

### **Covenants of Presence\***

1. ***Be fully present, extending and presuming welcome.*** Set aside the usual distractions of things undone from yesterday, things to do tomorrow. Welcome others into this story space and presume you are welcome as well.
2. ***Listen Generously.*** Listen intently to what is said, listen to the feelings beneath the words. As Quaker Douglas Steere writes "To listen another's soul into life, into a condition of disclosure and discovery – may be almost the greatest gift we can offer to another."
3. ***Author Your Story.*** We all have a story. Some might say, "I don't have a story" or "a story worth telling," but you do and the world is in need of hearing it. You must claim authorship of your own story and learn to tell it to others so they might understand you, be inspired by you and discover what calls you to be who you are, do what you do or love what you love.
4. ***We come as equals.*** We don't have the same gifts, limits or experiences, but no person's gifts, limits or experiences are more or less important than another.
5. ***It is never "share or die."*** You will be invited to share stories in pairs and in a large group. The invitation is exactly that. You will determine the extent to which you want to participate.
6. ***No fixing.*** We are not here to set someone else straight, right a wrong, or provide therapy. We are here to witness God's presence and movement in the sacred stories we share.
7. ***Turn to wonder.*** If you find yourself becoming judgmental or cynical, try turning to wonder: "I wonder why she shared that story or made those choices?" "I wonder what my reaction teaches me?" "I wonder what he's feeling right now?"
8. ***Hold these stories with care.*** There are many people who will benefit from the stories they hear during our time together. Imagine hearing another as you would listen to scripture – attentively, mindfully and open the holy.
9. ***Be mindful and respectful of time.*** We all have something important to share and the discipline of time invites us to focus and make particular choices about what to share and how much to share so that we might hear the deep longings of another's soul.
10. ***Practice confidentiality care.*** We create a safe space by respecting the nature and content of the stories heard. If anyone asks that a story shared be kept in confidence, the group will honor that request.

\*Adapted Touchstones used in The Center for Courage and Renewal's Circles of Trust Retreats

# Respectful Communication Guidelines

**R** = take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others

**E** = use EMPATHETIC listening

**S** = be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles

**P** = PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak

**E** = EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions

**C** = keep CONFIDENTIALITY

**T** = TRUST ambiguity because we are *not* here to debate who is right or wrong

(from *The Bush Was Blazing but Not Consumed* by Eric H. F. Law)

I agree to uphold these guidelines for the time we have together.

---

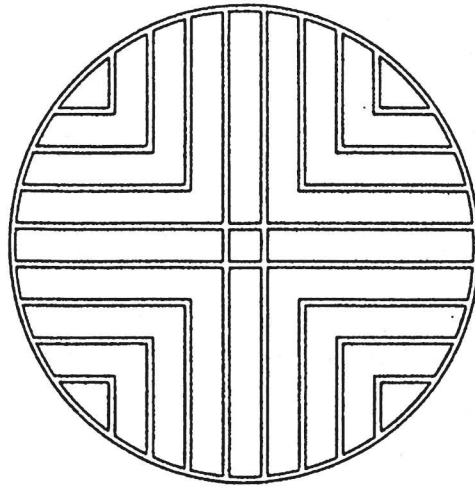
SIGNATURE

© 2012 Kaleidoscope Institute  
[www.kscopeinstitute.org](http://www.kscopeinstitute.org)

---

DATE

UMC Virginia Conference (Sept. 2012) • Page 4



# *Mutual Invitation*

**I**n order to ensure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak, we will proceed in the following way:

The leader or a designated person shares first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. (Who you invite does not need to be the person next to you.) After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share.

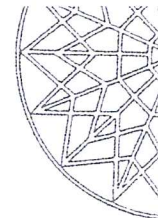
If you are not ready to share, say “I pass for now” and we will invite you to share later on. If you don’t want to say anything at all, simply say “pass” and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited.

We invite you to listen and not to respond to someone’s sharing immediately. There will be time to respond and to ask clarifying questions after everyone has had an opportunity to share.

*(from The Wolf Shall Dwell With the Lamb by Eric H. F. Law)*



# Kaleidoscope Bible Study Process



1. Read the Respectful Communication Guidelines and invite members of the group to affirm them for their time together.

2. Inform participants that the Bible passage will be read 3 times. After each reading, participants will be invited to share their reflections.

## ✦ FIRST READING

3. Invite participants to capture a word, a phrase or image when listening to the passage the first time.

4. Invite someone to read the passage.

5. Take a moment of silence to capture a word, a phrase or image that stood out from the passage for them.

6. Using Mutual Invitation, invite each person to briefly share his or her word, phrase or image. (This should take no more than 5 minutes.)

## ✦ SECOND READING

7. Invite participants to consider the second question appointed for this passage. (Facilitator should prepare ahead of time a question that is relevant to participants' context.)

8. Invite someone to read the passage a second time.

9. Take a moment of silence to reflect on the question.

10. Using Mutual Invitation, invite each person to share his or her reflection.

## ✦ THIRD READING

11. Invite participants to consider the following question while listening to the passage again.

*"What does God invite you to do, be or change through this passage?"*

12. Invite someone to read the passage a third time.

13. Take a moment of silence to reflect on the question.

14. Using Mutual Invitation, invite each person to share his or her reflection.

15. End the session with a prayer circle:

Invite participants to join hands in a circle. Invite each person to mentally complete the sentences:

*I thank God today . . .*

*I ask God today . . .*

The leader will begin by sharing his or her prayers. After he or she has shared, the leader then squeezes the hand of the person to the right. That will be the signal for the next person to share his or her prayers. If the person does not want to share, he or she can simply pass the pulse to the next person. When the pulse comes back to the leader, he or she can begin the Lord's Prayer and invite everyone to join in.



# Respectful Communication Guidelines

## Basic Description

Communication is one of the most important elements in building a more inclusive community. People of different backgrounds bring with them different communication styles. Sometimes these differences can cause conflicts among members of a community—often in an unconscious way.

Guidelines for communication are like the traffic rules that one has to understand and observe before getting a license to drive a car. We are required to pass a test proving that we know and will follow the rules in order to lessen the possibility of traffic accidents. With interpersonal communication, we do not require people to pass a test but we do need to remind people about how to interact respectfully. Conditioned by our society, we may react to others who are different with negative attitudes, put-downs, judgments and dismissal. If we are to express the essence of God's inclusiveness, we need to agree to behave differently when we are attempting to build a more inclusive community. The Respectful Communication Guidelines provide a foundation to uphold the well-being of the community.

Different communities use different versions of communication guidelines. The guidelines used most often by the Kaleidoscope Institute have been developed over the years through working with various groups. They are written in an acronym that helps group members remember the guidelines. During the first meeting of the group, the meaning of each letter should be explored. In later meetings, the guidelines should at least be read and agreed upon, and sometimes, with briefer explanation.

The following are typical explanations that I would give for each of the letters:

"R" stands for taking **"RESPONSIBILITY** for what you say and feel without blaming others." This means using "I" statements, such as "I think," "I feel," "I noticed," "I wonder," or "I believe." There are two reasons for this. First, it is important to claim our experience and respect our ideas, thoughts and feelings. Second, using "I" statements makes us less likely to judge or blame others for what we are feeling. For example, when someone says something that I disagree with, if I am not taking responsibility for what I feel, I might say something like, "You're wrong!" A more responsible way to express my views would be, "I have a different perspective on this issue, and this is why."

Some people might say, "It doesn't matter how I say it as long as I say what is on my mind!" But in English, sentences beginning with "you" often have a very judgmental feel. When someone feels judged, that person becomes defensive and stops listening. Whatever important things I have to say after that have very little chance of being heard. "I" statements help keep communication lines open.

### A Typical Formula of an "I" Statement:

When \_\_\_\_\_ (describe the behavior) \_\_\_\_\_,  
I \_\_\_\_\_ (describe your reaction) \_\_\_\_\_,  
because I \_\_\_\_\_ (share the result of your pondering and  
examination of your own experience.) \_\_\_\_\_.



“E” stands for “use **EMPATHETIC** listening.” Listen not just to words; listen to the whole person. Try to feel and see the world as the person who is speaking sees and feels it. Of course this is an almost-impossible task because no matter how empathetic I am to someone, I am not that person. I did not have the same upbringing and experiences. For example, as a man I am limited in my ability to empathize with women when it comes to talking about subjects such as pregnancy. Such limitations make it reasonable to ask questions when we do not understand. This might mean that we need to be patient with each other—and, sometimes, that we may have to explain something in a different way so that others can understand us more fully.

“S” stands for “be **SENSITIVE** to differences in communication styles.” Sensitivity to different communication styles is essential to effective, inclusive communication. For example, when someone is silent in a meeting, it could mean that the person agrees with what is being said. It could also mean that the person disagrees, is tired, does not care, is thinking, or is confused. Here we have one behavior and many possible interpretations of its meaning. Remember that people communicate in different styles; therefore, do not simply interpret another’s behavior from your own assumptions. Ask questions for clarification.

“P” stands for “**PONDER** what you think and feel before you speak.” Consider what we are going to say before we say it. When we attend to what is going on within ourselves, we communicate with more authenticity.

The second “E” stands for “**EXAMINE** your own assumptions and perceptions.” This involves asking, “What caused me to think or feel a certain way now? Are there personal experiences that I need to explore further before I speak?” This is another way to take responsibility for what we feel. For example, I was in a meeting where someone used a word referring to Chinese Americans that caused me to react with anger. Taking time to examine my response, I discovered that my reaction came from how this word was used to refer to Chinese Americans employed to build the railroad on the west coast of the United States during the 1800s. They were forced to live in sub-human conditions and nobody cared. They were blown up by dynamite, and nobody cared. This reality lay behind my anger. Continuing my self-examination, I asked, “Does my anger have anything to do with what is taking place right now?” The answer was both yes and no. I realized that if I responded by saying, “You shouldn’t use that word!” the conversation would end and no one would learn anything. Instead, I pondered first, and then responded by saying, “When I heard that word, I felt angry because that word brought up all of these feelings that I have about . . .” I used “I” statements after I had “pondered” and “examined.” I did not accuse the person who used that word for making me angry. I stated my feelings and shared my experiences without blaming or judging the other person. This kept the lines of communication open, allowing people at the gathering to learn from the experience.

“C” stands for “keep **CONFIDENTIALITY**.” Keeping confidentiality differs from keeping secrets. Secrets are kept to hold power or protect the interests of those who know. Keeping confidentiality upholds the well-being of the community that is being formed and the communities from which we come. Information that does not pass this test does not need to be kept confidential. For example, in a meeting, a major issue was discussed. Juan, Mary and Ming spoke passionately about the issue with very different opinions and perspectives. They disagreed on some points but they also found some common ground. After listening to the different perspectives, the committee decided on a course of action by consensus. In this case, it was inappropriate to tell people who were not present that Juan said this, Ming said that and Mary agreed with Ming



about something, and that Ming and Mary did not like Juan. Doing so could alienate people from each other and divide the community. Instead, at the end of the meeting, the group discussed, "What in this meeting should stay confidential and what should be communicated to whole community?" The committee might decide that it was appropriate to share what happened in the meeting without using names. They reported on the issue under discussion and the final decision, describing each perspective without saying who actually held those opinions. In this way, confidentiality was kept, appropriate information was communicated, and the well-being of the community was upheld.

In most situations, confidentiality means two things: 1, Personal information shared in the group stays in the group; and 2, information about specific communities (for example churches or ministries) shared in the group stays in the group. This assures group members that what they say about themselves and their communities will not be communicated outside the group without the benefit of the shared context developed in the group.

"T" stands for **TRUST** ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong." In a multicultural community, there will inevitably be different experiences, understanding, and opinions. There will be ambiguity. For example, different cultural groups might approach a task in ways that are markedly different yet are totally appropriate to each group's culture and customs. This is the kind of ambiguity that needs to be tolerated so that together we may discover greater truth.

Another example: In many anti-racism training workshops that I have seen, participants may debate which definition of racism is correct. In many diversity workshops, participants may debate whose pain was greater or who was more oppressed. Such debates often do not help those gathered address these issues constructively. Many times this approach increases frustration and leads to paralysis. By debating with each other when we are trying to address significant issues in our lives, we buy into what the "isms" such as racism, sexism, ablism, ageism, classism, and others, tell us: "We are made for division." When we resist the temptation to debate and truly listen to different perspectives and experiences of different people in the community, we can, together, name the "ism" and describe its many dimensions. We can then work together to dismantle it, instead of letting the "ism" continue to control and divide us.

The Judeo-Christian tradition provides support for finding greater truth by trusting the ambiguity that comes with diversity. For example, why are there four versions of the story of Jesus in the Bible—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? Why not just one? That might make Christian life easier. But the early church leaders decided to keep four different stories of Jesus in the Bible, even with inconsistent information and discrepancies. The different texts challenge us to struggle with this diversity. In that struggle, we might discover that Christ was and is much more than any one story as remembered and recorded by any one community in a specific time and place. Through this struggle with the diversity in the Bible we have a greater chance to discover who Christ is for us now. If we trust ambiguity and listen to how God relates differently with different groups and persons, we are more faithful to the God whom we acknowledge as greater than what any one person or community understands. Thus the quest for deeper understanding and faith calls us to encounter people from whom we differ and who have different experiences of God.

#### **IMPORTANT:**

After the full explanation of the Guidelines, two things need to happen in order for these Guidelines to be effective:



Ask participants if there are any clarifying questions on the Guidelines. The facilitator will take questions from participants. Most of the time, it involves clarification of the meaning of a particular word or giving a concrete example that will increase one's understanding of a suggested approach to communication.

Ask participants to give a sign of agreement to uphold these Guidelines for the time they are together such as raising their hands, or saying "yes."

Many will not understand the full impact of these Guidelines until they are involved in a dialogue. Therefore, do not dwell too long on the Guidelines initially. At this point, we are asking people to agree to them from an intellectual level. Once the agreement is there, the Guidelines become a safety net on which the group can rely when someone in the group communicates in a disrespectful manner. At this time, the facilitator can remind the group to follow the Guidelines by reviewing them again.

## What to Do When Someone Disagrees

Here are some strategies that can be used to address any disagreements with or refusals to uphold the Respectful Communication Guidelines:

### Ask for Clarification

1. Ask for more information and clarification. For example, I would ask: "What part of the guidelines do you not agree or have trouble with?" This way, you will get more information to work with in terms of what specifically the participant was thinking.

### Clarify Meaning of Specific Words

2. Sometimes, the disagreement is based on a misunderstanding or definition of a word in the guidelines. For example, when I was using the set of guidelines that used the word "Tolerate" for the letter "T," there were people who had difficulty with the word because they said, "I don't want to be just tolerated," even though that was not how I meant to use that word. I would attempt to explain it, perhaps in this way: "We are invited to tolerate the different perspectives and understanding of a situation that comes with living in a diverse multicultural environment and not just tolerate people." If the person accepts the clarification of the usage of that word, then I would move on.

### Change a Word or Phrase to Capture the Meaning of a Particular Guideline

3. Sometimes, it might mean changing the word so that the heart of what is meant by that guideline can be accepted. For example, on another occasion, after some discussion of the word "tolerate," with the consent from the group, we replaced "tolerate" with "trust." I could also replace the whole guideline with, "Trust that everyone is speaking the truth according to his/her experience."

### Re-Set the Parameter

4. Every so often, a disagreement comes from a place where the person fears that the application of the guidelines to specific situation will not work. For example, a person in one of my groups said, "I can't just trust ambiguity and not say it is wrong when someone makes a blatant anti-woman comment on the Internet." The appropriate strategy in response is to define the parameter in which we are using the Guidelines.



For example, my response to this woman was: "Do you have an agreement with Internet users that everyone should follow the Respectful Communication Guidelines as a way to enhance their communication?" The answer was: "No."

"Then," I said, "you can say anything you want to this person, since you didn't have the agreement with the people on that Internet group to start with. Go ahead and challenge that person's comment." Then I follow up by setting the parameter of how we use these guidelines. I said, "We are inviting you to follow these guidelines for the next three hours in this meeting, so that we can listen to each other's different perspectives and try to understand each other more fully."

Another typical way disagreement comes is in the form of applying the guidelines to extreme situations. For example, someone might say: "We have to say something is right or wrong in this world. How can you trust ambiguity with someone like Hitler during World War II? Because we trusted ambiguity, we let him kill millions of people. . ." My response to this person is again to remind the person of our parameters. I would say something like, "I agree with you that we had an obligation to say what Hitler was doing was evil. That analysis needs to take place and it requires a very different set of criteria. However, we are not here to talk about Hitler. We are here to engage each other in meaningful dialogue in the next five hours. We are inviting you to trust ambiguity when you encounter another person in this room. And that trusting ambiguity will help us see the greater truth of the issue that we are exploring together." A simple formula to remember in "re-setting" the parameter is as follows:

*We are not here to . . .*

*We are here to . . .*

Here is another example: A professor, after listening to the presentation of the Respectful Communication Guidelines said, "I can't have this in my classroom. I am teaching a method, and there is a right way to do it and a wrong way to do it. I can't just tolerate the ambiguity." My response: "In your classroom, you can set the groundrules any way you want. But we are not in your classroom; we are here in this gathering of faculty members, to be with your peers, to discuss the issues of diversity. We are inviting you to follow these guidelines for the next three hours that we are together. When you go back to your classroom, you can do anything you want." Or, you might say, "We are not here to teach accounting or math, where there is a right and a wrong way to do it. In fact, when we are teaching accounting, we want to be able to determine whether someone is doing the task correctly or not. However, we are not here to do math or accounting or any subject that has definite answers. We are not here to make a decision in which we have to decide what to do and what not to do. We are here to encounter each other as people, and people are diverse and by nature different from each other, and things are not going to be so clear and definitive all the time. So trusting ambiguity will be an important part of our time together."



