

# **The Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations**

## **Civil Discourse Five Week Curriculum**



**OFFICE OF  
GOVERNMENT  
RELATIONS**



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## WEEK 3: VALUES-BASED CONVERSATIONS

**Materials:** Copies of the handout for each person, Baptismal Covenant or Books of Common Prayer, large paper, markers, pens (Optional: copies of “Voices from the Church” for participants to read in between Sessions 3 and 4.)

### **Opening Prayer: (Read in unison)**

Eternal God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn but the sword of righteousness, no strength known but the strength of love: So mightily spread abroad your Spirit, that all peoples may be gathered under the banner of the Prince of Peace, as children of one Father; to whom be dominion and glory, now and for ever. Amen. (Prayer for Peace, BCP p. 815)

### **Values-Based Conversations**

*Leader:*

“You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.” Romans 2:1

In this segment, we will focus on civil discourse as it applies to policy advocacy, the development of legislation and new policies, and civic engagement.

Too often, we can find ourselves jumping into partisan debates over solutions without first acknowledging the values we hold individually, and the values we share with others. This division is fueled by national and public conversations, by the nature of social media, and by our own personal flaws to “be right” in debates. Our disagreements on solutions do not mean we are enemies in pursuit of different goals.

In this section, we will explore what it means to begin discourse with values.

We should always begin from a place of values. This means starting conversations on political issues by recognizing our values before jumping into solutions or partisan ideas. Values-driven conversation helps us see that we share more in common than the surface of differing political opinion may reveal. By recognizing shared values, we can often diffuse initial tensions in relationships knowing that we are pursuing the same goals—we just may disagree on how to get there.

In addition, values-based conversations help us to hold sacred the creative space for disagreement—which we will explore more in the final segment of this curriculum. Values-based conversations can help us find shared hopes for our country and produce outcomes in policy and legislation that have the most informed impact. As we seek solutions to the challenges of our time, we should aim to do so in a way that is always loving, liberating, and life-giving, even through disagreement.

## Defining our Values

Invite the participants to underline the values they, as individuals, hold dear.

After a few minutes, invite them to go back over the list and circle what values they think the church holds dear. Finally, invite them to put a square around the values they think our country holds dear.

Abundance	Curiosity	Honesty	Perseverance	Spontaneity
Accessibility	Dependability	Hope	Personal fulfillment	Sportsmanship
Accountability	Dignity	Humility	Philanthropy	Stewardship
Accuracy	Discipleship	Humor	Piety	Stillness
Achievement	Discipline	Inclusion	Playfulness	Strategic
Adaptability	Diversity	Independence	Power	Strength
Adventure	Duty	Initiative	Practicality	Success
Altruism	Efficiency	Integrity	Pride	Support
Ambition	Empathy	Intellect	Professionalism	Teamwork
Appreciation	Environment	Introspection	Reason	Thankfulness
Authenticity	Equality	Intuition	Recognition	Thoroughness
Awareness	Ethics	Joy	Reliability	Thoughtfulness
Balance	Excellence	Justice	Resilience	Thrift
Beauty	Experience	Kindness	Resourcefulness	Time
Being the best	Expertise	Knowledge	Respect	Tolerance
Belonging	Fairness	Leadership	Responsibility	Tradition
Belonging	Faith	Learning	Rest	Travel
Boldness	Family	Legacy	Restraint	Trust
Bravery	Financial stability	Leisure	Reverence	Truth
Capability	Firmness	Love	Risk-taking	Understanding
Caring	Flexibility	Loyalty	Sacredness	Uniqueness
Challenge	Forgiveness	Making a difference	Sacrifice	Unity
Collaboration	Freedom	Meekness	Safety	Usefulness
Commitment	Friendship	Mindfulness	Security	Variety
Community	Fun	Nature	Self-discipline	Vision
Compassion	Generosity	Nonconformity	Self-expression	Vitality
Competence	Giving	Openness	Self-respect	Vulnerability
Confidence	Grace	Optimism	Serenity	Warm-heartedness
Conformity	Gratitude	Order	Service	Wealth
Connection	Growth	Passion	Silence	Well-being
Contentment	Happiness	Patience	Simplicity	Wisdom
Contribution	Harmony	Patriotism	Simplicity	Wonder
Cooperation	Health	Peace	Spirituality	Youthfulness
Courage	Holiness	Perfection	Spirituality	Other:
Creativity	Home			



## The Values Around Us

The patriotic elements of our society are steeped in the values set before our country at its founding. Historically, we as a nation have fallen far short of fulfilling those values, yet that makes them no less worthy of pursuing.

Take, for example, the Preamble of our Constitution: “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.” This defines the democratic nature of our country, the pursuit of improvement, justice as a central element of our society, peace at home, protection from external threats, caring for our fellow citizens and environment, and caring for future generations.

These values should not be taken for granted, overlooked, ignored, nor discarded as unattainable. Instead, these values should be defended and not forgotten, starting in our daily conversations. We may disagree on policies and laws on how to ensure these values are upheld and followed, but ultimately, they should guide our pursuit to address the challenges before us.

Like those in the Preamble, the values Jesus challenges us to uphold include love and caring for our fellow citizens (as each is made in the image of God), the pursuit of peace and avoidance of violence, care and protection of the environment, and honesty and fairness in seeking justice.

We are connected to one another through these values—we’re connected as Christians, we’re connected as Americans, and we’re connected as citizens of the world. To have more successful civil discourse, we must keep these values in mind when engaging our fellow brother or sister.

We do acknowledge we may face situations where our values differ from those we are speaking with. What to do when faced with someone whose values are different from ours? Do we sit and talk with those whose values we do not share? Yes—if possible.

That does not mean that discussion with someone who holds negative or harmful values is always appropriate, nor does it mean that civil discourse is the only or proper form of engagement. It also does not mean, for the sake of civil discourse, that we should place ourselves in a physically or emotionally unsafe space.

Civil discourse is about enhanced understanding—it is not about giving credibility or merit, or accepting differing viewpoints as our own, or suppressing conviction or passion. Though some may disagree on this point, it is important to understand what alternative values may guide others’ views of the world, where those values come from, and how they guide someone’s opinions and actions.

Just like when we have shared values, enhancing our understanding through civil discourse with those who have values different than our own leads to an improved ability to describe the world around us with greater accuracy, deeper truth, and more potential. Differences in values



are often deeper and harder to overcome than disagreements in opinions or perspectives that are rooted in the same values.

As a final point for reflection, civil discourse across disagreement but with shared values is typically easier than civil discourse with someone who has different values. The vast majority of conversations around policy and legislation involve disagreement in the *how* of fulfilling values not in *what* the values are.

In the next segment, we will explore the messiness of policy and legislation development, which will enhance our understanding of the importance of values-based conversations. Legislative and policy related solutions to the problems in our local communities, our country and indeed the world are not always clear or easily solved.

### **Reflection:**

*Invite the participants to take a couple of minutes to look over their Values list and make notes to themselves.*

- Where did you find that you marked similar things?
- Where do you not see crossover?
- What do you do when your values are different than those around you?

### **Civil Discourse and Faith (30 minutes)**

*Invite participants to break into small groups and read the Baptismal Covenant at their table. Keeping in mind the characteristics of civil discourse, ask participants to spend 15 minutes in small groups responding to the Baptismal Covenant and identifying shared values embedded in the Covenant. Invite groups to share their responses.*

*Facilitate a discussion based on the responses. Possible questions include:*

- Has this exercise caused you to consider the promises in the Baptismal Covenant in a new way?
- How has it made you consider how our values bind us together?
- We respond with “I will, with God’s help.” How can you individually or as a community call on “God’s help” to create a civil society? Share specific ideas.

### **Closing Prayer:**

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.

([Saint Augustine's Prayer Book](#), Forward Movement)