

Suggested Norms for Cross-Cultural Dialogue

Since every conversation is a cross-cultural dialogue, we must find ways to talk across differences in ways that promote understanding as opposed to deeper layers of confusion. The follow suggestions are intended to slow down the flurry of assumptions that occur when talking about the stories and truths that shape our lives. The goal of today's "learning community" is to ensure that everyone can engage with and grow from our interactions.

- Assume positive intent on the part of fellow participants
- Ask questions from the standpoint of curiosity as opposed to arguing or debating a point of view
- Use "I" statements when sharing experiences, feelings and opinions
- Share the floor. Allow others to speak if you've already spoken, and speak up if you tend to be an observer
- Withhold unsolicited personal judgments
- Talking about sessions with non-members of the group is okay, but don't share personal content with people outside the group
- Avoid generalizing your view as being a universal truth
- Set your own boundaries for personal sharing. How much of your life do you want to tell?
- Be willing to examine and grapple with how personal assumptions shape your "truths"
- Speak personal viewpoints in constructive and civil ways
- Consider the role of humor in creating a supportive environment for cross-talk
- Allow space for emotions to be expressed; and notice when you get emotional – what are your emotions teaching you?
- As a speaker, consider how your individual communication style affects others
- As a listener, be willing to sit with your discomfort with other people's personal truth(s)
- Speak personal concerns directly with that person, and not about them
- Be open to taking risks
- This is a living document that can and should be changed as the group evolves

Practices to "Try On"
A Suggested Covenant for Dialogue *

- **Try on ideas:** If someone expresses an idea, opinion, or point of view new to you or different from your own, *try it on*; try to see it from within that other person's perspective.
- **Practice both/and thinking:** In this culture, we often practice *either/or* thinking, believing that ideas, situations, plans, and so on can only be "*this way*" *or* "*that way*." What happens if *both* ideas—more than one plan or situation or perspective—can be meaningful, valuable, true? What kind of creativity and collaboration can be unleashed by *both/and* thinking?
- **It is OK to disagree, but not OK to shame, blame, or attack another person:** We will surely disagree; this is natural, and we may even come to better ideas or deeper understandings because of our disagreements. Let us learn to sit with disagreement, even if it feels uncomfortable. Shaming, blaming, or attacking another is not OK. What feelings might cause us to express ourselves in shaming, blaming, or attacking mode?
- **Use "I" statements:** Let us speak from our own personal experience rather than speaking of another's experience or generalizing about a group, whether that group is our own or another's.
- **Take responsibility for your own learning:** If there is something that you do not understand, ask for clarification. Seek out sources of new learning. Come to the conversation with an "intent to learn," rather than an "intent to control."
- **Respect confidentiality:** It is good to share our learnings and experiences from dialogue with others, but it is not OK to share another's story and to name that person unless that person gives specific permission to do so.
- **It is OK to be messy:** Real dialogue, especially when it takes place across various kinds of differences, will be messy—inconclusive, sometimes uncomfortable or unclear, not all "thought out" or logical. Welcome the messiness as a sign of authenticity and honesty. Practice bringing to the conversation a spirit of compassion and flexibility.
- **Step up / step back:** If you are a person who often remains silent in group conversations, *step up* to share your experience and perspectives. If you are someone who often speaks in such conversations, *step back* to leave space for others. Be intentional about *both* contributing to the conversation *and* sharing the "air space."

* Adapted from *Visions, Inc.*,
with thanks to Rev. Leslie Takahashi Morris
and interpretations from Rev. Nancy Palmer Jones