

CIVIL DISCOURSE

A program to get the conversation started

Course Outline

This introductory program is designed to be completed in four class sessions; however, it may be expanded or contracted as each individual congregation or group determine what works best for their needs.

The videos are provided for free from ChurchNext and suggested curriculum is attached. Groups may meet in person or over Zoom as technology permits. It is necessary for the participants to have access to the videos and be available for group discussion(s).

<https://www.churchnext.tv/library/make-me-an-instrument-of-peace-a-guide-to-civil-discourse-50272/109669/path/>

Begin each session with a prayer such as this from the BCP, or a prayer of your choosing.

Almighty Father, whose blessed Son before his passion prayed for his disciples that they might be one, as you and he are one: Grant that your Church, being bound together in love and obedience to you, may be united in one body by the one Spirit, that the world may believe in him whom you have sent, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

The Council's Touchstone document is also included in these materials to help conduct these discussions.



Session One

Prayer

1st Video, "Practicing the Great Commission" (5:00) from Class 2, Lesson 1.

Questions

1. How do you react to the idea of brave space?
2. How does it interact with safe space?
3. What does vulnerability mean to you?
4. Is vulnerability nice or kind and what is the difference?

2nd Video, "Theological Moves" (3:15) from Class 1, lesson 3.

Questions

1. What is the difference between responding and reacting?
2. How might civil discourse relate to your understanding of a Christian's mission to spread the Good News of God in Christ?
3. How do you respond to incivility in conversations? Do you respond as you wish you had responded?

Practicum

Debate a topic and then switch sides.

Suggestions: The practice of Halloween? Cranberry relish or cranberry sauce? What should the color of the new carpet be in the Nave? Or one of your choosing.

Session Two

Prayer

Discuss any AH-HA moments from the last class.

1st Video, "Value Based Conversations" (3:00) Class 3 Lesson 3

Question

1. What is the value of listening to a different viewpoint?
2. Have you ever disconnected from a conversation that you didn't agree with?

2nd Video, “Weight of Values” (2:42) Class 3 Lesson 3

Discussion

Think of a person or group that holds a viewpoint different from yours, preferably someone that you like or love. Identify at least two values that you and this person hold in common.

Group discussion, should non-baptized people receive communion? Or a topic of your choosing.

Session Three

Prayer

Discuss any AH-HA moments from the last class.

1st Video “Humility” (3:29) Class 4 Lesson 4

Bible Study on Matthew 25:34-45

Questions

1. What would Jesus want you to support in the community?
2. What are the values that you hold that underlie your sense that Jesus would want this position enacted?

Session Four

Prayer

Discuss any AH-HA moments from the last class.

1st Video “Sacred Space for Debate-Come Closer” (3:54)

Question

How has the trust in the room changed since the first session?

2nd Video “Difference is Holy” (5:59) Class 5 Lesson 1

Question

What more complex issues would you want to discuss in this group, now that you have the tools to have conversation?

Diocesan Council Touchstones 2023

Touchstones are an established set of mutually agreed-upon principles that guide how groups will treat, and be with, each other in “deep dialogue” using the Coming to the Table approach for conversations that may be difficult and/or uncomfortable for the participants.

Create a Safe Space.

- Respect the confidential nature and content of discussions. What is said at the table, stays at the table.
- Respect difference by recognizing that different cultures and demographics have different norms for speaking in groups (such as interrupting, or degrees of assertiveness).
- Be 100% present. Set aside the usual distractions of things undone, things to do. Bring all of yourself to the experience. Welcome others here and know that you are welcomed.

Speak your truth.

- Say what is in your heart, trusting that your voice will be heard, and your contribution respected, even if it is different from or even opposite of what another has said.
- *Own* your truth by speaking only for yourself, using “I” statements.
- Let others know when you are responding with pain to remarks in the group, either from others or yourself, especially when your feelings are impeding your ability to stay connected to others. Help them understand the reason for your reaction.
- It is never “share or die.” You will be invited to share in pairs, small groups, and in the large group. The invitation is exactly that. You will determine the extent to which you want to participate in our discussions or activities.

Listen deeply.

- Listen intently to what is said - listen to the feelings beneath the words. “*To ‘listen’ another’s soul into life, into a condition of disclosure and discovery—may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another*”
(Douglas Steere).

- Respect silence. Silence is a rare gift. After someone has spoken, take time to reflect and fully listen, without immediately filling the space with words.
- Listen to yourself also. Strive to achieve a balance between listening and reflecting, speaking and acting.
- Identify assumptions; suspend judgments. Our assumptions, although usually invisible to us, often undergird our worldview; our judgments, frequently automatic, can block our growth.

No fixing.

- Each of us is here to discover his or her own truths. We are *not* here to set someone else straight, or to help right another's wrong, to "fix" or "correct" what we perceive as broken or incorrect in another member of the group.
- Make an opening for new ideas by trying them on for size. Give yourself the time to get to know them, to consider how they fit you.
- Be aware of and allow for the difference between intention and impact. Give yourself and others the grace of assuming that no one present *intends* to harm others, while also being ready to acknowledge that words or behavior/actions (nonverbal communication) can have a harmful impact.

Accept that things will be difficult.

- When someone else's truth challenges your own, try turning to wonder: "I wonder what brought them to this place?" "I wonder what my reaction teaches me?" Also, allow for the possibility of multiple experiences and perspectives; not everyone will have the same reaction.
- Expect "non-closure." Stay in the present. Know that you probably won't get to the end of the road today.
- Remember that Coming to the Table is the first step. *Staying* at the Table, *staying* conscious and committed, will then lead to healing and transformation.