

Valuing Diversity of Thought

The BOT has as one of its objectives this year to encourage living of the covenant of engagement. As a specific area of practice, we want to foster a culture valuing diversity of thought at UCE.

Page 1 is the covenant group meeting outline.

Page 2 has some notes for the leader.

Valuing Diversity of Thought

Opening reading:

“Dialogue,” says philosopher Martin Buber, “is a conversation between adults the outcome of which is unknown.”

Checkin

Topic Reading:

Can I be a member of the UCE community?

- ❖ I’m an ex-Catholic with liberal religious and political beliefs, but I feel strongly about protecting unborn fetuses including with laws restricting abortion.
 - ❖ I’m an atheist libertarian, who is socially liberal but I feel strongly that big government is wasteful and abusive, and that problems are best served by private markets and personal social action.
 - ❖ I’m a liberal social thinker who believes in God and the divinity of Jesus even though I am not comfortable with how traditional Christian churches operate.
- Can I be a member of UCE? Will I be able to say what I think and be heard? Will I feel welcome and valued?

For discussion

When was the last time you were aware that you or someone else at UCE were made uncomfortable by disparaging or dismissive remarks or even jokes made under the assumption that everyone shared the same beliefs or opinions? What did you do or what do you wish you had done?

Thinking back on the situation you remember, how does the person with the different beliefs feel in that situation? How would the person who made the statement feel if challenged about it? Why is it so hard to speak up and what are some ways of doing so that address the feelings of both parties?

These types of situations can happen from the pulpit, in committee meetings, covenant group meetings, congregational meetings. What is the importance of using the word “value” instead of “accept” or “tolerate”? Why is it a disadvantage to our community and ourselves if we don’t value diversity of thought? What do we gain by creating such a culture?

Closing Reading

In covenant groups, we practice active listening, for each speaker to know they are heard, and for each listener to truly hear each perspective. In covenant groups, we practice respectful sharing. We would not state our view as if everyone must share it, and joke about those who disagree. In covenant groups, we don’t come with our minds made up, but to deepen our understanding. What would it be like if all our conversations were given these gifts of listening, respect, and openness?

Note to Leader:

The experience of groups can be quite different.

Regarding the reading “Can I be a member of UCE”, in some groups there has been agreement that the people listed would not be attracted to UCE. Please know that these are descriptions of real people. There are in fact people at UCE with religious and political beliefs that differ from the totally liberal UU stereotype. Some people are more libertarian and/or fiscally conservative, and may support Republican candidates. Some people believe in God and the divinity of Jesus. Some people just have a strong individual belief because of personal experience.

Regarding the discussion of uncomfortable situations, if your group hasn’t experienced this at UCE, here are some situations reported by UCE members that might help discussion.

-At a committee meeting, someone made a remark (eyes rolled) about being a “recovering Catholic” and many others laughed in agreement.

-At a friendship dinner, it was assumed that everyone in the room would be voting for Obama. When one person expressed his deep concern about the moral issues surrounding burdening future generations with debt and said because of this he was considering voting for Romney, the rest of the group ganged up to “convert” him.

-At another social event just before the election, most people present joined in jokes ridiculing Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan. They felt so certain everyone was in agreement, the jokes were crude and mean.

-When a newcomer at UCE, a member reports how there was an assumption from the pulpit that any civilized person would agree we should not invade Iraq.

-At a service, the minister asked various questions about beliefs, requesting those in agreement to raise their hand. When she asked who believed in God, many people looked around as if to see who could possibly be raising their hand. One member saw a woman in front of her start to raise her hand but then put it down.