National Dialogue “Way of Proceeding” for Facilitators and Participants

Give and receive welcome. Go out of your way to be radically hospitable.

Be present as fully as possible. Keep your head in the room where your feet are. Be here with your doubts, fears and failings as well as your convictions, joys and successes. Listen with your heart, speak with your soul. Put your cell phone and computer away.

What is offered in the circle is by invitation, not demand. This is not a “share or die” event! It is okay if you don’t have an answer to a question. Facilitators should help people tell their story.

Empathy is the ability to mutually experience the thoughts, emotions, and direct experience of others. It goes beyond sympathy, which is a feeling of care and understanding for the suffering of others. Both words have similar usage but differ in their emotional meaning. We are looking for empathy.

Speak in ways that respect other people. This means not interpreting, correcting or debating what others say. Use “I” statements. Own what you share. Do not say “you know when you…” or “people say…” A facilitator should not “lead the witness”, show preference for answers that they agree with, judge the responses of some participants, or dominate the conversation with their own experience and opinion.

No fixing, saving, advising, or correcting each other. This is one of the hardest guidelines for those of us who make it a habit to help others. But it is vital to welcoming the soul. The goal is to let everyone be heard. The time for “teachable moments” is later, after the conversation is over. Make notes about what you need to follow-up on in your ministry, however.

Learn to respond to others with honest, open questions instead of counsel, corrections, etc. “Tell me more about that…”, “can you explain what you mean by…”

When the going gets rough, turn to wonder. If you feel judgmental, or defensive, ask yourself; “I wonder what brought her to this belief?” “I wonder what he’s feeling right now?” “I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?” Set aside judgment to listen to others—and to yourself — more deeply.

Trust and learn from the silence. Silence is a gift in our noisy world, and a way of knowing in itself. Treat silence as a member of the group. After someone has spoken, take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words. Silence should always get its own chair in the group.

Pay attention to your body language. Don’t stand over and apart from your group. Demonstrate you are in this together, by sitting on the same level. Don’t force sharing through non-verbal cues. Nod along to show listening.

Have a clear understanding and know what you want to find out. The questions should function as more of a reference than a script.

Observe confidentiality.

Goal:
To understand more deeply the experience of engagement of youth and young adults with the Catholic Church.