

## **Standing on the Side of Love with Ferguson Conversation Guide**

Facilitators: one person of color (“Facilitator 1”), one white (“Facilitator 2”)

Setup:

40 chairs in a circle, small table in middle with chalice

Have music playing as people enter (Nada Te Turbe, Ubi Caritas, etc.)

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Facilitator 1: Thank everyone for coming, introduce self and Facilitator 2

Read the following prayer as Facilitator 2 lights chalice:

Rev. Christian Schmidt

Spirit of Life and Love, be with us in this time, as people suffer, as parents grieve, as violence rages. Be with us who feel the pain of loss, who feel anger at injustice.

Stand with the oppressed and change the heart of the oppressor, knowing that both are joined in their humanity, no matter how often we forget it.

Remind us of the hope we had, we have, and will have, of joy in the midst of sadness, of success in the midst of challenge, of good things in the midst of bad.

Help us to be better people, to work for better things, and to create a better world.

Amen (, Axé, and Blessed Be.)

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Facilitator 2:

We’re here to share what is in our hearts in an environment of deep listening and mutual respect. We make room for all of our feelings, but we also remember that this is a subject that affects some of us far more than it affects others.

[Essentially, a reminder not to challenge or dismiss the experiences of people of color.]

At [congregation], we are a covenantal community with a shared ministry in which we all take responsibility for holding each other.

[If your congregation has a Covenant of Right Relations, you could read it here. Otherwise, say a few words about the importance of listening, speaking from personal experience, and a commitment to staying in relationship.]

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Facilitator 1:

There are many identities and life experiences in this room, and we want to make room for everyone to be heard. [Facilitator 2] and I, along with the ministers, are here to help create and hold that space. If you find yourself distressed, please do what you need---whether it's sharing with the group, leaving the room, or asking for pastoral care.

Explain proposed process: Raise your hand, wait for one of us to call on you. Wait respectfully after each comment rather than jumping in with a response.

(Ask if everyone is okay with this proposal.)

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Facilitator 2: Let's begin by getting all of our voices in the room by doing some brief introductions. Please tell us your name and your preferred gender pronouns, which are the pronouns you prefer people to use when they refer to you. Also, give us one word or short phrase that describes why you are here today.

Facilitator 1 will demonstrate: "I'm Karin, my preferred pronouns are she/her/hers, My word is 'commitment.'"

Facilitator 2 goes next, then go around the room.

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Facilitator 1:

Now we'll begin a time of sharing. I want to say that it's tempting to jump to what we need to DO, but we'll get to that later. First, let's have a conversation where we can share and hold our feelings. One place to start might be to reflect on the

sermon we heard today: what resonated with you, what you found challenging or difficult.

CONVERSATION: we will call on people as they raise their hand.

Group shares their feelings. Provide pause time between each comment. Make sure that people who want to speak a first time are able to before anyone speaks a second time. When more than one hand is raised privilege people with marginalized identities and call on them first.

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Facilitator 2: Thank everyone for sharing.

Describe some concrete actions people can take.

EXAMPLES:

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- Follow Black Lives Matter (National & Your City)
  - See Resources at Standing on the Side of Love with Ferguson  
<http://standingonthesideoflove.org/blog/withferguson/>
  - Join Facebook Group UUs Resisting the New Jim Crow
  - Bring issues of racial justice and white privilege into your worship services through sermons, prayer, song, and testimony.
  - Continue to hold conversations like this one and follow-up with planning.
  - Make a plan to connect with community partners working for racial justice and police accountability, e.g. congregation-based interfaith community organizations, NAACP, Black Lives Matter affiliates.
  - Examine your congregation's 'social location' in terms of power and privilege dynamics in your city or town and how you can work for justice.
  - Form a group to lead your efforts that works on solidarity and welcome and inclusion within your congregation.
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Facilitator 1: Even if you're not in a place to do any of these things, let us remember the importance of witness, of saying, "We hear. We see." We change the world by first changing ourselves.

Close by holding hands for a song (we used "Give Light" by Ella Baker)

Facilitator 2 reads closing prayer while Facilitator 1 extinguishes chalice.

\*Note: Rev. Hoover grants permission to replace the word “pioneers” with another word such as “daring” and use as a closing line “In that spirit, let us now go forth.”

Rev. Mel Hoover

We can't change the past, but we can learn from it and build on it.

We can't control the future, but we can shape it and enhance the possibilities for our children and grandchildren.

We can't discern in the present the fullness of our actions and their impact, but we can be pioneers in our time, exploring fully the crevices and cracks where knowledge and new insights might be found.

We can explore our spectrum of relationships and confront our complacency and certainty about the way things are.

We can dare to face ourselves in our entirety,

To understand our pain,

To feel the tears,

To listen to our frustration and confusion, and

To discover new capacities and capabilities that will empower and transform us.

In the spirit of the pioneer, let us now go forth.