

# Go And... Practice - Loving Dialogue

## September 19, 2024 Minutes

Number of Participants: 22 participants as of 7:12

### Welcome and Introductions: Rev. Danielle McCleary

- Each participant was invited to answer the question: *what is one word to describe how you want to be treated in a conversation that has disagreement*
  - Respect (x 10)
  - Loved
  - Honesty (x 2)
  - Patience
  - Willing to Listen/listened to
  - Heard (x 3)
  - Dignity
  - Love & light
  - Forgiveness
  - Kindness/Kind (x 3)
  - Generous assumptions

### Opening Prayer: Rev. Serena Rice

- Responsive prayer is in the powerpoint included in the meeting packet and is what Pastor Serena's congregation uses to ground themselves as they engage in Loving Dialogue to have difficult conversations

### Dwelling in the Word with Matthew 22:36-40: Rev. Judy Anderson

*What is the greatest commandment? Love God, Love your neighbor as yourself.*

- What catches your attention?
  - God is teaching us to love everyone
  - Love your neighbor as yourself
  - You must love the Lord your God
  - The one testing Jesus was a legal expert
  - Totality: you must will all your....
  - Love the Lord with all your being and all you've got
  - Everything depends, the law and the prophets (the whole Bible), depends on these two commands
  - Sadducees are speechless
- What is God inviting you to learn or do?
  - Love your neighbor as yourself = you have to love yourself first
  - Not judge others but love them as a [sibling] in Christ, this is not always easy
  - We are taught to love God, we learn to love God even when we cannot see or fully comprehend God - in the same way we can love our neighbor even if we cannot fully know or comprehend them. We can learn to love others like we love God.
  - When you learn to love like God, you become more like God. God represents all that is and love.

## Loving Dialogue Presentation: Rev. Serena Rice

- Diversity is our reality and it can be good and holy
  - When it brings division it becomes a problem
  - How the church responds to division is important
- We need to get people in the same room so we can have conversation, instead of letting things fester on social media
  - Sit down and figure out how to do this well. Not just opening the door for conversation but to actually figure out how to talk to each other

Loving Dialogue isn't what you talk about but how you talk to each other to break the mold and transform the way we come together and engage in difficult conversations

- Name the difficulties and danger
  - Violence: verbal and physical
  - Silence: when we shut down we fail to love God and love each other
    - We are denying God's presence in the topic of conversation
    - We aren't treating each other with kindness and respect
- Grounding in common identity
  - We have many differences that get amplified in divisive conversations
  - So what is common: baptized child of God, saved by Jesus Christ
    - This is more central to who we are than the ways we are different
- Recognition and ownership that these are conversations we want to have
- Intentionality about sharing our stories
  - What has respect and disrespect felt like to you?
  - What experiences have you had that influence your view of the world that is radically different from mine?
- Establish ground rules and covenant
  - I statements and only speaking from and about your own perspective
  - No speaking over one another or amplifying each other (for good or bad)

Foundations for Loving Dialogue established by Pastor Serena's Congregation

- Because we believe...
  - God is our refuge and strength (Psalm 46:1)
  - God is faithful to save God's people (Deuteronomy 7:9)
  - Our faith calls us to trust in a future filled with hope (Jeremiah 29:11)
  - Perfect love drives out fear (1 John 4:18)
  - We are individually gifted and called together to be the body of Christ (Romans 12:4-8)
  - We are called to love God and to love one another as ourselves (Matthew 22:36-40)
- We commit to approach each other as equals with:
  - Love
  - Kindness
  - Trust
  - Acceptance
  - Tolerance
  - Patience
  - Respect
  - An awareness of individual complexity

- We commit to call each other to:
  - Faith
  - Accountability
  - Compromise
  - Peace
  - Action
  - Inclusiveness
  - Careful listening
  - Responsibility
  - Cooperation
  - Growth
  - Forgiveness
  - Reformation
- Knowing that we will fail, and trusting in Christ's saving grace to continually renew us and call us to new life

We need to be able to challenge each other and call one another to change, but we have to do it lovingly. Commitments to this will make the conversation successful to holding one another accountable, upholding cooperation, and encouraging growth.

- Once you develop the model, commit to putting it into practice
- Intentionally create opportunities to disagree so you get better and better at it

**Don't just jump on the issue, it is worth it to back up and do the groundwork to determine how we are going to address the issue first.**

**Breakout Room Discussion: How would you fill out the boxes**

<b>Because we believe</b>	<b>We commit to approach each other as equals with</b>	<b>We commit to call each other to:</b>
- We are all children of God - We are all uniquely and beautifully made by God in God's image - We are all saved by grace through faith - We all bring unique gifts - We are all members of the body of Christ - We trust in God by the guidance of the Holy Spirit -	- Love - Kindness - Seeing each other as an image of the Divine - Openness - Desire to understand - Awareness - Humility - Humbleness - Patience - Empathy - Fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness	- Honesty - Accountability - Listening first and well - Not monopolizing time - Awareness of the power our words hold - Compassion - Empathy - Risk Taking - Vulnerability

Generous assumptions: someone may not intend harm, could they repeat what they are trying to say in a different way that might be less triggering.

**Closing Prayer & Sending Announcements: Lois Parrett**

- October 17th: Go and Plan
- Homework from August: Think about one idea you want to plan out for 90 days to see what that could look like. Just be willing to bring it; you can always change it!
  - If you don't have an idea, a focus can work too (faith formation, fellowship, etc.)

**Resources to take home:**

- Rev. Serena Rice: [pastorserena@optimum.net](mailto:pastorserena@optimum.net)
  - Feel free to reach out and follow up for more
- The Ballot and the Bible by Kaitlyn Schiess
  - A Bible Study for engaging with this text in your congregation is available on her website: <https://kaitlynschiess.com/theballotandthebible>
- Robin DiAngelo: Rejecting the Good Bad Binary
  - It's not about being "good" or "bad" but thinking about what is faithful
  - <https://vimeo.com/298414261>
  - This discussion is in the context of racism, but the principle of good/bad binary is relevant more broadly.
- Raising Kids Beyond the Binary by Jamie Brussehoff
  - Addresses the idea of rejecting binaries and embracing spectrums.
  - Also talks a lot about letting others tell us who they are instead of making our own judgment and assumptions.

**Go And Planning Team:**

- Rev. Maristela Freiberg, Director for Evangelical Mission and Assistant to Bishop
- Rev. Courtney Smith Westerlund, Messiah Oakland
- Rev. Danielle McCleary, St. Matthew Secaucus
- Lois Parrett, Abiding Presence Ewing, and NJ Synod Staff
- Rev. Judy Anderson, St. Thomas Brick
- Rev. Dianne Lewis, Trinity Jersey City
- Rev. Menzi Nkambule, St. Matthew Jersey City
- Rev. Joe Graumann, St. Stephen Woodbury
- Rev. Jill Collict, Faith Hillsborough