



Guiding Norms for Holy Conversations

We endeavor to keep the Eighth Commandment in the spirit of Martin Luther's explanation of it in the Small Catechism: "You are not to bear false witness against your neighbor. What is this? Answer: We are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light." When holy conversations are undertaken for the sake of seeking reconciliation, we endeavor to follow Jesus' wisdom expressed in Matthew 18.15 – 17 where Jesus exhorts us to take our concerns directly to each other.

When we Listen

We listen for what God may be telling us through what other people share and through what we share. We pledge to pray for one another.

We seek to learn from others and deepen the bonds of affection among those who are different from us, that we may grow to genuinely celebrate our God-given diversity.

We listen carefully and respectfully, paying attention to what others say without interrupting them. We will turn off our cell phones, laptops and tablets.

We leave time and room for others to speak and to be heard, without one or more persons monopolizing the conversation.

We honor each other's experiences, thoughts, opinions, and feelings, and don't try to correct or fix each other.

What others say does not leave the room, unless they give permission, in which case participants are free to use information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.

When we Speak

We use a "mutual invitation model" for conversation. That is, we invite others to speak and give everyone a chance to speak who desires to do so. We may always choose not to speak. We never have to share outside our comfort zones.

We speak clearly and loudly enough for others to hear us.

We speak for ourselves and not for others by always using "I" statements and language, owning what we say.

When reflecting on what another person says, we will say what we hear them to have said and check with them that our hearing and understanding are correct.

We will honor the facilitator and his or her guidance and instructions.

We will not complain, nor be given to cynicism, stoking fears, or perpetuating and increasing anger.

We will not manipulate or abuse others in our language. We will not deceive, tell half-truths, or give occasion for illusory hope.