

THE
Episcopal
CHURCH



Civil Discourse in America

Finding common ground
for the greater good

Facilitator's guide

Introduction

“The divisions in [our] nation are abundant, and the state of our federal government is a scandal. The good news is that there are opportunities to build bridges across the chasms between positions – by prayer and dialogue at least, and by forming our members as peacemakers. Christian religious leaders represent vastly different constituencies and positions; together we have committed to expanding our shared public witness to civil discourse.”

Remarks by Presiding Bishop
Katharine Jefferts Schori
to Executive Council, June 2013

On Wednesday, October 22, The Episcopal Church will sponsor a 90-minute forum and webcast, Civil Discourse in America, to draw attention to the need for civil dialogue in our country and to build church-wide and interfaith engagement. The forum is being hosted by the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania at Christ Church, the location of some of the earliest debates in our nation’s history.

The forum, which begins at 2 p.m. EDT, will be moderated by well-known journalist and commentator The Reverend Paul Brandeis Raushenbush, Executive Religion Editor for the Huffington Post. Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori will deliver the keynote at the start of the forum. The forum is scheduled to last 1 hour and 40 minutes.

Panelists represent some of the nation’s leading thinkers on civil discourse, representing faith groups, the media, and academia.

*Discussion panel #1:
Civil discourse and faith*

*Discussion panel #2:
Civil discourse in
politics and policy*

Dr. John J. DeGioia

President of Georgetown University

David Boardman

Dean of the School of Media and Communication
at Temple University

Rabbi Steve Gutow

President and CEO of the Jewish Council on
Public Affairs

Hugh Forrest

Director of the South by Southwest Interactive
Festival

Dr. Elizabeth McCloskey

President and CEO of The Faith & Politics
Institute

Dr. Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer

Executive Director of the National Institute on
Civil Discourse

The Rt. Reverend
Prince Singh

Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Rochester, NY

The agenda, including speaker bios, can be found
on the website here: [http://www.episcopal-
church.org/page/civil-discourse-event](http://www.episcopal-church.org/page/civil-discourse-event)

Videos will be available for use in local
educational programming within a month of the
webcast air date.

How to use this guide

This Facilitator's Guide is intended to help faith communities engage in the material presented in the webcast and to host conversations modeling respectful, open, and productive dialogue. The discussions and exercises included are appropriate for 9th grade through adulthood.

During the live webcast, there will be little to no time to engage in any of the activities below in depth. However, they are presented for use before and after the webcast and with the resulting videos.

Before viewing the webcast or videos, facilitators should:

- Determine a location, host (or group of hosts), and invitation process.
- Promote the event.
- Review each of the activities and decide which to use and how to best facilitate given group size, dynamics, ages, etc. If your group is small, you may want to complete the activities in one group. If you are facilitating a larger event, breaking into small groups will encourage more in-depth conversation. The time given for each activity can be altered, based on your sense of the group and how well the conversation is flowing.
- Consider recent local examples of issues and events that can be incorporated into the conversation. This will help make the discussion both more real and more relevant.

Important preparation notes for facilitators

- Set a relaxed and open tone. Facilitate introductions to get the event started.
 - Stress the importance of confidentiality. Make sure your youth understand that what they say during the conversation is to be kept completely confidential. Define what “confidential” means. For instance, it is not all right to speak outside of the event about what someone else said or did, but it is all right to share one’s own personal insights that result from this process.
 - Guide the conversation, but don’t control it. Your role is to monitor the comfort level of the room. Many things can affect this atmosphere:
 - A participant who talks too much
 - A participant who says something insensitive without it being acknowledged
 - A participant who argues with others’ opinions
 - A participant who starts looking for the “right” opinion or idea instead of hearing out all voices
 - Stereotypes or assumptions that are presented as facts (even positive stereotypes)
 - Keep track of who is contributing and who is not. You are not only helping to keep the group focused on the content of the discussion, but you are monitoring how well the participants are communicating with each other – who has spoken, who has not, and whose points have not yet received a fair hearing.
 - Follow and focus the conversation flow. A facilitator who listens carefully will select topics raised in the initial sharing. To help keep the group on the topic, it is helpful to occasionally restate the key question or insight under discussion. It is important to guide gently, yet persistently. You might ask, “How does your point relate to the topic?” or state, “That’s an interesting point, but let’s return to the central issue.”
 - Model and guide the conversation using the important tenets of civil discourse outlined below.
 - Keep track of time and encourage participants to take care of their needs, as appropriate.
 - At the end of each discussion, summarize what you have heard and encourage participants to continue conversations after the program concludes.
- Most importantly, keep in mind that the lessons of civil discourse are ongoing and we are all still learning and growing in this area. This Forum represents a starting point in your community’s engagement on this topic, so be sure to encourage humility and forgiveness throughout the event.

Prayer and scripture resources

Prayer of Saint Francis

You will want to begin and end with prayer or reading of Scripture. Here are some suggestions:

- Proverbs 31:8-9
- 1 Corinthians 12
- John 17:21
- Micah 6:8
- Romans 2:1
- Sirach 4:1-10

“Don’t be too quick to assume your enemy is a savage just because he is your enemy. Perhaps he is your enemy because he thinks you are a savage. Or perhaps he is afraid of you because he feels that you are afraid of him. And perhaps if he believed you were capable of loving him he would not be your enemy. Do not be too quick to assume that your enemy is an enemy of God just because he is your enemy. Perhaps he is your enemy precisely because he can find nothing in you that gives glory to God. Perhaps he fears you because he can find nothing in you of God’s love and God’s kindness and God’s patience and mercy and understanding of the weaknesses of men.”

Thomas Merton,

New Seeds of Contemplation, p. 177

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is discord, harmony;
Where there is error, truth;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, Grant that I may not so much
seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

What is civil discourse?

Civil Discourse is defined on Wikipedia as engagement in conversation intended to enhance understanding. (Full definition can be found here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_discourse).

According to *Civil Discourse in America* panelist Rabbi Steve Gutow, president and CEO of the Jewish Council on Public Affairs, “Civility is simply demonstrating respect for the dignity of our fellow humans – even those humans with whom we have sharp disagreement. Civility is allowing others to speak, and having the humility to admit that we may have something to learn. Civility favors truth over cheap gain, and patience over knee-jerk judgment.”

Rabbi Gutow continues, “Civility is more than good manners, however. It’s also the pro-active advancement of codes of behavior that will heal our society from the damage it has sustained. We need to plan our public events carefully, so that they can’t become occasions for ideological grandstanding; we must stand up to defend each other from attack; we must maintain an attitude of respect even when faced with smears and falsehoods. We must become aggressively reasonable.” (On Faith website, *We need “civil” discourse*, November 2010.)

Important tenets of civil discourse include respect, listening, mutuality, interactivity, deep listening, openness, honesty, humility, and careful speech.

While it would be much easier if incivility could be defined with widespread agreement, factors such as social position, power, political partisanship, ideology, and other factors can impact perceived incivility. However, some of the hallmarks

of uncivil discourse include verbal intimidation, personal attacks, deception, demonization, globalized character attacks, recklessly false and negative or misleading statements, vulgarity, threats, and racial, sexual or religious stereotypes. (Massaro and Stryker, 2010)

Incivility finds its roots in many factors of contemporary society, including the erosion of our community ties, political party polarization, the proliferation of mass media, depersonalization of the Internet and groupthink, business incentives for media and politicians to exacerbate political conflict, economic or “class warfare,” and decreased media and political literacy.

There are several additional terms you often hear associated with a conversation on civil discourse. Here are some working definitions of these terms from the Merriam-Webster online dictionary (<http://www.merriam-webster.com>):

- **Compromise** - a way of reaching agreement in which each person or group gives up something that was wanted in order to end an argument or dispute
- **Debate** – a discussion between people in which they express different opinions about something
- **Civility** – polite, reasonable, and respectful behavior
- **Civil** - polite but not friendly; only as polite as a person needs to be in order to not be rude; of or relating to citizens; of or relating to the state or its citizenry
- **Incivility** - a rude or impolite attitude or behavior

Before the webcast begins: Creating a covenant and defining civil discourse

Activity: Covenant (15 minutes)

Materials needed: Large pieces of paper, markers

- Hang 1-2 sheets of large paper at the front of the room and write the word Covenant at the top.
- Ask participants to raise their hands and contribute behavioral norms that should govern your time together. These may include any or all of the aspects of civil discourse and the facilitator's preparation notes listed above.

Activity: Defining civil discourse (30 minutes)

Materials needed: Large pieces of paper, markers, self-sticking notes

- Hang large sheets of paper around the room. On each write the following:
- What is Civil Discourse?
- What are the most important components of a civil conversation?
- How do you know if a conversation is not civil?
- Where do you witness instances of incivility?
- Distribute self-sticking notes and ask participants to take 15 minutes to write their responses on the notes and stick them to the large paper.
- Facilitate a discussion of the responses. Possible questions include:

- How difficult was this exercise? Were you previously familiar with the concept of civil discourse?
- Did anything surprise you?
- What is the difference between discourse and fighting and how do you know when a conversation or debate crosses that line?
- How can you demonstrate respect during a conversation?
- Are strong emotions compatible with civil discourse? Why or why not?
- In *Cohen v. California*, 403 U.S. 15, 25 (1971), the U.S. Supreme Court stated, "[O]ne man's vulgarity is another's lyric." Is incivility truly in "the eye of the beholder?" If so, how can we best determine for ourselves when we are engaging in a dialogue in a civil manner?

Activity: Revision covenant (5 minutes)

Materials needed: Markers

- Revisit the Covenant you originally created. Given your conversation on civil discourse, is there anything participants want to add to the Covenant?

Activity/discussion guide based on the Presiding Bishop's keynote address and panel discussion #1: Civil discourse and faith

For Christians, civility is rooted in the recognition of Christ in every individual and in our deep and abiding value of community, humility, and reconciliation. (You may want to read *Theology of Civility: A Theological Rationale for the Importance of Civility* by Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori and Fr. John Crossin for an expanded theological grounding <http://faithandpolitics.org/better-angels/theological-rationale>).

Activity: Reflections (10 minutes)

Materials needed: None

Ask participants to respond to what they have seen and heard. Possible questions include:

- What is one idea that stood out to you from the Presiding Bishop's keynote address?
- What is one idea that stood out for you from the first Panel Discussion?
- Did anything surprise you?

Activity: Civil discourse and faith
(30 minutes)

Materials needed: Copies of the Baptismal Covenant or Books of Common Prayer, large paper, markers, pens

- Ask participants to break into small groups and read the Baptismal Covenant at their table.
- Keeping in mind the characteristics of civil discourse, ask participants to spend 15 minutes responding to the questions in the Baptismal Covenant with specific ways that they individually, or we as a society, can better live these ideals.
- Invite groups to share their responses.
- Facilitate a discussion based on the responses. Possible questions include:
 - Has this exercise caused you to consider the promises in the Baptismal Covenant in a new way?
 - In the Covenant, we respond with "I will, with God's help." How can you individually or as a community call on "God's help" to create a civil society? Share specific ideas.

Activity/discussion guide based on panel discussion #2: Civil discourse in politics and policy

One of our panelists, Dr. Carolyn Lukensmeyer, previously defined civil dialogue to mean that, “I value your view on the subject as much as I value my own view on the subject. And I expect that as we talk over time we will both learn from each other’s views, and frankly, probably come out of the conversation with a little bit different shift in our own perspectives.”

She continues, “The moment when dialogue shows its power is when the facts have been put on the table, people have expressed their opinions, but through the dialogue they actually discover a way to let go of their start position and develop an understanding of how they can accomplish their goals and do it through compromise.” (From the video, Dialogue on Civil Engagement, from the National Institute on Civil Discourse, <http://nicd.arizona.edu/video/dr-carolyn-j-lukensmeyer-dialogue-citizen>.)

Activity: Reflection (10 minutes)

Materials needed: None

Ask participants to respond to what they have seen and heard. Possible questions include:

- What is one idea that stood out for you from this Panel Discussion?
- Did anything surprise you?

Activity/discussion guide based on panel discussion #2: Civil discourse in politics and polity

Activity: Civil discourse and politics (45 minutes)

Materials needed: Fact sheet from The White House on raising the minimum wage*, large paper

- After reminding participants about the Covenant they agreed to at the beginning of the event, write down the outline of civil discourse from Dr. Lukensmeyer above:
 - First, facts are put on the table
 - Second, people express an opinion
 - Dialogue
 - Understand how to accomplish goals through compromise
- Divide into small groups and ask each group to read through the Fact Sheet.
- Now ask participants engage in a short 15-minute conversation about this issue that is modeled on the above outline on civil discourse. Have one person at each table act as the facilitator to get the conversation going and keep it flowing in a productive way, and to gently remind participants about the Covenant.
- Most likely, participants will run out of time. When 15 minutes is up, call the group back together and facilitate a discussion with the larger group. Possible questions include:
 - How did you feel during your discussion? Did you become emotional or ever feel angry or frustrated? Alternatively, did you enjoy the engagement?
 - Was it difficult or easy to maintain your emotional balance to ensure an ongoing safe, productive conversation?
 - During your conversation, did you notice that your position was shifting or that you were gaining a better understanding of each other's opinions?
 - Do you believe that our culture, media, and political system have created tendencies toward incivility in our society? Can you see that influence in your own thinking and dialogue?

Keep in mind that civil discourse can be challenging and take practice, so be sure to reinforce that we are always in the process of learning how we can best participate in respectful, fruitful discussions.

*<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/02/12/fact-sheet-opportunity-all-rewarding-hard-work>

Conclusion: What next?

The Faith and Politics Institute invites individuals to make a pledge or statement, A Call to Pray and Practice Respectful Dialogue. You can view the pledge here: <http://faithandpolitics.org/better-angels/call-to-action/>. Similarly, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs encourages individuals to sign their Statement on Civility, <http://civility.jewishpublicaffairs.org/take-action/>.

Activity: Creating a civility covenant (30 minutes)

Materials needed: Copies of the Call to Pray and Practice Respectful Dialogue and the JCPA Statement on Civility, paper, pens or pencils

- Distribute the two pledges, paper, and pens/pencils to every table.
- Ask participants to work in small groups to create and sign their own Civility Covenant, which may include the following components:
 - Commitment to pray for civility among themselves, others, faith community leaders, political leaders, and others they may name.
 - Commitment to “lead by example” and practice civility, as you have defined it during your time together. Individuals may want to list particular aspects of civil discourse that they feel important to emphasize.
 - Commitment to listening more carefully to those with whom they disagree.
- Commitment to make amends for past incivility.
- Commitment to respect the dignity of every human being.
- Call the group back together and ask participants to brainstorm ideas on how they can broaden the impact of this Forum. Ideas may include:
 - Hosting educational programming using the videos from this Forum and discussion questions above. Consider inviting the wider community.
 - Holding a prayer breakfast focused on the importance of civil discourse.
 - Preaching or sponsoring events or a season of events designed to foster a deeper understanding of civility.

Resources

The Faith and Politics Institute

<http://faithandpolitics.org/>

Theology of Civility: A Theological Rational for the Importance of Civility by Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori and Fr. John Crossin, for an expanded theological grounding:

<http://faithandpolitics.org/better-angels/theological-rationale/>

Dialogue on Civil Engagement video, from the National Institute on Civil Discourse

<http://nicd.arizona.edu/video/dr-carolyn-j-lukensmeyer-dialogue-citizen>.

Teaching Tolerance, Civil Discourse in the Classroom curriculum

<http://www.tolerance.org/publication/civil-discourse-classroom>

Rabbi Steve Gutow, On Faith, *We need "civil" discourse*, November, 2010

<http://www.faithstreet.com/on-faith/2010/11/03/we-need-civil-discourse/7187>

Baptismal Covenant

<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/baptismal-covenant>

Toni M. Massaro and Robin Stryker, *Freedom of Speech, Liberal Democracy and Emerging Evidence on Civility and Effective Democratic Engagement*, Arizona Legal Studies, April 2012

National Institute for Civil Discourse

<http://nicd.arizona.edu/>

Jewish Council on Public Affairs

<http://jewishpublicaffairs.org>

Temple University School of Media and Communication

<http://smc.temple.edu/>

SXSW Interactive

<http://sxsw.com/interactive>

Episcopal Diocese of Rochester

<http://www.episcopalrochester.org/>

Georgetown University

<http://www.georgetown.edu/president/>

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