

Communication Norms

These suggested Norms for Conversations in the Diocese of Easton are designed to foster and encourage understanding between all participants. These communication norms are graciously shared by their author Ms. Julie Davis, a lay member of the Diocese of Florida, and the diocese. They use these norms throughout their diocesan ministry.

Be curious and open to learning. Conversation is as much about listening as it is about talking. Try to enjoy exploring how others' experiences have shaped their values and perspectives. Our purpose is not to reach consensus, convert someone to our own ways of thinking or believing, or win a debate. Be patient with yourself and others.

Show respect and suspend judgment. People tend to judge one another. Setting judgment aside opens you up to learning from others and makes them feel respected and appreciated. Try to truly listen, without interruption or crosstalk. Listen deeply and respectfully to learn: don't fix, debate or judge. Be aware of your own body language. Eye-rolling, head-shaking and snorting are not helpful. Assume positive intent, but acknowledge impact.

Note any common ground as well as any differences. Look for areas of agreement or shared values that may arise and take an interest in the differing beliefs and opinions of others.

Be authentic and welcome that from others. Share what's important to you. Speak authentically from your personal experience. Be considerate of others who are doing the same. Each response or story is a gift of trust. Receive it in a trustworthy way. Keep shared personal experiences and voiced opinions confidential. If you feel a need to share something you hear, ask permission from the person whose story or opinion you want to share.

Be purposeful and to the point. Do your best to keep your comments concise and relevant to the question you are answering. This conversation method is structured to help us practice listening—not talking. Allow for silence.

Own and guide the conversation. Take responsibility for the quality of your participation and the conversation as a whole. Be proactive in getting yourself and others back on track if needed. Use an agreed upon signal like the "time out" sign if you feel the agreed norms are not being honored. You may be tempted to abandon the question asked of the group and have free-floating conversation. That's the group's choice, but make sure everyone gets equal airtime, to ensure that no one's agenda takes over. If you do, consider having a few minutes of open conversation, asking if anyone has clarifying questions or comments, at the end of each round. Knowing there will be a time for that helps people listen during the rounds.