

Conversations as Missional Practice

Going Deeper

It is imperative to understand that when you are truly baptized into Christ you become part of a new creation. By taking on the life and mind of Christ, you increasingly view yourself and others from a changed perspective. Former ways of defining people by economic status, social class, sex, gender, or ethnicity no longer are primary. Through the gospel of Christ, a new community of tolerance, reconciliation, unity in diversity, and love is being born as a visible sign of the coming reign of God.

– Doctrine and Covenants 164:5.

You must be the change you wish to see in the world. – Mahatma Gandhi

*Que la paz de Cristo sea con cada uno de ustedes.*¹ – Spanish

Foundational Concepts

Fostering intentional conversations is essentially about creating “safe space” where people can encounter Christ’s peace *in relationship* with one another. What if we approached *every conversation* as a missional practice? Our conversations could become instruments for Christ’s peace. Although this may sound idealistic, imagine what would happen if our everyday conversations became sanctuaries of invitation, safety, authenticity, and healing? If the worst of our culture teaches us to use words to divide, create hostility and diminish the worth of people, can we in *communities* of Christ *reorient* ourselves towards practicing conversations as a primary way peace in Christ is relationally and culturally incarnate?²

It is helpful to review the nature of missional practices³ as we explore conversations as missional practice that embodies Christ’s peace:

- *Cultivate new understandings and ways of living Christ’s mission.*
- *Are intentional and repetitive patterns of individual and community actions.*
- *They lead to encounters where God’s activity and God’s invitation to Christ’s mission are discovered.*
- *They lead us into relationships with God, the Living Christ, and the Holy Spirit which in turn lead us to develop relationships of healing and wholeness with others.*
- *Empowered by God’s Spirit to remind, connect and transform us to be a community of faith who no longer live for ourselves but as a signal community revealing Shalom – God’s future for all creation.*

¹ In English, “May the peace of Christ be with each of you.” Note: In Community of Christ gatherings in Central and South America, whenever anyone stands in front of a congregation to say a prayer, make an announcement, or share the Word it is very common for them first to say, “Que la paz de Cristo sea con cada uno de ustedes.” They say this to acknowledge that they are gathering in Christ’s spirit and to acknowledge the connectedness that exists because of that spirit.

² Doctrine and Covenants 163:3a

³ Missional Practices — What are They? Introduced at LCM Retreat 1 and available at www.missionalleaders.org

Fostering intentional and sometimes difficult conversations is going from superficial and casual conversation toward deeper ones that enrich mutual understanding and well-being. When our conversations enhance understanding and mutual well-being, they become pathways for Christ's peace to be encountered in tangible ways!

Fostering intentional conversations move us toward *what matters most*—*receiving, embodying and sharing Christ's peace*. This requires skills and values that are Christ centered.

Creating Safe Space: A Closer Look

Conversation is essential to mission. Christ's mission is inconceivable without conversation. Cultivating conversation to enhance understanding and promote or restore deep, healthy and right relationships, is at the heart of what it means to be the church.

An important key for conversation is creating safe space where each person feels secure and valued to offer her or his perspective. Creating safe space involves creating *open space* and *free space* where something new can happen. Safe space allows the Spirit to breathe so transformative experiences can take place. Cultivating safe space is an imperative in our personal discipleship and in the congregation to allow new expressions of Christ's peace. Safe space is *welcoming*. It opens up and frees people to respond to Christ's invitation for all to become part of a new creation.

Christ's mission calls us to move away from having a personal agenda toward trusting the Spirit with a sense of peace. This "Holy Indifference" calls us to move away from a transactional conversation, for the purpose to get a personal benefit in return, toward a transformative conversation, for experiencing, unanticipated, gifts of grace. Transformative conversation, without an agenda or determined objective, trusts the Spirit to bless and bring about something new. This requires us to be open to, to trust in, and be shaped by Christ's peace. This is the essence of the new relational engagement required in order to fully embody and share Christ's peace with others.

Every day conversation in congregational and personal life includes sharing joys and concerns as a way to know and care for one another. This includes "chit-chat" and all types of informal conversation. Fostering intentional conversations is emphasizing an intentionality to go deeper and share from our hearts *what matters most*.

This new relational engagement requires a commitment to continuously prepare ourselves, as disciples and congregations, to cultivate safe space for conversations about *what matters most*. Safe space does not just happen. It occurs as we are mindful, compassionate, and intentional in our efforts, always trusting in the Holy Spirit.

To encourage the fostering of intentional conversations this resource has three parts:

1. Intentional Conversations as Missional Practice
 - a. *Fostering Conversations that Receive Embody, and Share Christ's Peace*
 - b. *Engaging in Intentional Conversations that foster Holy Curiosity for the Other*
2. Difficult Conversations as Missional Practice

- a. *Conversations around Conflict, Hurt Feelings, and Misunderstandings*
- b. *The Essential Paradigm Shift*
- 3. Reference:
 - a. *Proactive Approaches Adapted from Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*
 - b. *Intentional Conversations: A Missional Practice*
 - c. *Difficult Conversations: A Missional Practice*
 - d. *“At a Glance Guides” for Use When in a Difficult Conversations*
 - e. *A List of “Feeling” Words*

1. Intentional Conversations as Missional Practice

The word “intentional” means deliberate and infers a thoughtfulness and prayerful reflection. Intentional conversations are conversations we approach thoughtfully and prayerfully as opportunities to embody Christ’s peace with others. They require that we are “fully awake and ready to respond” to each conversation as an opportunity to bless others with Christ’s love and peace.

Intentional conversations challenge us to *slow down* and go much deeper than transactional conversations. They invite us to connect with others at a deeply personal and authentic level. Intentional conversations as missional practice are deeply spiritual when we begin to encounter the presence of Christ within the soul of each person we meet. This way of living impacts the care and thoughtfulness with which we approach each conversation as though we were in conversation with God.

a. Fostering Conversations that Receive, Embody, & Share Christ’s Peace!

The purpose of *Receive, Embody, and Share Christ’s Peace!*⁴ is to stimulate a new conversation and envision ways we *receive, embody, and share **the invitation** to Christ’s peace* in a changing and diverse world. It presented examples of *Spirit led invitations—entry points through which we move deeper into relationship with God and others, encounter our mutual poverty, and turn toward new life in Christ together*. In everyday life *Spirit led invitations* become pathways to *Christ’s peace*. It is inconceivable to imagine any *Spirit led invitation* without conversation. *Spirit led invitations* are not onetime events but a collection of Spirit led events that move us closer toward all the dimensions of Christ’s peace and include:

- Invitation to conversation without agenda
- Invitation to tables of abundance where *body and soul* find nourishment
- Invitation to backyards, dinner tables, and ordinary places where people receive and share radical hospitality
- Invitation to safe space where thoughts and feelings can be freely expressed
- Invitation to prayer as discovery of Jesus as constant companion

⁴ A paper introduced at LCM Retreat #5.

- Invitation to new forms of loving community where no one walks alone
- Invitation to release from unnecessary suffering
- Invitation to reconciliation as restoring of healthy relationships
- Invitation to responsible choices that lead to wholeness and healing for all
- Invitation to the fullness of Christ's peace as invitation, hospitality, healing, and call to action
- Invitation to baptism as commitment to walk with Christ
- Invitation to confirmation as receiving the Spirit in community with others

Opportunities abound in our daily lives to prayerfully and thoughtfully extend genuine invitation to relational encounters that create pathways for new hope and healing. It begins as we intentionally approach each conversation as missional practice and surprise others with our authentic desire to connect with them — not for what they can do *but for who they are in Christ*.

b. Engaging in Intentional Conversations that Foster Holy Curiosity in the Other

Holy Curiosity in the Other: A Missional Practice⁵ is a very specific and intentional way to approach conversation as missional practice. The purpose of *Holy Curiosity in the Other* is to more deeply understand the essence of God in the other person and to help us embody the invitation to Christ's peace with people we do not know well or ones we want to know better.

This practice is about how we create safe space to open others to share their evolving life and faith journey. In this practice we trust the nudging of the Spirit to meet people in the context of their lives and to free them to discover and express the essence of who they are and desire to become in the presence of the Spirit.

This practice will often not be appropriate for an initial conversation with a stranger although one should always be open to the impress of the Holy Spirit. This practice is to take an existing relationship deeper by authentically engaging in five stances:

- i. **Be Prayerful Throughout** – Seek courage, patience and insight to be fully present with God and the other person to discover the essence of God in the other person.
- ii. **Ask Genuine Questions** – Ask open-ended questions that gently lead to deeper sharing. If you sense the relationship has evolved to a place of intimacy and openness begin to explore questions of faith.
- iii. **Pause and Reflect** – Reflection is about both hearing and understanding the other so they feel they have been heard and understood. When our curiosity is genuine and Spirit led we desire deeper understanding to ensure we are truly stepping inside their story and experiencing things from their perspective rather than through our lens or experience.

⁵ Introduced at LCM Retreat Six and fuller description and steps available at www.missionalleaders.org

- iv. **Affirm the other** – Convey your total attention by genuinely affirming what you hear by making eye contact, nodding, or offering an affirmative statement, such as “I understand” or “Tell me more about that.”
- v. **Follow the Spirit’s Lead** – Depend on the Spirit’s guidance to help us balance how our personal sharing in a conversation can help lead a conversation deeper and not limit the other person’s sharing.

2. Difficult Conversations as Missional Practice

The word “difficult” suggests effort or skills are needed to work through a situation or problem that has the potential for an unintended or unfortunate outcome. Difficult conversations, like intentional conversations, are conversations that require thoughtfulness and prayer. Beyond these disciplines, difficult conversations require skill and self-awareness to avoid bad outcomes.

Difficult conversations although risky can be opportunities to embody an alternative third way that moves a relationship and situation beyond attaching blame or winners and losers. Difficult conversations as missional practice invite us to be fully awake to our own motives, emotions, and interactions as we practice skills to contribute to the wholeness and well-being of others.

a. Conversations around Conflict, Misunderstandings and Hurt Relationships

How do we engage in “difficult” conversations around conflict, misunderstandings and hurt relationships that need healing? Let’s admit it: real risks and potential blessings exist.

“Difficult” conversations can be risky. Even when approached with care, skill and good purposes in mind, there is no guarantee that outcomes will be positive. Even when “nudged” by the Spirit, being prayerful and thoughtful to bring healing, and even when approached with skill, real risks exist.

For well-founded reasons we avoid difficult conversations. They take energy, time and trust. Personal rejection is a risk. We fear failure. And perhaps most of all, we fear making matters worse.

It is not always wise to respond to every unresolved conflict, misunderstanding or hurt feeling. When we take immediate offense, it may be best to step back or at least delay a difficult conversation until emotions are more stable. Sometimes a person’s reaction may involve complex emotional and psychological issues that need a professional counselor or mediator.

Before engaging in a difficult conversation, consider the following to decide if you are ready or need help:

- Is your purpose for the conversation clear? If you are struggling with your own emotions you may not be able to think clearly and need help sorting through your motives and emotions.

- Have you examined how you might be contributing to the problem? Self-awareness is challenging and a third perspective may be helpful. You may want to step back and ask a professional or good friend for perspective.
- Are you entering the conversation with unexamined assumptions about the other person? Making assumptions about another person's motives often leads to false conclusions and puts the other person on the defensive.
- Is the other person able to engage in a rational conversation or do emotions quickly get out of control and lead to irrational statements and accusations? If this is true you may need help in how to approach the conversation or you may need a third party to help mediate the conversation.
- Do you or the other person have a pattern of conflict in relationships? It is much harder to assess this question personally. Consider asking a trusted friend for honest feedback. If the other person has a pattern of conflict in relationships you may need help in addressing the situation.
- Are you currently facing significant stress or physical challenges? Our physical well-being and stress level can significantly impact our perspective. If you are experiencing these challenges consider consulting a counselor or trusted friend to help you evaluate whether a conversation would be helpful now.
- See ***Proactive Approaches from Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*** in the **Reference Section** for additional helpful questions.

“Difficult” conversations can be a blessing. The word “blessing” shares roots in the Latin term “benedicere” (bene=well + dicere=to speak, say, or tell), which means “to say good things,” “to speak well of.” Sometimes, avoiding a conversation undermines “speaking” the good news of the gospel. Not conversing may prevent possibilities for healing and transformation. When we sense the Spirit’s “nudging” us toward considering a difficult conversation, reflect and pray on these verses:

- *Lovingly invite others to experience the good news of new life in community with Christ. Opportunities abound in your daily lives if you choose to see them.* – Words of Counsel presented at the 2014 World Conference
- *See much broader dimensions of God’s grace working through Christ to transform human relationships in a divided world.* – Words of Counsel presented at the 2013 World Conference (Adapted)
- *Encounter the Living Christ who heals and reconciles through redemptive relationships in sacred community.* – Doctrine and Covenants 163:2b (Adapted)
- *The restoring of persons to healthy or righteous relationships with God, others, themselves, and the earth is at the heart of the purpose of your journey . . .* – Doctrine and Covenants 163:2b
- *Become a people of the Temple—those who see violence but proclaim peace, who feel conflict yet extend the hand of reconciliation, who encounter broken spirits and find pathways for healing.* – Doctrine and Covenants 161:2a

- *The temple (and the people of the temple) shall be dedicated to the pursuit of peace. It shall be for reconciliation and for healing of the spirit.* – Doctrine and Covenants 156:5a (Adapted)

b. The Essential Paradigm Shift

Perhaps our hesitation to engage in or to begin a conversation around conflict, misunderstandings or hurt relationships is because we have a “fix it” paradigm. If our paradigm tells us we are to fix problems and resolve conflict, we may not have the skills needed.

The gospel paradigm shift is to first cultivate “safe space.” For the sake of our congregations, neighborhoods, and world our purpose is not always to lead with a “fix it” approach to conflict, misunderstanding, or a broken relationship. It is to provide safe space — space for mutual understanding and well-being to be embodied and shared. It is in this space where healing can occur in surprising ways. The following quote from Henri Nouwen explores how healing can occur amid our brokenness:

Our most important question as healers is not “What to say or to do?” but “How to develop inner space where the story can be received?” Healing is the humble but also very demanding task of creating space where strangers can reflect on their pain and suffering without fear, and find the confidence that makes them look for new ways right in the center of their confusion.⁶

What if we approach a “difficult” conversation out of a genuine, even holy curiosity to know and appreciate one another’s perspective and feelings when “hurt” happens? What if when we experience a “hurt” or fear we don’t withdraw but lean into conversation to deepen mutual understanding and work toward healing the relationship?

Approaching difficult conversations as missional practice require intentionality, spiritual sensitivity, and skill. As we increasingly risk new and deeper relationships in response to Christ’s mission we will encounter “difficult” conversations. In preparation to respond more fully to this call consider the following questions for reflection:

- How do I gain confidence in my ability to have intentional and difficult conversations?
- How will I be faithful to my identity in Christ and our identity as Community of Christ, in ways that embody and share Christ’s peace? How can I take on *the life and mind of Christ to increasingly view ourselves and others from a changed perspective?* – Adapted as a question from Words of Counsel presented at the 2013 World Conference.

The following **Reference Section** provides ideas from Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most and introduces two missional practices, At-a-Glance Guides, and A Word List of Feelings.

⁶ Reaching Out by Henri Nouwen

3. Reference Section

*a. Proactive Approaches from Difficult Conversations: How To Discuss What Matters Most*⁷

The authors of *Difficult Conversations: How To Discuss What Matters Most* outline three proactive approaches to use when engaging in intentional conversations of substance.

1. A “Learning Conversation”
2. “Three Conversations”
3. How to Begin the Conversation (Adapted from “the Third Story”)

Any conversation can become challenging in the best of circumstances. Conversation is complex. There are many levels to a conversation that can result in various reactions that originate beyond the conversation.

The three proactive approaches below help us approach conversations that matter.

1. A “Learning Conversation”

A “Learning Conversation” through the lens of incarnational mission is for understanding and well-being. The primary goal of a “Learning Conversation” is to sustain a constructive conversation. This helps to move us forward into the future together. A “Learning Conversation” shifts our purpose from “I have a message to deliver” to “I have some information to share and some questions to ask.” The stance of a learning conversation is “curiosity.” A learning conversation moves us away from persuasion and getting our way toward four inseparable objectives:

- i. To understand the other person’s point of view,
- ii. To explain your point of view,
- iii. To share and understand feelings, and
- iv. To work together to figure out a way to go forward.

A “Learning Conversation” employs three skills:

- i. Inquiry: inquire to learn. “Reach out in understanding...” by phrasing safe or invitational questions. (See Doctrine and Covenants 161:2, 3). Tip: Before you ask a question, ask yourself, “Why am I asking this question?” The only good answer is: “To learn.”
- ii. Paraphrasing: Paraphrase to clarify whether you understand what the other person is saying and to embody attentive listening.
- iii. Acknowledgment: Recognizing the feelings of another person shows that you want to understand the emotional content of what that person is saying.

⁷ Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen, *Difficult Conversations: How To Discuss What Matters Most*, New York, Penguin Books, 1999

Acknowledgement does not mean you agree with what is being said but have received it with grace.

A “Learning Conversation” explores their story and yours with these principles in mind:

- Listen to understand.⁸ Listen to their point of view and their feelings—paraphrase to see if you understand.
- Ask questions.
- Acknowledge what you hear being said and acknowledge expressed feelings.
- You *most* want to understand the other person’s point of view! Then... explain your point of view and share your feelings.
- Reframe to keep the conversation moving forward: from truth to different perceptions, from blame to curiosity, and from being stuck in the past to moving toward the future.
- Figure out together how to go forward.

Three Mistakes:

- i. We make assumptions. (The first mistake is we think we “understand” the other person.)
- ii. We don't ask enough questions.
- iii. We start off wrong. We don’t start from an open stance and clearly state our purpose.

2. **“Three Conversations”**

Take time for “Three Conversations” with yourself beforehand. This will help clarify your purpose and decide whether you are ready for the conversation. When your purpose remains unclear, this is reason to delay or not proceed.

Three steps to take before having a conversation:

First Step: Imagine Yourself in the Conversation

Before having a conversation imagine the conversation before-hand by having three conversations with yourself:

- i. “What is happening?”⁹ Conversation (Adapted): Each person has their own perspective. What is my story or perspective and what is the other person’s?

⁸ Note the following quote from Faithful Disagreement Definition and Principles, World Church Leadership Council, 2013 “In seeking to create genuine signal communities, we listen respectfully to one another’s viewpoints. In addition, we try to see from each other’s perspective. We trust in each person’s commitment to Christ and motivation to see the mission of Community of Christ flourish. We seek to celebrate our unity while learning from our diversity.”

⁹ Adapted by changing the “What happened?” Conversation to ““What is happening?” Conversation.”

Goals for when in conversation: Move toward exploring one another's stories.

Do and don'ts when in conversation: Ask questions. Be curious. Don't assume or make assumptions.

- ii. The Feelings Conversation: Feelings and emotions are present. What feelings or anxiety may the other person be having? Ask yourself: What are my feelings? What pressures or anxieties do I feel? How will I handle feelings?

Goals for when in conversation: Handling your feelings and acknowledging the feelings of the other person.

Do and don'ts when in conversation: Acknowledge your feelings without judgment. Use "I" statements, not "you" statements. I.e. "I am not good at expressing my feelings and I am not sure I can express them well." "I want to acknowledge my feelings and to understand yours." Ask questions to understand and acknowledge how the other person is feeling. Don't deny that feelings will be present. Avoid judging or evaluating feelings, yours or theirs. Acknowledge hearing the stated feelings of the other person.

- iii. The Identity Conversation: Identities are at stake. Have an "internal" conversation with yourself about what an anticipated conversation means to you or says about you. This conversation is to turn personal anxiety toward more confidence. Ask yourself, "What kind of person am I?" (Note: Each person is complex, not totally this or that. We will make mistakes.) Could the conversation put me off balance? How do I get my balance and confidence back? Remember you cannot control other people's reactions and expressed feelings. Before the conversation, imagine a range of reactions and what your response might be.

Goals for when in conversation: To see my identity and the other person's as complex. No one is perfect.

Do and don'ts when in conversation: Be aware of your identity story and that each person involved has a sense of their identity being impacted. Listen. Ask questions. Don't lose focus on your purpose (to understand, not fix, and to be curious).

Second Step: Clarify Your Purpose

Clarify to yourself what your hopes are for the conversation. Ask yourself: "What do I hope to accomplish? How can I promote us learning one another's story, one another's points of views and feelings, toward mutual well-being, and toward mutual or shared decisions to foster healthy relationships?"

Third Step: Make a Decision

Decide whether to proceed. Think as clearly as you can in advance about how the conversation can turn out. Ask yourself, “Do I sense hope to achieve my purpose? Am I grounded or feel balanced in my own feelings? Is this more about me and my identity story? Whose interest am I serving? Can I achieve my purpose or affect a better outcome by some other way? If I do not proceed, what will likely continue?”

How to Begin the Conversation¹⁰

Begin the conversation to communicate that you:

- Have an “open stance” and want to *open up* (not close up) the conversation.
- Acknowledge and welcome *differences* (not judgments) in views and feelings.
- Acknowledge your need to better understand by knowing one another’s thoughts and feelings.
- Acknowledge your purpose (be genuine!). I.e. to understand one another’s perspectives.
- Invite various alternatives for hopes you have. I.e. to reach mutual decisions about how to go forward.

An example script to begin a “difficult” conversation:

“I (a pastor) want to understand your (chair of the building committee) thoughts about the upcoming budget. I sense you have concerns or even perhaps strong feelings against the recommended budget. I want to understand your perspective and share my perspective about why I want to spend less money on building improvements and more money on our neighborhood after school program. I am open to your thoughts and feelings. I hope with better understanding of each other we will decide best for the congregation.”

b. Intentional Conversations—A Missional Practice

Intentional Conversations—A Missional Practice

Missional practices: *cultivating new understandings, ways of being, and living Christ’s mission.*

Purpose: Intentional Conversations challenge us to *slow down* and go much deeper than transactional conversations. This approach to conversation invites us to connect with others at a deeply personal and authentic level — to understand this practice as deeply spiritual where we begin to encounter the presence of Christ that dwells within the soul of each person we meet. This way of living begins to profoundly impact the care and thoughtfulness with which we approach each conversation as though we were in conversation with God.

¹⁰ Adapted from the “Third Story”

Steps:

- a. Pray the **Mission Prayer** when you rise in the morning.
- b. Pray the phrase “*Help me be fully awake and ready to respond*” at mid-morning, lunch, mid-afternoon, and before the end of your work day.
- c. As you engage in conversations throughout the day imagine you are greeting the risen Christ during each conversation. Listen deeply and seek to be *fully awake* to the presence of Christ that dwells deep with the soul of each person you meet.
- d. After each conversation give thanks for your encounter with Christ.
- e. Before sleep, reflect on how Christ was revealed in each person and conversation.

Tips for the Process:

- This is challenging work! To be fully present and awake to the presence of Christ in others takes practice and a new level of awareness. Don’t get discouraged if you look back on your day and can’t identify moments of awareness in conversation with others.
- Try to establish a rhythm with your prayer based on times you transition between tasks. Think of breathing as a way to remember the prayer. When you breathe in focus on “awake” and when you breathe out focus on “respond”. Consider spending a few moments simply allowing your breaths to carry the prayer *awake, respond, awake, respond*.
- Practice at home with your family members or at church. Deep listening and sensitivity to the presence of Christ in others is a practice that matures over time. Be patient but intentional. Intentional Conversations challenge us to *slow down* and go much deeper than transactional conversations. This approach to conversation invites us to connect with others at a deeply personal and authentic level — to understand this practice as deeply spiritual where we begin to encounter the presence of Christ that dwells within the soul of each person we meet. This way of living begins to profoundly impact the care and thoughtfulness with which we approach each conversation as though we were in conversation with God.

c. *Difficult Conversations*—A Missional Practice

Difficult Conversations: A Missional Practice

Missional practices: *cultivating new understandings, ways of being, and living Christ’s mission.*

The cause of Zion is the ongoing call to en flesh the peace of Jesus Christ in all dimensions of life.

We are called... to reveal Jesus Christ in the world through finely honed ministries of peace, reconciliation, and healing of the spirit, making the ministries of the Temple manifest through our lives. — Stephen M. Veazey at the 2005 World Conference

Purpose: To be mindful and prayerful about creating safe space for all involved to experience peace, reconciliation and healing of the spirit in difficult conversations around conflict, misunderstandings or hurt feelings.

Steps:

1. Three steps to take before the conversation:
 - First, imagine being in the conversation to think through what happened from your and their perspectives. Sense what your and their feelings, pressures or anxieties are present and how you will handle them. Have an “internal” conversation about what happened says about or impacts your and their identity.
 - Second, clarify your purpose and hopes for the conversation. Ask, “How will these promote mutual understanding, well-being and healthy relationships?”
 - Third, decide whether to proceed. Think about how the conversation can turn out. Ask, “Do I sense hope to achieve my purpose? Am I grounded or feel balanced in my own feelings? Is this more about me and my identity story? Whose interest am I serving? Can I achieve my purpose some other way? If I do not proceed, what will likely continue?”
2. If the decision is to proceed plan your approach with these suggestions:
 - Pray the conversation can be a transformative experience—a pathway to Christ’s peace.
 - Start the conversation by being open and state your purpose with clarity.
 - Explore their story and yours as a “Learning Conversation” with these skills:
 - Inquire, to learn and understand the other person’s story!
 - Paraphrase to check understanding and show you are listening.
 - Acknowledge feelings to show you are trying to understand.
 - Move toward a better future by inviting expressions of hope and shared values or concerns for what each would like to happen going forward.
 - End with specific commitments about the future. If further conversation is needed, schedule a committed time and place to meet again.

Tips for the Process:

Approach a difficult conversation as an opportunity for mutual understanding and well-being where Christ’s peace can be received, embodied and shared.

d. At-a-Glance Guides

Note: These are available as separate items.

e. A Word List of Feelings Related to Conflict, Misunderstandings and Hurt Relationships

People have many diverse feelings. Often it is difficult to name a feeling. The following list of words may help identify the feelings we may have when faced with a difficult conversation.

aggravated	aggressive	alienated	alone	ambivalent
angry	annoyed	anxious	ashamed	awkward
bitter	bored	cautious	confused	contempt
defeated	depressed	despair	diminished	disappointed
discouraged	disgraced	disgusted	disillusioned	Disliked
dissatisfied	distressed	dominated	disillusioned	doubtful
embarrassed	empty	enraged	fatigued	fearful
forced	frustrated	grief-stricken	grumpy	guilt
hateful	helpless	hesitant	Hopeless	Horrificed
hostile	humiliated	hurt	incapable	incensed
indecisive	Indifferent	indignant	inferior	infuriated
insecure	insulting	irritated	isolated	lonely
lost	melancholy	miserable	neglected n	nervous
numb	overwhelmed	panicked	paralyzed	pathetic
perplexed	pessimistic	powerless	provoked	regretful
rejected	resentful	revulsion	sad	scornful
shamed	skeptical	shocked	shy	silly
sorrow	spiteful	stunned	suspicious	terrible
tense	uncertain	uncomfortable	uneasy	upset
useless	vengeful	vulnerable	weary	worried