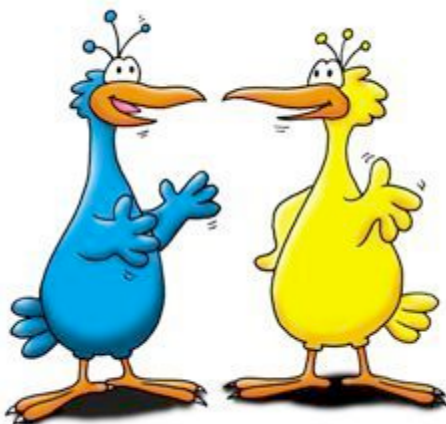


Guidelines for Conversation



“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”—*John 13: 35*

“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you.’”—*1 Cor. 12: 21*

When we gather as the church in assembly, we are reminded that we are united by a common baptism, sealed by the same Holy Spirit and marked by the cross of Christ forever. At the same time we recognize that some of the issues we will be discussing can trigger strong emotions and have the potential to be divisive.

We trust that the church can engage in passionate debate without being destructive of the body by being open to the power of God’s Holy Spirit and by calling ourselves and each other to remember Jesus’ invitation to love one another. To that end, we offer the following Guidelines for Conversation:

- Wrap your conversations in prayer. Ask for strength to remain calm; guidance to speak your point of view clearly; and openness to carefully hear other points of view.
- Listen respectfully and carefully to others. Don’t assume you know what they will say. Respond to what you have heard. Be attentive to what has not been said.
- Speak for yourself, rather than as a member of a group. Use “I” statements, e.g. “I feel...” or “I believe...”, rather than “You” statements, e.g. “you people” or “they”.
- Speak respectfully to and about people at all times, whether you agree with them or not. Allow others to be heard. Refrain from stereotyping or labeling. Remember the point of sharing in this way is to open up discussion, not close off discussion.
- Do not question the faith or faith commitment of others. Honor those who have a different point of view than your own. Remember Paul’s admonition in 1st Corinthians (printed above). Those present are fellow members of the Body of Christ. Remember Luther’s teaching in our Confessions that in relation to others we should “defend them, speak well of them, and explain their actions in the kindest way.”

The Book of Acts shows us that difficult questions can be addressed in this manner and successfully brought to a conclusion. With confidence they said, “It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...” In that same confidence our conversation can be blessed.

Conflict and Healing Team
Upstate New York Synod
May 2007 revised June 2007