



***Make Me an Instrument:  
A Guide to Civil Discourse  
Participants Guide***

# Opening and Closing Prayers

**Open each session with the Prayer Attributed to St. Francis (page 833 of the Book of Common Prayer):**

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is discord, union;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that we 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.

*Amen.*

**Close each session with the following prayer from the St. Augustine's Prayer Book:**

Lord Jesus, who traveled with the disciples on the road to Emmaus:

Be with us on the way,

that we may know you in the scriptures, in the breaking of bread,

and in the hearts of all whom we meet. *Amen.*

# Session One: Context Matters

1. **Opening Prayer.** Say it together.
2. **Introductions.** Introduce yourselves to the group, by answering some simple questions, “Who are you? Why are you participating in this group right now? What do you wonder? What do you hope for?”
3. **Create a Covenant.**
4. **Read the course introduction.**
5. **Introduce Session One:** Read the introduction to session one.
6. **Watch video one. Answer the following discussion questions:**
  - a. As you begin this curriculum, what is your sense of what the practice of civil discourse involves? What do you already know about it?
  - b. Would you choose to engage in civil discourse if only one conversational participant is using the tenets of civil discourse? If one person were participating to learn and the other were participating to “win,” for example?
  - c. Often, people who are most likely to want to weigh in on particular civic issues – particularly the ones involving exploitation or oppression – have a context with these issues that they would rather keep private (e.g. histories of mental illness or incarceration, private information related to gender/sexuality, etc.) To what extent do you think civil discourse can successfully balance people’s need for privacy with an emphasis on context and perspective? How might a group achieve that balance?
7. **Watch video two. Answer the following discussion questions:**
  - a. Is it worth the time and effort to try to engage in civil discourse on social media? Or should we avoid the inherent difficulties with such platforms and engage serious discussion in person or via different kinds of online platform (moderated forums, etc.)?
  - b. Whether or not you engage in these discussions via popular social media platforms, can you recommend other kinds of high-quality online platforms that support the kind of discussion that civil discourse is meant to foster? (E.g. particular moderated forums, online discussion groups, blogs with high-quality commentary, etc.)?
  - c. From what you know about it so far, how do you think society can profit from engaging in this method of civil discourse regularly? Thus far, do you see any drawbacks to using this method of discourse in discussions of policy?
8. **Watch video three. Answer the following discussion questions:**
  - a. How do you respond to incivility in conversations about policy? Do you tend to respond as you would wish to respond?
  - b. How might civil discourse relate to your understanding of a Christian’s mission to spread the good news of God in Christ?
  - c. Ranjit acknowledges that it can be very difficult, when practicing civil discourse, for people to maintain respectful listening when confronted with opinions that anger them – particularly if those opinions support systems that oppress them. Do you have any suggestions for practical ways to set aside anger/pain when trying to listen to someone whose ideas anger you?
9. **Closing Prayer**

# Session Two: Tenets for Civil Discourse

1. **Opening Prayer.** Say it together.
2. **Review the Covenant.** Consider adding, removing, or altering elements of the covenant as needed.
3. **Introduce Session Two:** Read the introduction to session two.
4. **Read the Tenets.** With your group, read the full list of civil discourse tenets (see next page).
5. **Watch video one. Answer the following discussion questions:**
  - a. Is it ok if civil discourse leads to academic discussion rather than practical decisions/action? If so, why? If not, how might a civil discourse approach avoid that result?
  - b. How do you react to the idea of brave space? How does the concept of brave space interact with the concept of safe space? Can a brave space BE a safe space? Discuss how these two concepts interact.
  - c. Does vulnerability as Shannon describes it open the participants up to abuse? Is there a way to avoid that possibility and still remain vulnerable in productive ways?
6. **Watch video two. Answer the following discussion questions:**
  - a. Some of the responses that Shannon offers as acceptable in civil discourse -- asking questions, seeking clarification, etc. -- can communicate protest, anger, and other reactions as subtext. How can groups avoid the prospect of civil discourse becoming politely coded arguments?
  - b. What challenges have you experienced or do you anticipate experiencing in responding rather than reacting to people who disagree with you?
  - c. Do you consider yourself to be an introvert or an extrovert (or something in between)? What challenges and strengths does this aspect of your personality offer to your practice of civil discourse?
7. **Watch video three. Answer the following discussion questions:**
  - a. What is the difference between speaking from humility and projecting low confidence in your own opinions/ideas?
  - b. Shannon talks about people of privilege tending to speak more often and more confidently than less powerful people. In what other ways does privilege tend to lead people take up too much space in this kind of conversation? How might people, without necessarily meaning to, silence or devalue others?
  - c. In terms of the issues being discussed in this section (working to understand others' viewpoints, sharing talk time, speaking with humility, and expressing gratitude), which do you find especially challenging? Which do you think you would be able to do without trouble?
8. **Watch video four. Answer the following discussion questions:**
  - a. Describe an issue in our culture that you think has been presented in a false either/or context. What nuances does the either/or presentation ignore? On what points do people who care about this issue most likely agree more than they think they do?
  - b. Shannon points out that in the gospels, Jesus has conversations with people that allow him to see their points of view, that change him. Give an example of such an interaction. What viewpoint does Jesus hear? How does it change his approach?
  - c. How can groups make room for people to make mistakes -- even serious ones -- while practicing civil discourse? Are there any mistakes from which might be hard for a group or an individual to come back, or should all mistakes be reconciled in civil discourse among Christians?
9. **Watch video five. Answer the following discussion questions:**
  - a. What if one person is refusing to follow the tenets and everyone else is abiding by them? What would you do? Talk to the person? Ask the person to leave? End the conversation entirely? Something else?
  - b. If you felt that the conversation was degenerating or becoming unsafe for participants, how would you end it? Would you say that you were ready to stop? What if others disagreed? Below, come up with a plan for ending a civil discourse conversation effectively and efficiently -- one that you can suggest incorporating into your meetings' norms from the beginning.
  - c. As Shannon notes in her lecture, issues overlap. How will you know when you have strayed too far afield from the main issue?
10. **Closing Prayer**

# *Tenets for Civil Discourse*

## ***Tenets for Civil Discourse***

1. **Respect** – Respect each person you meet and take the time to truly consider what they are saying. Respond, don't react. No blaming, shaming or attacking another person. Doing this does not mean accepting or upholding their ideas as your own; rather, it can help you understand their perspective, build your knowledge for future conversations, and open your mind to previously unfamiliar ideas—especially important even if you continue to disagree with them.
2. **Listen Deeply** – Listen to what the person is saying, focus on the ideas presented, and discuss ideas and issues—not people. Don't start side conversations as they distract from engagement and listening. Do not interrupt while others are speaking.
3. **Speak for Yourself** – Use “I” statements when commenting or responding. Share your personal experience. Own it.
4. **Try to Understand** – Try to understand the thoughts and ideas of others. Ask questions for clarification. Note: sometimes we may be discussing the same concept, yet use different words. Make sure to pay attention to such areas of misunderstanding, and seek clarification where there is any confusion.
5. **Share Talk Time** – If you are having a discussion with more than two people, make sure everyone has the opportunity to speak before speaking again. Take notes if there are things you want to follow up on. Ask what others think.
6. **Speak with Humility** – You may not know everything about the topic at hand, and your experience may not be that of the other person's. Lean into your knowledge, personal experience, and expertise, but remain open to the truth others are sharing.
7. **Gratitude** – If what someone has shared or asked helps with your own learning, say thank you.
8. **Suspend Judgment** – We all have presumptions, biases, stereotypes, prejudices, and other pre-judgments. Try to suspend pre-judgments and seek first to understand.
9. **Disagree and Love** – We seek to learn and listen. You can disagree with someone and still love them and listen to them. Civil discourse is about listening and learning together, seeking shared understanding and exposure to new ideas in the pursuit of improving our world and fulfilling our call as followers of Jesus.
10. **Practice Forgiveness** – We learn from trying things out and sometimes we make mistakes. Seek to forgive and to be forgiven as we learn together.

# Session Three: Values-Based Conversations

1. **Opening Prayer.** Say it together.
2. **Review the Covenant.** Consider adding, removing, or altering elements of the covenant as needed.
3. **Introduce Session Three:** Read the introduction to session three.
4. **Watch video one. Answer the following discussion questions:**
  - a. Offer an example of where you have seen people divided into opposing groups by outside influences. Why do you feel that these divisions were imposed or exacerbated? Without that outside influence, what relationship do you think the people involved would have with one another?
  - b. Think of a person who is in a political or social group that is antagonistic to yours (preferably someone whom you like or love). Then identify at least two important values that you believe you and this person hold in common.
  - c. How do you make decisions (particularly decisions about public policy) based on your knowledge, ethics, and values?
5. **Watch videos two and three.**
6. **Practice Civil Discourse.**
  - a. On a large piece of paper, write the following points:
    - i. Facts are put on the table
    - ii. People express an opinion
    - iii. Engage in productive dialogue
    - iv. Understand how to accomplish goals through compromise
  - b. Divide into small groups and ask each group to read through one of the “Voices from the Church” statements.
  - c. Ask participants to engage in a short 15-minute conversation 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, gently reminding participants about the Covenant. If your group begins going to a different topic, gently remind them about the topic at hand.
  - d. Most likely, participants will run out of time. When 15 minutes is up, call the group back together.
  - e. Facilitate a discussion with the larger group. Possible questions include:
    - i. How did you feel during your discussion?
    - ii. Did you become emotional or ever feel angry or frustrated?
    - iii. Alternatively, did you enjoy the engagement?
    - iv. Was it difficult or easy to maintain your emotional balance to ensure an ongoing, safe, and productive discussion?
    - v. During your conversation, did you notice that your position was shifting or that you were gaining a better understanding of each other’s opinions?
    - vi. 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?
7. **Watch video four. Answer the following discussion questions:**
  - a. Offer an example of inappropriate either-or thinking. What are nuances that people tend to miss in dealing with this issue?
  - b. What should you do if people whom you love and/or to whom you are related hold values that oppose one another? Should you avoid conversations on these topics to preserve the peace? Engage in civil discourse? End the relationship? Something else? Discuss.
  - c. In your experience, what value comes from understanding the viewpoints of people who fundamentally disagree with you about important values?
8. **Closing Prayer**

# Session Four: Values-Based Conversations

1. **Opening Prayer.** Say it together.
2. **Review the Covenant.** Consider adding, removing, or altering elements of the covenant as needed.
3. **Introduce Session Four.** Read the introduction to session four.
4. **Watch video one. Answer the following discussion questions:**
  - a. Are you naturally inclined to embrace or to be suspicious of compromise in relation to policy decisions? (Or something else?) Explain your response.
  - b. Offer an example of compromise creating effective long-term policy. (It can be from some aspect of your own life, history, contemporary politics, or any other relevant scenario.) Why did the compromise work? How might it have gone wrong?
  - c. Offer an example of a situation (again, from your own life, history, your community, politics, or any other relevant scenario) in which excessive compromise has led to disaster. Why was the compromise problematic? Was compromise possible? Would another type of compromise have worked better?
5. **Watch video two. Answer the following discussion questions:**
  - a. Offer an example of an important public issues on which people's values overlap more than they might appear to do on the surface. What are the values related to this issue about which most of us are likely to agree?
  - b. Consider your representatives (either on the state or federal level) -- especially those with whom you disagree. Does considering the complexities of policy-making help you to understand them better and/or see things from their viewpoint? Why or why not?
  - c. Consider a local issue that boils down to which good thing your community wants to prioritize. What are the competing goods? Why do you feel as you do about which good should be prioritized?
6. **Watch video three. Answer the following discussion questions:**
  - a. Offer an example of a public policy's having consequences the policy makers never intended.
  - b. Describe your philosophy about the appropriate role of government in providing a social safety net. If you do not think the government should be responsible for the social safety net, who (if anyone) do you think should be?
  - c. Consider your own view of the appropriate role of the federal government. Now look at the view of someone who believes the opposite. What good are they interested in prioritizing? Can you agree that, while you prefer your own goal, this goal is also good? If not, why not?
7. **Watch video four. Answer the following discussion questions:**
  - a. Take an example of a public policy that you believe Jesus would want you to support. What values underlie your sense that Jesus would want this policy enacted? In our culture, might the same goal be accomplished in other ways? Discuss.
  - b. Consider the policy issue that you discussed earlier. In light of Rebecca's discussion, will you change the way you think about this issue? Are you as certain as you were that yours is the approach that God wants? Why or why not?
  - c. What is an issue that you think people need to talk about differently so that more people can hear each other? What values do the participants share? How might social pressure have created artificial divisions in relation to the issue?
  - d. How certain are you that we can speak definitively about what Jesus would want on public policy issues? Does the Bible have a clear stance on issues like federalism and states' rights? Can you recognize that people may have differing interpretations of what Christianity calls for vis-à-vis the government's role?
8. **Closing Prayer**



# Session Five: Sacred Space for Debate

1. **Opening Prayer.** Say it together.
2. **Review the Covenant.** Consider adding, removing, or altering elements of the covenant as needed.
3. **Introduce Session Five:** Read the introduction to session five.
4. **Watch video one. Answer the following discussion questions:**
  - a. Have political divisions threatened any groups to which you belong? If not, why not? If so, is the group navigating these divisions successfully? Why or why not?
  - b. What issue do you really wish were simple, but isn't? What is the simple narrative you wish it could be? How is the narrative actually way more complicated than that?
  - c. Discuss the role of the Eucharist specifically in creating space for mutual understanding during turbulent times.
5. **Watch video two. Answer the following discussion questions:**
  - a. Offer an example of a situation in which the opportunity to examine a situation from multiple perspectives has fostered growth and helped solve problems.
  - b. As you bring these skills into the world, what topics would you like to engage using civil discourse?
  - c. What kinds of group would you be interested in forming to use civil discourse practices? What subjects would they cover? Where would you look for participants?
6. **Watch video three. Answer the following discussion questions:**
  - a. What are norms you would want to include in a covenant of the type Marcus describes in a civil discourse scenario?
  - b. Have you ever embarked on a project like this with people whose ideas differed from yours? If not, why not? If so, please describe the experience. How did people handle their differences? Did you all see it through to the end?
  - c. Would you engage in civil discourse in your day-to-day interactions? E.g. with family who disagrees with you, on social media, etc.? Or would you prefer to engage it only in settings in which all participants have agreed to a covenant of the type Marcus describes?
7. **Watch video four. Answer the following discussion questions:**
  - a. Think of an issue that upsets you and imagine that someone tries to start an argument about it. Would you be tempted to fight it out? Flee from the conflict? What might you do to move yourself from your instinctive response into a "leaning in" moment?
  - b. What ideals from these sessions would you want to make sure and take with you into future conversations?
  - c. Having completed this curriculum, what will you do now? How will you use what you have learned?
8. **Closing Prayer**



# ***Going Forth Into the World***

Congratulations on working your way through *Make Me an Instrument: A Guide to Civil Discourse*.

Now that your interest in learning about the values described in the course is heightened, we want to equip you for deeper study. Here are some suggestions:

1. Try researching on your own. You can find helpful resources on the following webpage:

<https://episcopalchurch.org/OGR/civic-engagement>

2. You might also be interested in taking other ChurchNext classes on similar topics. Try:

- Bridging the Political Divide with Parker Palmer
- Faithful Dissent: Loving Our Way into a Brighter Tomorrow

3. If you find that this course has had an impact on your faith journey or has moved you in any way, we would love to hear about it! Email us at [hello@churchnext.tv](mailto:hello@churchnext.tv). Thank you!

**Let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the spirit. Thanks be to God!**