

Brave Conversations: building bridges across difference

Gracious Dialogue on Race and other issues of our time

Topic: Race and Immigration (February 2018)

Objective: To invite participants into a gracious time and space to experience a constructive dialogue on the subject of race relations focusing on immigration in the United States.

Type of Group: Adults from diverse backgrounds (race, ethnicity, age, gender, economic status, etc.)

Size of Group: 6-10

Setting: A bright, large room with projection screen or empty, reflective wall space for projecting video. Chairs for participants should be arranged in circle, with a clear view of the chart paper (if used) and video screen.

Material: Name tags, Session Handouts, sturdy writing surface for each person (such as a cardboard or clipboard), pens/pencils. Set up for video presentation with external speakers so everyone can hear the audio. If desired, have chart paper and dark markers (water-washable are best).

Time Required: 1 hour depending on the size of the group

Preparation: Before participants arrive,

- a. Set up room, equipment and supplies
- b. **Set Up Video:** “The Racist History of US Immigration Policy”
Contact Congregational Resources and Training Office to get password to the link to the video in our website.
You can also get this video in YouTube
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6yiQAmgl5s4>

Overview of Dialogue Process:

- **Gathering and Welcome, and framing for dialogue**
- **Introduce (or review) Respectful Communication Guidelines**
- **Focusing Video: *The Racist History of US Immigration Policy***
- **Dialogue Process: *The Racist History of US Immigration Policy***
- **Reflection: “I notice... / I wonder...”**
- **Commitment for Future Participation**
- **Closing and Sending**

How to Proceed:

1. As participants arrive, greet the participants and invite them to find a seat in the circle.
2. Welcome and Opening Reflection:
A facilitator invites participants to sit in the circle of chairs and reads the following to

welcome:

Welcome to Building Bridges. This program is sponsored by The Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts and the Kaleidoscope Institute to provide a gracious space to have constructive conversations in our community on race relations and other important issues of our time. The purpose of dialogue is to bring together people with diverse backgrounds, viewpoints and experiences to have meaningful conversation on a common subject.

We invite you to enter into a time of dialogue remembering that:

- **Dialogue does not force anyone to change. It is not a debate in which we try to convince others that we are right. It is about mutual understanding.**
- **Dialogue is NOT about finger pointing, demonizing or punishing individuals or groups. Truth dialogue invites each one of us to commit to sharing his or her truth while being willing to listen deeply to another's truth.**
- **Dialogue does not avoid our history and present differences, pretending that everything is okay. Dialogue acknowledges our history and our present differences. By sharing our different experiences, we can achieve greater understanding of the issue and move toward potential reconciliation fostering constructive change in our community.**

3. Respectful Communication Guidelines

Hand out copies of Respectful Communication Guidelines. A facilitator gives the following explanation: (Note: an abbreviated version can be used if there are no new member joining the group since the last gathering.)

We, people from different cultural backgrounds, bring with us different assumptions of communication styles. Sometimes, these different assumptions may cause communication breakdown. Therefore, before we begin our dialogue, I invite you to consider a set of Respectful Communication Guidelines. They are written in the acronym from the word "RESPECT."

Two or more facilitators may take turns reading the following explanations of the Respectful Communication Guidelines.

**R = take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others
Avoid judgmental language which can cause defensiveness and cut off communication. Instead, use "I" statements. Begin what you want to say with "I" and therefore claiming what is yours. For example, I feel, I know, I believe, I think, I notice, I wonder, etc.**

**E = use EMPATHETIC listening
Put yourself in the other person's shoes and attempt to see and experience the issue from the speaker's perspective. This is a commitment that we make to try as hard as we can to understand**

each other knowing our limits. Therefore, it is okay to ask clarifying questions. It is also okay to give feedback to check if you have understood what the speaker was saying.

- S =** *be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles
When someone behaves differently from you, don't just simply interpret that behavior using your own assumptions of what is good communication. Remind yourself that this person might be communicating in a very different way and there might be opportunities to learn more about how the other communicates.*
- P =** *PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak
Think before you speak.*
- E =** *EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions
As you ponder, ask yourself what caused you to feel, think or react in a certain way. Where might these ideas come from for you? If you are able to notice your own assumptions, you are more able to take responsibility for your own thinking and feeling.*
- C =** *keep CONFIDENTIALITY
In order to uphold the wellbeing of each person in this group, I invite you to keep the personal information shared here in confidence.
This way, we can feel safer in talking about real issues that concern our lives and our communities without the fear that they might be shared outside without the full benefit of the trust developed in this group.*
- T =** *TRUST ambiguity because we are NOT here to debate who is right or wrong.
In order to address these issues constructively, we must be willing and able to listen to each other's different experiences and points of view even though at times, the ambiguity might be uncomfortable for some of us. By listening empathically without judgment and debate, we, as a community, may gain a fuller description of the issues we are trying address. In this way, instead of being divided, we can move forward, working together to find constructive ways to address them.*

After the reading of the explanations, a facilitator asks participants if there are questions and then poses the following question:

Do we have an agreement to uphold these guidelines for the rest of our time together? I need a sign or gesture from all of you to indicate that you agree.

If nobody disagrees, the facilitator can continue with the dialogue process. If there are questions, discuss it until there is an agreement, and then continue with the dialogue process.

Problems to Anticipate in this section:

Be prepared to give concrete behavioral examples if there are questions about the meaning of the guidelines.

Anticipated Learning:

Defining some parameters for respectful communication is crucial in dialogue work. We can find ourselves in destructive situations if we do not take care in helping participants to think through how they would behave at the beginning of our gathering.

In this dialogue session, we will have opportunities to dialogue on race and immigration. To help us focus our time together, we'll watch an excerpt from a video "The Racist History of US Immigration Policy"

Take a moment to notice what came up for you as you watched this video?

4. Reflection on the Video: The Racist History of US Immigration Policy

Facilitator ensures everyone has the corresponding worksheet

I now invite you to ponder these questions:

- ***What were the things that stood out for you as you watched this video?***
- ***What challenged you?***
- ***What was affirmed for you?***

Give participants time to ponder the questions and write responses.

Using Mutual Invitation, let's briefly share our responses to the questions.

5. Dialogue Process:

A facilitator gives the following instructions to introduce the process. (Note: if there are not new members joining the group, simply remind participants that we will be using Mutual Invitation again for the next process and skip the detail instructions. If the group is bigger than 12, you will need to divide the group into smaller groups of no more than 12 with a facilitator for each group giving the following instructions.)

Now we invite you to share your reflections from the worksheet. Share only what you're a comfortable speaking about. Take care of yourself. In order to ensure that everyone who wants to share HAS the opportunity to speak, we will use a process called Mutual Invitation:

The leader or a designated person shares first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. Try not to invite the person next to you so that we won't move into the habit of going around in a circle. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share.

If you are not ready to share, say “I pass for now” and we will invite you to share later on. If you don’t want to say anything at all, simply say “pass” and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited.

We invite you to listen and not to respond to someone’s sharing immediately. There will be time to respond and to ask clarifying questions after everyone has shared.

Any questions?

We’ve set aside 20 minutes to share our reflections from this worksheet. We’ll use Mutual Invitation for this. Please share only what you are comfortable sharing with the group. Each person will have about 2 minutes to share. I will ask you to respect other people’s time as you share. Are there any questions?

Facilitator then begins the process by introducing him/herself.

When everyone has shared, facilitator debriefs the group by asking participants to complete the sentences:

I noticed. . .

I wonder . . .

Problems to anticipate in this section:

People sometimes forget to invite others after they finish speaking. Do not invite for them. Simply remind them they have the privilege to invite the next person.

6. Reflection on the Experience

Invite participants to recall what they learned from the last 45 minutes and to consider the question:

Informed by your experience in this dialogue session, what are you called to do in the next week or month about race as result of the dialogue?

Invite participants to share using Mutual Invitation.

7. Sending Forth:

Thank the participants for sharing their time and for their participation. If your plan is to continue with additional dialogue topics, let them know to stay in touch. Then a facilitator reads the following to send participants out to the world:

Nourished by understanding

Warmed by friends

Fed by loved ones

Matured by wisdom

***Tempered by tears
Made holy by caring and sharing
Go forth in peace!***

Adapted from Leonard Nimoy

8. Donation Request:

If you appreciated this dialogue process, please make a donation to the Kaleidoscope Institute (find them on the web at kscopeinstitute.org) so that they can continue to develop more dialogue sessions and offer the Building Bridges resources to more people including those who have little financial resource.

Handouts for Session: Race and Immigration (use the separate “Handouts” file)

Reflection Worksheet for the video

The Racist History of US Immigration Policy

What were the things that stood out for you as you watched this video?

What challenged you?

What was affirmed for you?

Excerpt from the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)

An Act to execute certain treaty stipulations relating to Chinese.

Whereas in the opinion of the Government of the United States the coming of Chinese laborers to this country endangers the good order of certain localities within the territory thereof: Therefore,

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That from and after the expiration of ninety days next after the passage of this act, and until the expiration of ten years next after the passage of this act, the coming of Chinese laborers to the United States be, and the same is hereby, suspended; and during such suspension it shall not be lawful for any Chinese laborer to come, or having so come after the expiration of said ninety days to remain within the United States.

SEC. 2. That the master of any vessel who shall knowingly bring within the United States on such vessel, and land or permit to be landed, any Chinese laborer, from any foreign port or place, shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and on conviction thereof shall be punished by a fine of not more than five hundred dollars for each and every such Chinese laborer so brought, and maybe also imprisoned for a term not exceeding one year.

SEC. 3. That the two foregoing sections shall not apply to Chinese laborers who were in the United States on the seventeenth day of November, eighteen hundred and eighty, or who shall have come into the same before the expiration of ninety days next after the passage of this act, and who shall produce to such master before going on board such vessel, and shall produce to the collector of the port in the United States at which such vessel shall arrive, the evidence hereinafter in this act required of his being one of the laborers in this section mentioned; . . .

SEC. 4. . . . in order to furnish them with the proper evidence of their right to go from and come to the United States of their free will and accord, . . . , the collector of customs . . . make a list of all such Chinese laborers, which shall be entered in registry-books to be kept for that purpose, in which shall be stated the name, age, occupation, last place of residence, physical marks of peculiarities, and all facts necessary for the identification of each of such Chinese laborers, which books shall be safely kept in the custom-house.; and every such Chinese laborer so departing from the United States shall be entitled to, and shall receive . . . a certificate, signed by the collector or his deputy and attested by his seal of office, . . .

SEC. 12. That no Chinese person shall be permitted to enter the United States by land without producing to the proper officer of customs the certificate in this act required of Chinese persons seeking to land from a vessel. And any Chinese person found unlawfully within the United States shall be caused to be removed therefrom to the country from whence he came, by direction of the President of the United States, and at the cost of the United States, after being brought before some justice, judge, or commissioner of a court of the United States and found to be one not lawfully entitled to be or remain in the United States.

SEC. 14. That hereafter no State court or court of the United States shall admit Chinese to citizenship; and all laws in conflict with this act are hereby repealed.

Approved, May 6, 1882.

As I listen to the excerpt from the Chinese Exclusion Acts,

I notice . . .

I wonder . . .

Reflection question: *How does this history of exclusion that lasted over 60 years inform your understanding of immigration in the U.S. today?*