

CONVERSATION COVENANTS OR GUIDELINES

Following are several sample covenants or guidelines that have been used during a community's conversation about a difficult issue or during conflict. Congregations are encouraged to develop their own covenant or guidelines that delineate how people will relate to or act toward one another when they may not agree.

RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES From the Kaleidoscope Institute (diverse world emphasis) and The Rev. Eric Law

R = take **Responsibility** for what you say and feel without blaming others

E = use **Empathetic** listening

S = be **Sensitive** to differences in communication styles

P = **Ponder** what you hear and feel before you speak

E = **Examine** your own assumptions and perceptions

C = keep **Confidentiality**

T = **Trust** ambiguity, because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong

HOW WE WILL TREAT ONE ANOTHER Adopted from a congregational covenant during time of conflict

- We will listen to one another with open, nonjudgmental minds. We will assume the best, not the worst intentions and motivations of one another.
- We will speak only for ourselves, without blaming one another, without saying, "everybody thinks this way or feels that way."
- We will treat one another with respect and care, remembering that Christ is present *with* us and *within* each of us.
- We will stay on the topic agreed upon for our time together.

- We will allow one another to speak, without interruption.

COMMITMENT TO MINISTRY PROCESS Created by a congregation for council and congregation in conflict

We adopt a covenant for the participation in regular prayer for one another, the pastor and the congregation, for worshiping together regularly, and for stopping the whispering and gossip. We ascribe to others the best possible intentions. We will respect and care for one another.

GROUND RULES From Bacher and Cooper-White's *Church Administration*

- We remember at all times that we are sisters and brothers in the faith, that God loves each and all of us equally; that "in Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew," etc.
- We commit ourselves to listen attentively and respectfully when another person is speaking, avoiding interruptions or immediate response.
- We pledge to live up to Martin Luther's interpretation of the Eighth Commandment: put the best construction on others' words and actions.
- We seek to avoid posturing ourselves as adversaries; rather together we seek to be problem-solvers and do what's best for our community of faith.
- We agree to receive and ponder new information and objective data that may help us more fully grasp our situation.
- We will attempt to focus on and discuss or debate issues, avoiding personal attacks and disparaging comments about the attitudes and perspectives of others.

- We agree to direct communication, avoiding triangulation (rather than A speaking directly to B, with whom A is in disagreement, A complains to C about B), and talking behind one another's backs.
- We trust that God is at work among us and that the Holy Spirit may enable us to find creative alternatives and arrive at consensus without anyone compromising their core convictions and key values.

COVENANT AS WE MAKE DECISIONS

Illinois Conference

Seeking to be faithful together, we covenant with one another to be attentive to these guidelines as we make decisions for the Illinois Conference. In a spirit of trust and love, we will:

Give them a hearing (John 7:51)

Listen before answering (Proverbs 18:13)

1. Treat each other respectfully so as to build trust, believing that we all desire to be faithful to Jesus the Christ.
 - We will keep our conversations and communications open for honest exchange
 - We will not ask questions or make statements in a way which will intimidate or judge others
2. Listen. Listen. Listen.
 - We will try not to formulate what you want to say while someone else is speaking
 - We will NOT assume the motivations or experiences of others
 - We will seek clarification if needed
3. Be open to new learnings from various perspectives.

Speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15)

4. Share our concerns in a spirit of love and respect in keeping with Jesus' teaching.

5. Focus on ideas and suggestions instead of questioning people's motives, intelligence or integrity.
 - We will not engage in name-calling or labeling of others prior to, during or following the discussion.
6. Speak for ourselves only, expressing our own thoughts and feelings, referring to our experiences. We will avoid broad generalizations.

Maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3)

7. Seek to stay in community with each other though the discussion may be vigorous or full of tension.
 - We will be ready to forgive and be forgiven
8. Respect the decision of the majority, and if we disagree with it and wish to change it, work for that change in ways which are consistent with these guidelines.
9. Include our disagreements in our prayers, not praying for the triumph of our viewpoints, but seeking God's grace to listen attentively, to speak clearly, and to remain open to the vision God holds for us all.

A CONVERSATIONAL COVENANT

Revised from ELCA Conversation Covenant

- Listen respectfully and carefully to others; do not interrupt or dominate the discussion.
- Do not debate or challenge others' opinions.
- Speak for yourself, not for others; use "I" statements.
- Speak respectfully to and about others at all times.
- Do not question the faith or commitment of others.
- Keep confidentiality for the sake of community.