

Brave Conversations: building bridges across difference

Gracious Dialogue on Race and other issues of our time

Topic: Race and Gun Violence (February 2018)

Objective: To invite participants into a gracious time and space to experience a constructive dialogue on the subject of race relations using the Dallas Police Shooting event as dialogue material. At the end of the session, participants are invited to consider committing to additional dialogue sessions if appropriate.

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/handouts

- a. **Set Up the Video:** “Dallas Shooter’s Motivation” – An ABC news report. Contact Congregational Resources and Training Office to get password to the link to the video in our website. You can also get the video on Youtube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYGanOktVfA>

Overview of Dialogue Process:

- **Gathering and Welcome, and framing for dialogue**
- **Introduce (or review) Respectful Communication Guidelines**
- **Focusing Video: “Dallas Shooter’s Motivation”**
- **Dialogue Process: Reactions to the Dallas Shooting**
- **Reflection: “I notice.... / I wonder”**
- **Closing and Sending**

1. As participants arrive, greet the participants, invite them to take a seat in the circle, and complete the first handout – Self-awareness Reflection.
2. Welcome and Opening Reflection:
A facilitator invites participants to sit in the circle of chairs and reads the following:

Welcome to Brave Conversations. 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

Invite participants to turn in the handouts to the 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.

4. Dialogue Process: Sharing reactions to the Dallas shooting:

Facilitators distribute the reflection worksheet. Invite participants to follow along as you read:

On July 7, 2016, Micah Xavier Johnson ambushed and fired upon a group of police officers in Dallas, Texas, killing five officers and injuring nine others. Two civilians were also wounded. Johnson was an Army Reserve Afghan War veteran who was reportedly angry over police shootings of black men and stated that he wanted to kill white people, especially white police officers. The shooting happened at the end of a peaceful Black Lives Matter-organized protest against police killings of Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Philando Castile in Falcon Heights, Minnesota, which had occurred in the preceding days.

Following the shooting, Johnson fled inside a building on the campus of El Centro College. Police followed him there, and a standoff ensued. In the early hours of July 8, police killed Johnson with a bomb attached to a remote control bomb disposal robot.

In this dialogue session, we will have opportunities to dialogue on how race and gun violence impacts our society. To help us focus, we'll watch news segment from ABC News Good Morning America, "Dallas Shooter's Motivation.

(play the video "Dallas Shooter's Motivation," and invite participants who are not familiar with this event to complete the worksheet based on their reactions to video. Then continue to guide participants to work through the worksheet.)

I invite you to use the worksheet in your handouts to help you reflect. Completing the sentences "I notice... and I wonder...", what do you notice or wonder having watched this video?

A facilitator continues with the worksheet.

Please write your responses to the next questions on the handout.

What were your reactions, when you first heard about this event? (Pause.)

As more information was released through media? How did you react? (Pause.)

What was your reactions to the subsequent events leading up to the memorial service for the police officers? (Pause.)

How did your reactions connect with your past experiences of race and gun violence?

- ***personally? (Pause.)***
- ***your family? (Pause.)***
- ***my ethnic/racial group? (Pause.)***
- ***My neighborhood/community? (Pause.)***

Keeping the Respectful Communication Guidelines in mind, how would you frame and share your perspective with others so that they can hear and understand? (Pause.)

Give time for participants to reflect and/or write on the worksheet/handout.

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 10, you will need to divide the group into smaller groups of no more than 10 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 . . .

5. Reflection on the Experience

Invite participants to recall what they learned from the last several hours and to consider the question:

What are you called to do in the next week or month about race as result of the dialogue?

6. Sending Forth:

A facilitators read the following to send participant out to the world:

Go forth into the world in peace;

be of good courage;

hold fast that which is good;

***render to no one evil for evil;
strengthen the fainthearted;
support the weak;
help the afflicted;
honor everyone;
love and serve; be loved and be served.
Go forth into the world in peace!***

7. Donation Request:

If you appreciated this dialogue process, please make a donation to the Kaleidoscope Institute 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.

Handout for Session: Race and Gun Violence (use the separate “Handouts” file)

On July 7, 2016, Micah Xavier Johnson ambushed and fired upon a group of police officers in Dallas, Texas, killing five officers and injuring nine others. Two civilians were also wounded. Johnson was an Army Reserve Afghan War veteran who was reportedly angry over police shootings of black men and stated that he wanted to kill white people, especially white police officers. The shooting happened at the end of a peaceful Black Lives Matter-organized protest against police killings of Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Philando Castile in Falcon Heights, Minnesota, which had occurred in the preceding days.

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What were your reactions, when you first heard about this event?

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- *personally?*

- *your family?*

- *my ethnic/racial group?*

- *My neighborhood/community?*

Keeping the Respectful Communication Guidelines in mind, how would you frame and share your perspective with others so that they can hear and understand?