Welcome to FCCW’s

Civility Workshop!



Adult Faith Exploration Ministry

April 28, 2018

**Civility Techniques**

It’s natural for people to have different views on all kinds of topics. That’s because each person’s “truth” about any subject matter is unique. Our individual truths are the culmination of our values and beliefs as they relate to our sense of fairness, justice, history, and equality. All of our views are valid because they’re created as a result of our personal life experiences. But, sometimes it can be hard to talk with someone whose opinions are very different from our own. Thankfully, there are ways to address that dynamic and to have meaningful conversations with people who have opposing views.

**Be Interested:** First, we need to decide that we’re actually interested in hearing and learning about another person’s perspective. This may sound obvious, but sometimes we act as if we’re interested when we’re actually actively judging or preparing our own arguments about a topic in our head. Or worse, we don’t want to engage and instead we avoid the person and the circumstances completely. This can leave us feeling tense, bewildered, and unfulfilled. If you’re really struggling with someone, get curious!

**Listen Deeply:** While the other person is talking, hear what is being said without casting judgment. If you are judging, you can’t hear well. Ask clarifying questions so you can understand. Listen carefully with an open heart and mind to both the facts *and* the feelings. Reiterate what you think you’ve heard to ensure that you are fully understanding. Don’t worry about getting across your views while you’re listening, but rather, focus on what the other person is saying. If you can comprehend the context that has formed the other person’s view, you can begin to see the matter from that individual’s perspective.

**Seek Common Ground:** For every issue, there are always points upon which both parties can agree. Look for them and acknowledge their existence. While it’s good to recognize this, be sure to move on to the areas of disagreement so you can focus on understanding one another’s personal views.

**Be Respectful:** Facts don’t necessarily bring people together but respecting one another’s experiences can. Speaking honestly, sharing personal experiences, and speaking for yourself (not for other parties or groups) are effective ways to show respect in a conversation. Don’t try to change the other person’s position or give advice. Remember that we’re just trying to learn and understand so we can arrive at a place of mutual respect with the other person. One of our deepest human needs is to be “seen.”

**Recognize When it’s Not Working:** Occasionally, the person we’re speaking with might not be ready to have dialogue in an authentic and open manner. His or her feelings may be so raw that s/he is argumentative or even hostile. This isn’t the right time to engage. It’s best to change the subject or perhaps take a break from interacting with the person until the circumstances are different. Keep in mind that anger is what pain looks like in public (i.e. consider compassion).

**Practical Steps:** Be kind, stay curious, and listen with the same amount of passion with which you’d like to be heard. One of the greatest acts of courage is to be vulnerable to those with whom we disagree. Ask yourself how you show up­ — do you have an open mind and heart? Authenticity connects us with one another and leads humanity towards true belonging. Part of our commitment to humanity is to accept all people in their incompleteness (and that’s all of us!).

**Reverse Debate**

**“Regular" Debate**

* We all know that debate is about persuading someone else (another person, the audience) to change their mind to our point of view. We have talking points, and debate arguments, and facts to make our case. And in a debate, someone is declared the winner.

**“Reverse" Debate**

* In a reverse debate, we throw all of that out the window.
* We aren’t trying to *change* the other person’s mind, we are trying to *know* it, to learn and understand more about the other person.
* And even more than knowing their mind, we are trying to know the other person’s heart, their feelings and experiences.
* So, for a reverse debate, the **most important skill is listening, deep listening** using some of the **civility dialogue techniques**

**Redefining “Winning” in Reverse Debate**

* We are turning ‘winning’ a debate up-side-down and on its head.
* LISTENER wins if they have a new found or deeper understanding of the other person’s point of view, feelings and experiences.
	+ This does NOT mean that the listener has to agree with the talker’s opinion(s).
* The TALKER wins if they feel they have had a chance to tell their story in full, they feel fully understood, known, heard, 'seen'.
* **Both participants win** – simply by engaging in civil conversation

**Try a Reverse Debate at home with a family member, on a walk with a friend, over coffee, etc.**

* Try discussing a topic that you or the other person you are with feels strongly about, something you might not usually talk about with them.
* Try using the dialogue techniques in the hand out, use the phrasing tips on the next page, 'exercise your civility muscle a little bit'!
* As you practice dialoging, notice what happened during the conversation
* Did judgments and opinions come to mind? What did you do about that?
* Did you gain an understanding of the person’s perspective/experience?
* Did you feel listened to, understood?
* Was it interesting, satisfying, bonding?

**Tips for Phrasing Your Dialogue**

Help me understand…

I’m curious about what you just said, tell me more about that….

What experience(s) in your life shaped your thinking/opinion about that?

I don’t quite understand that point, can you clarify or explain it a bit more….

So, what I think I heard you say was….

(Try to reflect back what the speaker said but in your own words, to test whether you have understood them)

It’s OK to acknowledge a difference, as in:

You and I have different perspectives on that; I’m curious and I’d like to learn more about your point of view…

**Welcoming Prayer**

Based on the teachings of Father Thomas Keating, Welcoming Prayer is a method of inviting God’s presence into personal situations of emotional volatility. The conceptual framework for Welcoming Prayer centers around its relationship to the “false self” system and the human condition. It builds on Fr. Keating’s practice of Centering Prayer.

Welcoming Prayer helps us to dismantle the false self and accept our difficult emotions rather than avoiding or suppressing them. It doesn’t encourage a passive embracing of a negative situation, but rather encourages acceptance of the natural bodily and emotional responses to it and thereby opens space for us to access God’s presence within. It’s a full acceptance of the content of the present moment. If we give the experience over to God, the false self takes a back seat (at least for the moment) and the true self can be liberated.

Our false self is forged by an overcompensating effort to have three primary needs met that serve as **human energy centers**, or motivations, in our lives. They are:

1. **Survival/security** (shelter, safety, stability, financial predictability, etc…)
2. **Affection/esteem** (belonging, affirmation, respect, approval, etc…)
3. **Power/control** (being in charge, making sure things are done “right,” etc…)

Every negative emotion that we feel (anger, frustration, fear, hurt, betrayal, pain, sadness) is directly related to these three energy centers. We can trace anything that we’re feeling at any time back to one or more of them. Recognizing this through the Welcoming Prayer can release us from the grip of our negative emotions and remind us that our lives are meant to be about much more than just getting those needs met.

**Welcoming Prayer Practice**

We can utilize the Welcoming Prayer practice anytime we experience a charged emotion (even a positive one!) as a result of a certain situation. We can do it in the moment or in retrospect. We can be the victim, the perpetrator, or a bystander. Welcoming prayer is not an exercise in trying to analyze the source or the specific dynamics of a situation — although sometimes that can be readily apparent to us.

1. **Notice** the charged emotion that you feel in the situation. Feel and sink into its sensation in your body (racing heart, tense muscles, reddened face, headache, shortness of breath). **Focus** on these bodily sensations.
2. **Welcome** the sensation and name the emotion (anger, frustration, fear, hurt, betrayal, pain, sadness, etc…). Welcome what you are feeling as an opportunity to consent to the presence of God’s grace within you. Say for instance: “Welcome anger and welcome fear, you are welcome here.”
3. **Let go** of the emotion by recognizing that it is directly related to one or more of your human energy centers. Say for instance: “I let go of my need for survival and security.” Or “I let go of my desire for affection and esteem.” Or “I let go of my need for power and control.” One or more of these energy centers will apply in any given context. You could add “I let go of my desire to change this situation (this person, this person’s perception of me).” By doing this, you dis-identify with the emotion and realize that the emotion is not you, that you are greater than your emotions. You can let go of both the emotion and your attachment to the human need because you’ve recognized the connection between them. Then you can rest your bodyin a larger field of awareness (i.e. your more authentic self) and/orrespondfrom a space of interior freedom. If you respond from this space, your next step will come from a place of trusting God within you, rather than from your false self.

Welcoming Prayer:

* is a prayer of the soul
* heals the wounds of a lifetime by addressing them where they are stored — in the body
* is recognition that God is in all things
* says yes to the charged emotions and is the quickest way to get back into the flow of grace with God
* allows us to keep our energy moving in a positive way
* has an underlying attitude of surrender
* is an opportunity to make choices free from of the false self system — responding instead of reacting to the present moment
* helps us to have compassion, rather than compulsion
* allows us to keep the hurt from setting in
* is a practice and a discipline
* empowers us to take appropriate action as freely and lovingly as possible in any situation that presents itself in our lives
* is powerful in bringing about inner change
* will deepen our relationship with God

**“The Guest House” by Rumi**

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond

Bottom of Form

**Civility Workshop Resources**

**Dialogue Techniques**

UCC “Being a Civil Voice in Uncivil Times” including tips for faithful and respectful discussion and other resources:

<http://www.ucc.org/ourfaithourvote_civility>

To Break Political Stereotypes, this Event Tries Breaking Bread:

<http://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2017/11/16/make-america-dinner-again>

Political Perspectives are the Main Course at these Dinner Gatherings:

<https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2017/03/04/518182530/political-perspectives-are-the-main-course-at-these-dinner-gatherings>

Dialogue and Exchange — we're living in a time of intense ideological division, and it often feels impossible to bridge the gap. But can we afford not to? TED speakers explore how to communicate across the divide:

<https://www.npr.org/programs/ted-radio-hour/558307433>

A new study says people who ask more questions, particularly follow-up questions, are liked better by their conversation partners:

<https://www.npr.org/2017/11/29/567133944/people-like-people-who-ask-questions>

No challenge before us is more important — and more potentially life-giving — than that we come to see and know our fellow citizens, our neighbors, who have become strangers:

<https://onbeing.org/programs/anand-giridharadas-whitney-kimball-coe-the-call-to-community-in-a-changed-world-nov2017>

“When we're our best selves with each other, I don't think that's what's possible between people; I believe that's what's true between people."

<https://onbeing.org/programs/brene-brown-strong-back-soft-front-wild-heart-feb2018/>

Margaret Keyser Consulting — Transforming Conflict into Peaceful and Productive Relationships: <http://www.transformingconflicts.org/default.html>

Circle of Trust Approach: <http://www.couragerenewal.org/approach/>

Choosing Civility: The Twenty Five Rules of Considerate Conduct by P.M. Forni:

<http://krieger2.jhu.edu/civility/choosingcivility.html>

George Washington’s Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation: <http://www.foundationsmag.com/civility.html>

**Welcoming Prayer**

“Open Mind, Open Heart” by Thomas Keating: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/open-mind-open-heart-paperback>

Overview: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/category/category/welcoming-prayer>

The Practice of Welcoming Prayer by Cherry Haisten:

<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/public-file/practice-welcoming-prayer-cherry-haisten>

Welcoming Prayer Brochure: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/sites/default/files/private/welcomingprayer_a4trifold_2016_0.pdf>

Welcoming Prayer — A Tool for Healing Emotional Wounds: <http://www.thought-management.com/welcoming-prayer/>

The Welcoming Prayer — A Powerful Transformative Practice: <http://globalsistersreport.org/column/contemplate/spirituality/welcoming-prayer-powerful-transformative-practice-45781>

Welcoming Prayer Video: <https://vimeo.com/16000491>