

CONVERSATION GUIDE

Our goal for conversations in every meeting or study in St. Michael's is to create opportunities to explore, listen, and learn. We encourage all groups within St. Michael's to adopt these guidelines for their meetings, and to routinely draw attention to them with reminders of how we will respect one another in conversation. The following are to be implemented. This is especially useful for Online Dialogue.

- **Listen deeply.** Listen intently to the words that are said; listen to the feelings beneath the words. Notice your responses to what is said, both the things that you want to say and the feelings that you have in response to what you hear.
- **Be present.** Set aside the usual distractions, including cell phones and other screens, so that you can bring all of yourself to the experience. Make a point to turn phones off and put them away so that they are not visible. When engaging in online dialogue, turn off notifications and close all other applications to ensure your engagement in the conversation at hand.
- **Don't interrupt.** Let the speaker finish before asking for clarification or responding.
- **Allow for silence.** ***5 whole seconds of silence, 15-30 seconds for more sensitive conversations*** (which may be timed, as needed, by a designated timekeeper), allows the speaker's words to settle in the listeners' hearts and minds, giving space to reflect on one's initial 'gut-level' responses. *A hurried response is a reaction and not a response. Listen with the intent to understand, not with the intent to reply.*
- **No fixing.** We are not here to set someone else straight, or to help right another's wrong, or to "fix" or "correct" what we perceive as broken or incorrect in another member of the group.
- **Be curious.** If you don't understand something that is said, ask for the speaker to elaborate. If you are asked to elaborate on something you say, do your best to explain what you mean. If you have an unexpected emotional response to something someone says, be curious about what lies beneath that response, rather than becoming upset with the other person.
- **Use "I" statements.** Own your truth by speaking only for yourself.
 - **AVOID at all costs:** "I've heard...." "People have said...." "I don't feel this way, but others have expressed...." "This is not my concern, but I have heard...."
- **Extend grace.** Give yourself and others the grace of assuming that no one present *intends* to harm or offend others. Trust.
- **Acknowledge uncomfortable responses, as able.** While assuming that no one present *intends* to harm or offend others, the *impact* of another's speech or behavior may be to cause discomfort. Acknowledging that impact ("When you said '...', I felt '...') may feel extremely vulnerable, but can help both the speaker and the group learn about the unintended impact of their words.
- **Maintain confidentiality.** What is said in this conversation remains here and is not shared with others.
- **Honor ambiguity.** We will not solve these problems today. We hope to explore and learn about ourselves.