

**Congregational Conversations
about Homosexuality and the Church
Session 1 - Introduction**



After watching the video together, before you begin discussing the questions that follow, please share in this Covenant for Christian Conversation, which begins with a prayer provided by our bishops. Select a "leader" to read the regular-type words below; everyone reads the bold-face type. Make sure that everyone knows everyone else. Don't assume that you all know each other, just you're part of the same congregation or RCC!

Let us join in prayer.

Lord God, as your Son once sat at table with his disciples, gracing them with his presence, come now, by the power of your Spirit, and dwell with us. Guide our conversations in all the days to come. Help us to speak with an honesty that is gentle, forbearing one another, exercising compassion, kindness, meekness and patience in our discussion. Help us listen to each other without judgment, respecting the diversity of experience and understanding among us. More than anything, O God, help us in these moments to "put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony" despite our differences. These things we humbly ask in the Name of Him who binds us together, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

As we meet here today to have conversation about homosexuality and the church, we join in covenant with one another before God.

We covenant to exercise the Golden Rule in all our conversation, following Jesus' admonition: "Here," he said, "is a simple guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative, and do it for them." ("The Message" translation of Matthew 7:12)

When expressing feelings, thoughts or opinions, we know that we can only truly speak for our own experience. We will use "I" statements rather than "you" statements.

We will accept responsibility for our own feelings and our own convictions and claim them as our own.

We covenant to give everyone the opportunity to speak and be heard regardless of whether we agree with his or her opinion, perspective, or theology. If we have been heard, the convener may ask us to yield the floor before speaking again in order for everyone to have a chance to speak.

We covenant to listen to one another without interrupting.

Following Christ's teaching in Matthew 18, we speak directly with a sister or brother with whom we disagree, instead of talking about our disagreement with them behind their backs.

We covenant to be honest with each other and "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). We cannot choose either truth or love without the other. Balancing truth and love together will bring wholeness to our discussions.

Our covenant expands beyond this day's meeting. We will respect the contributions of everyone who is here, now and in the future.

I will not record this event on my phone or other device, nor will I post on social media* about what I have heard at this event.

We will respect the contributions of everyone who is here, and we will not repeat their comments to anyone.

When we leave this place,

I understand that I am free to tell anyone what I said;

I agree not to tell what anyone else said.

Every person here is a child of God and a brother or sister in Christ, and we will treat them that way.

To each person around this table, I covenant to honor you as a child of God and as my brother or sister.

Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

Throughout this time of discernment in our province, we will continually ask ourselves, Can we truly say, "Come, Lord Jesus, our Guest to be"?

Come, Lord Jesus, our Guest to be,

**And bless these children of God, as our brothers and sisters, gifts bestowed by Thee.
Amen.**

** - Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, blogs, or other internet sites*

Questions for Discussion

1. Share some initial reactions to what you've heard from the conversation among the four bishops. What did you learn? What surprised you? What challenged you?
2. Has conversation about the Holy Spirit been a significant part of your faith experience in the past? What feelings arise for you in talking about the Holy Spirit?
3. What are the challenges of working to discern the leading of the Holy Spirit in community? What are the benefits? What do we gain, and what must we be willing to let go of?
4. Where have you seen evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in your church?
5. As you rise to depart, please share in the Lord's Prayer together.