

# **RADICAL HOSPITALITY: HOSTING AND HARVESTING CONVERSATIONS THAT MATTER**

Regional R&R Trip, August 2009  
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*"The stakes are too high: our era is too complex, its challenges too significant, its promises too great, and its velocity too fast for us simply to react. Rather we must amplify the power of our brains, individually and collectively to match our new circumstances."* Eamonn Kelly—*Powerful Times*

*"Chaos is creativity in search of form."* John Welwood

- ❖ Share of a time when you felt welcomed into a community. What contributed to that feeling?

## **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF CONVERSATION? Often NOT Hospitality!**

- ❖ The modern art of debate is isolating, not welcoming: right/wrong vs. learning
- ❖ Conversion/Positioning—"being right" vs. diversity and being in relationship
- ❖ Rapidly settling on answers that may only meet the needs of the majority or the "normal" person vs. exploring possibilities with creative communal wisdom

## **THE ART OF HOSTING—A 4-FOLD WAY OF BEING HOSPI--TABLE**

(from [www.artofhosting.org](http://www.artofhosting.org))

- ❖ Be Present: be willing to sit in the chaos; keep the space open
- ❖ Participate: be willing to listen fully, respectfully, without judgment and thinking you already know the answers
- ❖ Be Courageous, Inviting and Willing to initiate conversations that matter: find and host powerful questions; harvest the answers, patterns, insights, learnings and wise actions
- ❖ Co-create: be willing to blend your knowing, experience and practices with others in a working partnership for communal wisdom

## **TRAITS OF HOSPITALITY COMMUNICATION**

(adapted from *Completing The Circle* by David McMahill, pp. 22-28)

In a culture of radical hospitality...

... people are encouraged to tell their own stories and listen to other people tell theirs. Diverse experience and view points are welcomed and honored, leading to having conversations that matter or trust circles, especially where there is disagreement or conflict.

... people are encouraged to say what they need to say to those who need to hear it.

... people are encouraged to directly ask for what they need.

... when something prompts anger, people will use their anger as an opportunity for seeking a conversation and better understanding rather than for hurting the other or forwarding their agenda.

... people avoid blaming or shaming others, especially those who disagree or make them feel uncomfortable.

## **BEING A MINISTER OF RADICAL HOSPITALITY**

**Remember in every relationship, interaction and conversation:**

\*\*\* Be Kind \*\*\*

\*\*\* Be Respectful \*\*\*

\*\*\* Be Gracious \*\*\*

\*\*\* Be Open \*\*\*

\*\*\* Be Loving \*\*\*

\*\*\* Be Present \*\*\*

## **MODELS FOR HOSPI--TABLE CONVERSATION:**

### WORLD CAFÉ TABLE CONVERSATIONS ([www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com))

This conversation method is built on the assumption that people already have within them the wisdom and creativity to confront even the most difficult challenges. When diverse individual wisdom is brought together in intentional, "cross-pollinated" community and given appropriate context and focus, the deeper knowledge about what's important emerges and can be harvested into new insights and wise action.

- ❖ Name the Issue/Question that matters; a disturbance; a problem; an exploration for more information or understanding; a curiosity...
- ❖ Clarify the intention and purpose of the conversation; what should the harvest reap (output and action)?
- ❖ The Conversation—creating the space for communal wisdom to emerge in small "table" conversations of 4-5 each, then "cross-pollinate" ideas by having participants mix up and move around to different tables.
- ❖ Harvest the emerging insights and wisdom by having people share themes and insights from their conversations with the whole group. Look for common patterns, ideas, experiences, insights and begin to have them consider this new information in moving forward to look at action items and next steps.
- ❖ Recap the purpose for the conversation, connecting the insights with results and wise actions for next steps and further practice.

### CIRCLES:

- ❖ A shift from informal socializing and opinionated discussion to a receptive attitude of deeper sharing and listening.
- ❖ A circle is a shared-responsibility and rotating-leader group and operates on mutual respect and circle agreements; including only one speaker at a time.
- ❖ Rely on Spirit to show up—a Presence that is more than just the sum of the parts.
- ❖ Basic Guidelines for Calling a Circle:
  - \*\* Intention
  - \*\* Welcome Start-Point
  - \*\* Center and Check-in/Greeting
  - \*\* Agreements
  - \*\* Conversation
  - \*\* Check-out and Farewell

WISDOM OR TRUST CIRCLES: Use for exploration and insight, deep sharing and community building. It should range between 3-12 participants. Only one participant speaks at a time (can use a talking piece to designate who has the floor). Leaving 15-20 seconds of silence between speakers creates a respect for what was shared and gives room to "breathe" before the next sharing fills the space.

There is no problem-solving or feedback—the purpose is connecting and reflection. Allow approximately 1 ½ to 2 hours per group meeting.

COUNCIL CIRCLES: This design can be used for reflection or creative problem-solving that makes space for a group wisdom that emerges which is greater than one individual agenda. They hold the circle agreements above, with only one person speaking at a time.

A guardian is appointed to keep the circle on purpose and intention. The guardian usually uses a gentle cue, like a chime or hummed note to signal everyone to stop action, breathe, be silent until the guardian signals again and speaks to why the pause was called.

The three practices of Council:

- ❖ Speaking with intention: contributing only what has heart, meaning and relevance to the topic of the moment. Story, rather than facts or figures is the heart of intentional speaking.
- ❖ Listening with attention: focusing clearly on what someone else is saying, without competing for attention or preparing to interrupt.
- ❖ Conscious self-monitoring: the ability to consider the impact of our words and actions before, during and after we interact. It is a commitment to repeatedly ask: 1) What is the intent of the circle in this moment? 2) Is what I am saying or doing contributing to that intent or distracting from it? 3) Are my contributions based on a sense of "guidance" or am I inserting my ego and personal need for attention or agenda?
- ❖ Formal closure is important: "Here's what I take with me from this circle.... Here's what I leave behind for the center to hold." Finish the circle before returning to a more casual social space.

FEEDBACK/REFLECTION CIRCLES: This is perhaps the best design for pastoral and program evaluation for a congregation. Small groups come together to offer descriptive feedback about what group members have experienced in certain areas of congregational life (see David R. McMahill, *Completing the Circle: Reviewing Ministries in the Congregation*). There are 5 broad stages:

- ❖ **Planning the Process:** What is the purpose and focus of the feedback/reflection circle, and who should be assigned oversight responsibility for the process. These groups should be 8-12 people who are invited to meet for 1 ½-2 hours describing their experiences and stories of the topic for feedback.
- ❖ **Gathering High-Quality Feedback:** Who is in the group will shape the information gathered. Consider the purpose and focus of the feedback/reflections being sought and invite a representative sample from the congregation. Members should be reminded that they are not expected to do a critique or an evaluation or to make decisions or solve problems, but simply to let church leaders know what they have experienced in certain programs.
- ❖ **Discerning What the Feedback Means:** The oversight group and minister can meet as needed to discuss: 1) What are we learning? 2) Are we getting clear information from the sessions that we can easily interpret? 3) Has anything surprising emerged that we need to pay attention to sooner rather than later (or not at all)? 4) Does anything we have heard suggest a need for us to adjust the questions we need to ask or the design of the groups? 5) Who needs to receive what we have learned and when do they need to hear from us?
- ❖ **Report Findings:** The oversight group should report findings promptly to the designated receivers of the information. This report should include an assessment of issues, challenges and opportunities that have emerged from these groups and how it may be used for visioning and goal-setting.
- ❖ **Assimilating Results into Congregational Life:** When this process works well, relationships between members are strengthened, and leadership can lead more effectively by knowing how to ask for and receive high-quality feedback that flows to those who lead. The information gathered can be reflected back to the congregation to answer such questions as, "How are we doing?" "What do we do well?" "Where do we stumble?" "How can we fulfill God's call to us more effectively?"

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[www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com)

The Art of Hosting website which offers a variety of methods and resources for hosting conversations that matter: [www.artofhosting.org](http://www.artofhosting.org)

Ethical Guidelines for Congregational Conduct: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) found on the general church website at:  
[www.discipleshomemissions.org/Ministers/PDFfiles/EthicalGuidelines.pdf](http://www.discipleshomemissions.org/Ministers/PDFfiles/EthicalGuidelines.pdf)

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