

Facilitator and Group Discussion Guidelines – Salem Presbytery

Mutual Invitation Model of Discussion and Discernment

designed by Eric H. F. Law

This guide makes use of a process that Eric developed and named "Mutual Invitation." In Mutual Invitation, the facilitator speaks first. Upon finishing, the facilitator invites the next person to speak. That person has the opportunity to speak or to pass or to pass for the moment. Whatever the person chooses, she has the opportunity to invite the next person to speak. The process continues until everyone has had a chance to speak.

It is important to use the language of invitation in this process. Doing so emphasizes the sharing of power. If you "call" on me to go next, you have taken the power to choose me. If you "invite" me to go next, you have extended the power to me, and I have the opportunity to take it and respond or not. I also have the opportunity (power) to offer an invitation.

If a group member chooses to pass for the moment, be sure to offer him or her the opportunity again. You may ask a speaker questions for clarification only.

The leader or designated person will share first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. Whom you invite does not need to be the person next to you. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share. If you don't want to say anything, simply say "pass" and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited.

If this is the first time you use this with a group, it will be very awkward at first. The tendency is to give up on the process and go back to the whoever-wants-to-talk-can-talk way. If you are persistent in using this process every time you facilitate the gathering, the group will eventually get used to it and be more comfortable with it. A good way to ensure the process goes well the first time is to make sure there are a couple of people in the group who have done this before and, as you begin the process, invite them first.

Problems to Anticipate

This process addresses differences in the perception of personal power among the participants. Some people will be eager for their turn, while others will be reluctant to speak when they are invited. If a person speaks very briefly and then does not remember to invite the next person, do not invite for him or her. Simply point out that this person has the privilege to invite the next person to speak. This is especially important if a person “passes.” By ensuring that this person still has the privilege to invite, you affirm and value that person independent of that person’s verbal ability.

This model of study may differ from others in which you have participated in the past. We do not try to convince other participants of our point of view. We listen. We listen to the Scripture and we listen to each other. We listen and others listen to us. ***Listening and being listened to are gifts that we too rarely experience.*** They are also critical gifts we need to share with each other as we seek to live together within the diversity that God creates.

These studies are designed for a small group. Six to eight is an good size although the group may have fewer participants. When the group gets larger than eight, the length of each discussion may exceed an hour.

1. Read Romans 15: 1-6 three times. Each reading is followed by a moment of silence. After the silence, discussion takes place using Mutual Invitation. After the first reading, participants identify a word or phrase or image from the passage that speaks to them.
2. After the second reading, participants respond to questions specifically written for that passage: “Who is my neighbor?” “How do we build up our neighbors?”
3. After the third reading, participants respond to the question: “What is God inviting me to do, be, or change through this passage?”
4. Members are invited to name a blessing in their lives, and a prayer request. The facilitator will lead the prayers. Other may pray as led by the Holy Spirit.
5. At the conclusion of the prayers the facilitator will review Amendment “B” and begin the mutual invitation process by asking the following:

Briefly describe your “personal relationship with Christ/faith walk/spiritual journey, etc.”

Describe your current position on Amendment 08-B (which would replace G-6.0106b, which requires of ordained officers “fidelity within . . . marriage or chastity in singleness” with a new description of fidelity to ordination standards).

Share how your reading and reflecting on the Scriptures and your faith walk have led you there.

When all have been heard and the conversation is brought to a close, other amendments may be discussed as deemed appropriate by the table group.

The session will be closed with prayer for one another, Salem Presbytery, Our Church and the world beyond our walls.

Facilitator Notes:

The facilitator should be familiar with the process.

The facilitator should be familiar with the Scripture passage and the Reflection Question(s) for the session being led.

Each participant needs a copy of the Scripture passage and the Reflection Question(s) for the session being led.

Name tags may be needed as it is important for people to speak to each other by name.

At the first session, distribute the Respectful Communication Guidelines. Provide an explanation of them, such as: “For effective communications, a group needs a common set of ground rules that all group members agree to keep. Here is a set of guidelines that we will use during this discussion.

Seeking to be Faithful Together: **Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement**

In a spirit of trust and love, we promise we will...

Give them a hearing...listen before we answer

*John 7:51 and
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 candid and forthright exchange,
- _ we will not ask questions or make statements in a way which will intimidate or judge others.

2 Learn about various positions on the topic of disagreement.

3 State what we think we heard and ask for clarification before responding, in an effort to be sure we understand each other.

Speak the truth in love
Ephesians 4:15

4 Share our concerns directly with individuals or groups with whom we have disagreements in a spirit of love and respect in keeping with Jesus' teachings.

5 Focus on ideas and suggestions instead of questioning people's motives, intelligence or integrity;

- _ we will not engage in name-calling or labelling of others prior to, during, or following the discussion.

6 Share our personal experiences about the subject of disagreement so that others may more fully understand our concerns.

Maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace
Ephesians 4:3

7 Indicate where we agree with those of other viewpoints as well as where we disagree.

8 Seek to stay in community with each other though the discussion may be vigorous and full of tension;
_ we will be ready to forgive and be forgiven.

9 Follow these additional guidelines when we meet in decision-making bodies:

- urge persons of various points of view to speak and promise to listen to these positions seriously;
- seek conclusions informed by our points of agreement;
- be sensitive to the feelings and concerns of those who do not agree with the majority and respect their rights of conscience;
- abide by 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.

10 Include our disagreement 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.

Adopted by the 204th General Assembly (1992) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for use by sessions and congregations

As Presbyterians, we are called to work for the “peace, unity and purity of the Church” (Book of Order) as we seek to be faithful to God’s work in the world. However, disagreements and conflicts are inevitable in the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as we try to be faithful.

They exist within committees, congregations, presbyteries, synods, at General Assemblies and in the national life of the denomination. Conflicts are inevitable in all of life and certainly in the church. The history of the church is filled with conflicts and disagreements. Several of Paul’s letters address the conflicts which were common in the early church. There have been and are going to be disagreements as Christians attempt to discern God’s work in the world and as we interpret scripture

Conflicts can be harmful and even destructive. They can cause individuals a great deal of pain and the community of faith immeasurable damage. Congregations have been divided; denominations have experienced schisms.

At the same time, conflicts can be an opportunity for new insights, learning, and individual and corporate growth. Disagreements can illuminate a topic in helpful ways and can present solutions to problems which previously had not been seen. The successful resolution of conflict can also bind people together in a powerful way.

The Bible contains many stories of conflict and disagreement and much advice about how they can be addressed. As those stories indicate, God is already present wherever there is brokenness, granting wholeness and peace. God promises to be with us in times of disagreement and calls us to reconciliation, trust, love and forgiveness.

We realize that our perspectives are limited, so to help us affirm each other, enhance our community, stay open to the viewpoints of others and be sensitive to cultural diversity, we commit ourselves to the Guidelines in a spirit of prayer, trust, and love, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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Seeking to be Faithful Together:

Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement

In a spirit of trust and love, we promise we will...

<p>Give them a hearing... listen before we answer</p> <p><i>John 7:51 and Proverbs 18:13</i></p>	<p>1 Treat each other respectfully so as to build trust, believing that we all desire to be faithful to Jesus the Christ;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – we will keep our conversations and communications open for candid and forthright exchange, – we will not ask questions or make statements in a way which will intimidate or judge others. <p>2 Learn about various positions on the topic of disagreement.</p> <p>3 State what we think we heard and ask for clarification before responding, in an effort to be sure we understand each other.</p>
<p>Speak the truth in love</p> <p><i>Ephesians 4:15</i></p>	<p>4 Share our concerns directly with individuals or groups with whom we have disagreements in a spirit of love and respect in keeping with Jesus' teachings.</p> <p>5 Focus on ideas and suggestions instead of questioning people's motives, intelligence or integrity;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – we will not engage in name-calling or labelling of others prior to, during, or following the discussion. <p>6 Share our personal experiences about the subject of disagreement so that others may more fully understand our concerns.</p>
<p>Maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace</p> <p><i>Ephesians 4:3</i></p>	<p>7 Indicate where we agree with those of other viewpoints as well as where we disagree.</p> <p>8 Seek to stay in community with each other though the discussion may be vigorous and full of tension;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – we will be ready to forgive and be forgiven. <p>9 Follow these additional guidelines when we meet in decision-making bodies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – urge persons of various points of view to speak and promise to listen to these positions seriously; – seek conclusions informed by our points of agreement; – be sensitive to the feelings and concerns of those who do not agree with the majority and respect their rights of conscience; – abide by 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. <p>10 Include our disagreement 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.</p>

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Questions and answers about the Guidelines for use by sessions and congregations

1 What are the Guidelines and how did they come about?

“Seeking To Be Faithful Together: Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement” is a response to requests from many Presbyterian congregations which have experienced pain and brokenness resulting from disagreements that were not dealt with in a healthy and productive way. Some of these disagreements were about issues important in our national life (e.g. abortion and human sexuality), while some of them were about matters dealing with the life of the congregation (e.g. should we start a building campaign?).

Every congregation has conflicts. They will either be occasions for divisiveness and harm or they will provide opportunities for growing and learning. The Guidelines may help congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) use conflict in a creative and productive way.

The 204th General Assembly (1992) adopted the Guidelines for its own life and provided this tool to congregations and the other bodies of the Presbyterian Church to help them deal with the inevitable conflicts and disagreements which occur.

2 What is the biblical basis for the Guidelines?

The Bible contains many stories of conflict and offers a great deal of guidance for dealing with disagreements. It is also rich in its description of God's peacegiving and reconciling work.

- God, through Jesus Christ is reconciling the world and gives us the ministry of reconciliation. (II Corinthians 5:17-20)
- We are one body. (I Corinthians 10:7)
- We are called to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:3)
- Make peace with your brother and sister when you have a conflict. (Matthew 5:23-24)
- Bless those who persecute you; live in harmony with one another. (Romans 12:14-16)
- Be kind to one another and forgive one another. (Ephesians 4:13-16)
- Listen carefully before you speak. (Proverbs 18:13)
- Speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:13-16)
- Work for consensus. (Acts 15:1-31)

3 Why should your session and congregation agree to use the Guidelines?

Conflicts and disagreements occur in congregations. Where there are people who care deeply, there is bound to be conflict.

The Guidelines offer clear, simple suggestions for dealing with differences, so they become occasions for growing in grace and understanding, not times of divisiveness and separation. Though use of the Guidelines cannot prevent conflict from happening, they might help develop an open, helpful climate where differences are dealt with productively.

4 What are some suggested steps for considering the use of the Guidelines in your congregation?

- **Leadership**...Ask a committee of session or several elders to lead the session in a study of the Guidelines.
- **Bible Study**...Suggest that an adult church school class or Bible study group study the biblical insights on conflict and what to do about it. It would also be useful if the session would have their own similar study. One resource you might use is *Behold the New Has Come: Peacemaking in Corinthians* (DMS 225-90-202; 75 cents, phone 800-524-2612).
- **Skill Building Sessions**...If the session has not recently used a portion of their meetings for learning skills for dealing with conflict, consider using and adapting this resource. Also consider using this resource in your adult education program.
- **Study the Guidelines**...Ask the session to study the Guidelines by examining each one of them. The session might ask these questions about each Guideline:
 - How might the use of this Guideline help create a healthy atmosphere for dealing with conflict?
 - How might the use of this Guideline help deal with an existing conflict?
 - Would you like to change this Guideline or remove it from the list?

- **Vote on the Guidelines...**The session might vote to use the Guidelines in its own life and to encourage and help members of the congregation make use of them. The session might also wish to overture the presbytery to agree to use the Guidelines for its life together. Ask a committee of the session to help the session and the congregation make use of the Guidelines.
- **Report to the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program...**Please tell the Peacemaking Program if your session agrees to use the Guidelines, about your experience with them, and other efforts to deal with conflict and disagreement.

5 How can our session actually use the Guidelines?

Once your session has agreed to use the Guidelines, there are several ways they might be used:

- Encourage all members of the session to take responsibility for using the Guidelines during the meeting.
- Urge session members to use the Guidelines and remind others to use them during informal conversations in the congregation.
- Read a simple prayer together prior to the start of the session meeting which asks God's help in dealing with conflict effectively.

One possible prayer:

Gracious and Loving God, You have called us together to do the work of Your church. Be present with us during this meeting, guide us that we may make decisions that will reflect Your loving presence in this world. Create within us open minds and hearts, that we will not fear conflict or run from it, but embrace it, knowing that it is an opportunity for growing in faith and a fuller understanding of Your will for us. Help us to listen to each other, share our thoughts in loving, honest ways and do all we can to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

- Pray before voting on a matter which has created significant disagreement, reminding all present that some will be happy about the decision and some will be disappointed.
- Use the Guidelines in ways which encourage open candid discussion. Discourage using the Guidelines in ways which would stifle the sharing the disagreements and impede session members from sharing their opinions.
- Display the Guidelines poster in the rooms where the session and other committees meet.
- Review and evaluate the session's use of the Guidelines each year. Help each new class of the session understand the Guidelines and their use.

6 How can the Guidelines be used in our congregation?

- Reproduce the first page of this form and include it in a Sunday bulletin or in your congregation's newsletter in an effort to give copies to as many members as possible.
- Display the Guidelines poster on several of your church's bulletin boards.
- Present the Guidelines to the committees of session, other committees, the choir, Presbyterian Women, Presbyterian Men and the youth fellowships.
- Invite members of these groups and other leaders in your congregation to a training session on the Guidelines. Use some of the resources listed on the back page of this brochure in the training session.
- Include training on the Guidelines in new member classes and officer training classes.

- Ask the worship committee of session to work with the pastor to find ways that the Guidelines might be emphasized in worship.
- At a congregational meeting, ask the congregation to decide if they will use the Guidelines.
- If a congregation votes to use the Guidelines, consider having an evaluation annually at a congregational meeting on how effectively the congregation has used them. This evaluation might produce suggestions for using them better.

7 Why inform the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program of any actions taken by your session on the Guidelines, as well as your experience and your concerns?

The information received by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program will help it and perhaps the General Assembly evaluate the Guidelines and their use. This information may lead to the strengthening of this tool and the development of resources which will help congregations use the Guidelines.

The Presbyterian Peacemaking Program will send information about new resources and other assistance to congregations which are using the Guidelines as well as good ideas and suggestions received from other congregations.

Covenant of Conduct for Discernment Process

Covenant of Conduct for Discernment Process Adapted from Victorian Curtiss and Presbytery of Puget Sound

As Christians called to model the body of Christ, we will:

*Be intentional in developing relationships with one another in order to build and maintain Christian community and foster trust, even when discussion may at times be tense;

*Rely on prayer, Scripture, listening, and deep engagement with Christ and each other;

*Act in a spirit of truth and love, honoring the truth that God works through each member of the body;

*Engage in conversation and ongoing study together in such areas as Scripture, theology, church, vocation, and gifts of the Holy Spirit;

*Share adequate information with the whole body;

*Learn about the various perspectives on the topic;

*Use I-messages to speak openly and transparently regarding one's intentions, concerns, values, and interests;

*Speak from our personal experiences related to the subject;

*Listen attentively and with respect and openness to our sisters and brothers, believing that all desire to be faithful to Jesus Christ;

*Respond after restating what we have heard and asking for any clarification when discussion is intense or we are working through conflict and misunderstanding is likely;

*Focus on ideas instead of questioning people's motives, intelligence, or integrity;

*Remain open to the vision God holds for us all and to find win/win solutions where possible;

*Honor and fully participate in the process agreed to by all parties;

* Stay open in mind and heart to unanticipated outcomes of our discernment process until the group comes to a place making, resting, and approving a recommendation;

* Articulate what the largest portion of the body senses is the leading of the Holy Spirit.