

## What are the Respectful Communication Guidelines?

**R** Take **RESPONSIBILITY** for what you say and feel without blaming others:

Use “I” statements, thereby claiming what is yours. If you use “we”, please help us understand who you mean. Avoid “you” or “should” statements because they tend to have a judgmental feel to them and may cut off open communication.

**E** Use **EMPATHETIC** listening:

Get into the other person’s skin. Try to feel and see the world as the other person does. We make this commitment knowing the limits of our experience. Therefore, we may ask each other questions for clarification. This may require patience when we are asked to explain something again in another way.

**S** Be **SENSITIVE** to differences in communication styles:

Recognize that different people communicate in different ways. For example, when someone is silent in a group, it could mean that the person agrees with what is being said. It could also mean that the person disagrees, or is tired, or does not care, or is thinking, or is confused. Do not interpret what others say or how they say it through your own assumptions. Ask questions if necessary. Pause before speaking to invite and allow thoughtfulness.

**P** Access the **PRESENCE** of God:

It is essential and central (spiritually and literally) to know that we all have the presence of the peace of God within us, which we can get in touch with. Christians see inner peace as the presence of the Spirit of Jesus within us all. St. Paul explains this as the riches of God’s glory, which is the mystery hidden from ages and generations. It is “Christ in us, the hope of glory.” (1Col 1:27) “It is in this experience of the presence that will bring all people into one in Him.” (Eph 1:9-10) Look for the spiritual beyond the physical. Listen with a sense of wonder, not judgment. When we start with the awareness of Jesus with us as well as the person we are listening to and speaking with, we have the capacity for Christian Community.

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

Look to yourself when you experience a negative reaction to what someone says or does. Consider what caused you to feel or think as you do. Where might the source of these ideas and feelings be? If you are able to understand your own assumptions, you are more able to take responsibility for your own thinking and feeling. For example, if you get angry when someone says something, then ask, “Does my anger have anything to do with what is taking place right now?” The answer is sometimes both yes and no. If we respond by angrily saying, “You shouldn’t say that”, the conversation would end and no one would learn anything. A better response would be “When I hear that, I feel... and it brought up feelings that I have about...” State your feelings and share your experiences without blaming or judging the other person. This will keep the lines of communication open allowing people at the gathering to learn from the experience.

**C** Keep **CONFIDENTIALITY**:

Personal information shared here stays here. This allows us to feel safer talking about real issues that concern our lives without the fear that they might be shared without the full benefit of the trust developed in this group. 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.

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

We attempt to listen to each other’s different experiences and points of view even though the ambiguity might be uncomfortable at times. When we trust the Holy Spirit to guide us to the truth by listening empathically without judgment, our community may gain a deeper understanding that allows us to work together to name and to find constructive ways to address the issues we face. *-Eric Law*