



GO AND...

HAVE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS AT WORK

How to Handle Difficult Conversations at Work

Rebecca Knight wrote this article for the Harvard Business Review aimed at difficult conversations in the workplace. <https://hbr.org/2015/01/how-to-handle-difficult-conversations-at-work>). Her suggestions extend beyond the workplace providing a framework for engaging in any hard conversation.

1. Change your mindset - “A difficult conversation tends to go best when you think about it as just a normal conversation,” says author Holly Weeks. (Failure to Communicate)
2. Breathe - Good advice from Jean-Francois Manzoni at INSEAD. Practice mindful breathing. Take a break, get a drink, walk down the hall, and collect your thoughts if it is getting too hard.
3. Plan but don't script. Be flexible. Weeks adds, “Stay with simple, clear, direct, and neutral language.”
4. Acknowledge your counterpart's perspective - Weeks suggests two questions to ask yourself before you meet. “What is the problem?” and “What does the other person think is the problem?” If you are not sure of their viewpoint, ask. Manzoni encourages us to look for overlap between our point of view and the other person's.
5. Be compassionate - Come at sensitive topics from a place of empathy. Be pleasant, considerate, and compassionate.
6. Give something back - Be constructive. Propose options.

Bottom line: Be clear, direct and unemotional. Put yourself in the right frame of mind and show empathy. Enter into the conversation with the sincere intent to have a good conversation not an argument. And, of course enter grounded in prayer and a willingness to listen to the Holy Spirit working with, in and through the conversation.



GO AND...

ASH WEDNESDAY WITH KIDS: THOUGHTS & IDEAS FOR ENGAGING SAINTS OF ALL AGES TO “GO AND” HAVE THE CONVERSATION

By Deacon Kristin Johnson

Ash Wednesday is traditionally the day when the Easter season begins. It is set at 40 days before Easter. The idea of Ash Wednesday is to remember our humanness and our mortality, and helps to prepare our hearts for the crucifixion and resurrection. Here are some ways that congregations can encourage families to celebrate Ash Wednesday:

1 – The day before the Ash Wednesday service, families can prepare for this time by celebrating ‘Pancake Day’. Because Ash Wednesday began the period of time when eggs and fats were forbidden, the tradition grew that the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday should be “pancake day”, also known as ‘Fat Tuesday’, or ‘Shrove Tuesday’. Families would have a pancake party to have a last day of celebration (and use up their eggs and fats) before the somberness of Lent began.

Families can celebrate this by having a pancake supper, either in their homes, or at church, all together. Make it a fun celebration by providing the “works” for the pancake toppings (whipped cream, chocolate chips, strawberries, etc.) As part of your evening, you can also share about this tradition and how other countries participate in this tradition too. One delightful tradition is the pancake day race, performed in Olney, England. Locals will don aprons and put pancake batter in hot skillet. They then race down the street, cooking and flipping their pancakes (at least three flips). The winner is the first to reach the end with a cooked pancake.

2 – Ash Wednesday Dinner

Encourage families to make an extra special deal for dinner on Ash Wednesday. Because the liturgical color for Lent is purple, families can dress up the dinner table all in purple. And if they are really daring, they can add purple food coloring to their food that night. This is just another way that helps send the message to the whole family that this is a big day, and important season, and it revolves around Jesus’ sacrifice for us.

3 – Encourage families to attend the Ash Wednesday service together. This is a great way to begin the season of Lent and communicate to their children that this is an important day. What is also beautiful about attending this service is that everyone get ashes, even the babies! It is through the act of having ashes placed upon one's forehead in the shape of a cross, that we are reminded that we are dust, and to dust we shall return. Attending this service also provides a wonderful opportunity to talk with their children about the meaning of Ash Wednesday. Did you know the ashes most church's use on Ash Wednesday are the burned-up palms from last Palm Sunday? Why do we get ashes on our foreheads? As a reminder of our own mortality, that one day everyone will die. But it's also important to remind kids that even though we all will die, that we will be with our Lord in heaven, and will see all our loved ones there too (this can help calm the fears of the littlest of ones who might fear never seeing a loved one again).

4 – After the Ash Wednesday service, encourage families to bury the Alleluia! Did you know that most protestant churches don't say the word "Alleluia" all during Lent? Not again until Easter! So, as a way to help kids understand why, a tradition began of "burying" the Alleluia the night of Ash Wednesday. Families can sing Alleluia songs, clap, dance, make it a big deal, then put it in a box and leave it there until Easter, not saying the word anymore.

It is my hope that through these meaningful, and even some fun, traditions, that it will help families connect to the greater meaning of this important day in the church community.

About the Author: Deacon Kristin Johnson is the Deacon of Faith Formation at First Lutheran church in Fremont, NE. With 23+ years of ministry experience, she has a heart for Youth Ministry and Cross+Generational relationships being at the core of the church. Kristin is married to Bishop Scott Johnson, and they have two teenage daughters: Ainsley and Alanna.



GO AND...

PAPER CHAINS ACTIVITY

By Deacon Timothy Siburg

Where have you seen God? Where is God showing up in your life? What are examples of new life, or new ideas, that you have witnessed or sensed lately?

These are big open-ended questions. But they could also be good food for thought starters for Lent this year. They might be the starting place for having a conversation with another. They might also be a part of leaning in during Lent and being intentional.

For whatever question(s) grabs your attention, invite your whole congregation to participate in this activity this Lenten season!

Instructions:

- Using any color of construction paper that your congregation would like, cut sheets of paper into strips that can be used to make paper chains.
- Invite the disciples in the congregation to respond to these questions as part of the Lenten journey.
- For every answer they might have to this question, invite a disciple to write each separate answer down on a strip of paper.
- Create a station or place within your church to receive the paper strips. This might be a table or bin in the narthex.
- Or, take the strips as they come directly to the altar or altar rail and begin making a chain. Connecting each strip as they come by making the strips into interlocking loops and creating a chain. To make a loop, take a strip, and place it around another. Secure the strip as a circle with either tape or a staple, and you should be all set. If taking this approach, make sure there is a space for the tape or stapler so people can easily access it.
- If receiving the strips outside of the worship space, consider how you will use them and display them.

Making it Visual:

A suggestion: as part of your congregation's Lenten journey, begin assembling the strips as a growing chain. Perhaps a powerful image of this process could be to begin the chain near the altar or communion rail, and then continue to add to it through Lent. By Easter, you might have a very colorful and long chain displaying countless examples of God showing up and signs of new life in Christ. As part of the Easter liturgy, celebrate the growth of the chain and give thanks in the prayers or the liturgy of the day by witnessing to the various witness and experience of God's on-going presence and new life in Christ today.

Need More Ideas or Have Questions? Want to share your story about this idea?

Reach out to Deacon Timothy Siburg at timothy@nebraskasynod.org. And share your story with the Nebraska Synod by emailing goand@nebraskasynod.org.



GO AND...

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS- HOW TO START, AND HOW TO HAVE THEM.

Further Resources to Go and Have the Conversation

There are a number of great resources to help start the process of having difficult conversations. Among these, here are few that have been lifted up and selected as particularly helpful for congregations and disciples working through and making space for, difficult conversations. These selected resources offer different ideas and input but would be greatly applicable to most any congregation of the Nebraska Synod.

1. “Difficult Conversations within the Church.” This is a toolkit that has been written, edited, and assembled by the Nebraska Synod’s Micah 6:8 team. This resource was created by Micah 6:8 in order to “equip the congregations of the Nebraska Synod to live out their baptismal promise ‘to strive for justice and peace throughout all the earth.’” This resource includes: resources for Bible Study and theological reflection; guidelines for communication; examples of ground rules; topical conversation tools; an advocacy primer; and other resources.
2. About twenty years ago, the Alban Institute published a resource by pastor and theologian Rev. Dr. Katie Day called, “Difficult Conversations: taking risks, acting with integrity.” The book was written with the premise that, “We don’t talk about controversial issues here!” This premise it is noted, results in that “congregations are noticeably absent from the public forum and members of faith communities fail to develop ‘social capital.’” Rev. Dr. Day invites the reader to “engage in difficult conversations,” through “a process she hopes will become habit forming,” and “a new way of being communities of faith.”

3. From the ELCA comes the resource, “[Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues](#).” This resource was designed in 1999 to help disciples and congregations discern and discuss difficult topics. It has been particularly applicable for congregational use when discussing the content and possible themes of various social statements that the church has considered, debated, discerned, and adopted over the years. Though some of the pictures and layout will look dated, the concepts and themes are still timely and useful.

4. Within the ELCA as a whole and the Nebraska Synod, we hold “Accompaniment” as a value for how we walk together as God’s people and engage the world and our own communities through our daily lives as disciples. To explore this theme, and how it can help create space for hard, difficult, and meaningful conversations that might lead to change of understanding and growing relationships, use this [Accompaniment Booklet](#) resource from ELCA Global Mission. It emphasizes the importance of listening and relationships, and puts the conversation and accompaniment process within the frame of “God’s Story, My Story, Your Story.” This emphasis and these related themes may be particularly useful for our synod’s February and March focuses of “Go and Have the Conversation,” and “Go and Be Intentional.”