you reflect on your river of life,

- What values, commitments, causes, or principles were most important to you at a given point in your life?
- Toward what goals, if any, were your primary energies directed – or, metaphorically speaking, what purposes and ends helped to shape the flow of life waters at a given time in your experience?
- *Note these on your river.*

Taking a Step Back

As you finish depicting your river of life, take a look over the whole diagram.

- Do its symbols and words seem to portray how you think and feel about the whole of your life?
- Is there some important element left out?
- *Make adjustments as needed.*

Remember that no drawing can possibly capture all that shapes a person's journey.

This is intended to be a beginning point for reflection and/or conversation, not a comprehensive depiction of your life!