

Frequently Asked Questions about Sanctuary for Dialogue

(updated 9/10/16)

1. What is Sanctuary for Dialogue?

It is an effort of The Community Church and some dedicated volunteers to create an inclusive, safe, and respectful environment where people with conflicting points of view can come together to talk about difficult issues. Sanctuary for Dialogue's mission is "to facilitate civil and respectful dialogue in which people express their beliefs and ideas, and seek to understand better the beliefs and ideas of others, including why they believe as they do."

2. Why is becoming a Sanctuary for Dialogue important?

Many people have difficulty discussing issues on which they disagree without attacking, even vilifying, those with whom they disagree. We seem to have lost much of the capacity to have civil, constructive conversations about divisive issues.

Even within our church, there are some issues about which people feel so strongly that they avoid discussing them for fear of having a polarized discussion that "goes nowhere." But if we are to make progress in addressing problems that result from just such issues, we must start by having civil conversations about them.

3. What is one of these dialogues like?

Two trained facilitators lead 6-8 participants in a dialogue session that lasts 2-2½ hours. Part of the time the facilitators ask prepared questions of the participants, and part of the time the participants ask questions of each other.

4. How are participants chosen?

The opportunity to participate in an upcoming dialogue within the church is publicized to the congregation through the newsletter, announcements, inserts and tabling. Potential participants can let the team know at tabling or email dialogue@c3huu.org or click on the link provided on the website, www.c3huu.org/sanctuary-for-dialogue.html.

Members of the Sanctuary for Dialogue team follow up with a phone call to collect information used to design the dialogue and develop the prepared questions. Participants may need to be selectively invited to balance the range of opinions in each group.

5. How are participants prepared for the dialogue session?

During the preparational phone interview, participants are asked questions that can stimulate deeper thinking about the topic. A set of draft communication agreements is also shared, which enable the facilitators and participants in the dialogue to make sure each participant has ample opportunity to speak, and understand how others in the session view or feel about the topic and why they think or feel that way. *(There is also a post interview to help facilitators improve future dialogues.)*

6. How are facilitators chosen?

Facilitators must have been participants in a dialogue, join the Sanctuary for Dialogue team and agree to serve as a facilitator for a minimum of two years. They are invited by the Sanctuary for Dialogue team to participate in an intensive 3-day training course, the Power of Dialogue, taught by the Public Conversations Project in Boston.

7. What is the desired outcome of such a dialogue?

It is important to know what the desired outcome is not. It is not that people will change how they see the issue, nor that they will resolve their differences, nor that they will negotiate a settlement or make a group decision of some kind. It is that they will better understand the views and feelings of those with whom they disagree, and better understand their own views and feelings as well.

8. If I wanted to become more involved in Sanctuary for Dialogue work, how could I do that?

The Sanctuary for Dialogue team welcomes new members. We meet after the last service on the second Sunday of most months. Just let the team member at the table know of your interest or contact dialogue@c3huu.org.