

TRINITY ECUMENICAL PARISH

Guidelines for Dialogue and Discussion

1. Treat one another with respect at all times, believing that we all desire to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ.
2. Profess your own values and beliefs without attacking or judging others. State your position on issues in a spirit of self-control and mutual respect, and allow others to do the same. Do not demand that others think, act, or feel the same as you do.
3. The purpose of dialogue and discussion is to listen and to share, and to speak honestly about our thoughts and feelings. Dialogue and discussion are not about scoring points, or defending our position, or attacking someone else's position. An important part of dialogue and discussion is to ask questions for clarification to be sure we understand one another.
4. Talk to one another, not about one another.
5. In dialogue and discussion it is perfectly acceptable to say, "I disagree with you," and to explain your position in a spirit of Christian love. The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Statements such as "You're wrong and you're going to hell" do not evidence the fruit of the Spirit.
6. Dialogue and discussion should not question anyone's motives, intelligence, or integrity. The Golden Rule always applies: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." We should always be sensitive to and compassionate toward persons who become upset by our discussion or who are injured by our words or actions.
7. Ponder these:
 - ▶ "The main problem is not differences in points of view; it is the emotional reaction to the difference." [Michael Nichols]
 - ▶ "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." [Martin Luther]
 - ▶ "Real community is not homogeneity. It is the discipline and devotion of disparate people bearing with one another – the hard tasks of love."

[Richard John Neuhaus]

Revised January 2009