

Listening with Love: A Conversation

East District 2019



Desert Southwest Annual Conference
The Rev. Gina Gilland Campbell
and The Desert Southwest Conference District Superintendents

Listening with Love: A Conversation

Preparatory Prayer

Creator of love and life, as we prepare for our Church Conference we pray to you for wisdom, for a listening heart, for the flourishing of Christ's holy church in this place, for the increase in our love for others in the name of Christ, and for the light of Christ to shine brightly in this local community to folks who may never enter our doors. This I pray with a humble heart. Amen and amen.

Arrival - As you arrive write on two or three post-it notes your responses to following prayer and place them somewhere around the candle/worship focus table. These will be used in the closing of the conversation. "Lord, what do you desire to do through ____ UMC in this time and this place?"

Welcome

Statement of Purpose and Introduction to the Process

Opening Worship

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Scripture Focus - The Great Commandment

Mark 12:28-34 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

²⁸ One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" ²⁹ Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." ³² Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; ³³ and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,'—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." ³⁴ When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

Words to the Song	Movement
<i>Spirit of the living God</i>	Raise arms swirling them like fire
<i>Fall afresh on me</i>	Hands down slowly with fingers wiggling slightly - hands/fingers turned toward self
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<i>Melt me</i>	Bring both hands together in front of body, palms facing in, with a little space between them
<i>Mold me</i>	Do a “molding” motion with hands, with space in between
<i>Fill me</i>	Bend knees and bend down slightly as hands reach up in a cupped position (looks like shape of a chalice)
<i>Use me</i>	Both arms/hands reach out in front of body and come down
<i>Spirit of the Living God</i>	Raise arms swirling them like fire
<i>Fall afresh on me</i>	Hands down slowly with fingers wiggling slightly - hands/fingers turned toward self

Directions for our Holy Conversations

- Each person will speak only once – and using very few words – until everyone has the opportunity to speak.
- We will reverence one another’s speech by holding a few moments of silence between speakers.
- We know that we will disagree. That does not mean we cannot remain in holy conversation with one another.
- We will use only statements that begin with “I”.
- We will speak only from our own hearts; not quoting from any source, even the Bible.
- We will speak for the benefit of the body of Christ – in ways that profit the work of the entire body gathered in this place.

Conversations Around the Table

1. In what ways do I experience God at _____ UMC?

2. What of the ministry of Jesus Christ will go missing in our local community if _____ UMC is no longer here?

3. What are the two most important things you pray that the people of _____ UMC will be known for this this community?

4. What needs to happen for me to remain a vital part of this living body of Christ?

One Last Question

5. What 1% change in my own way of participating in the life of _____ UMC am I willing to make in order that we may flourish as a vibrant body of Christ?

Next Steps to Develop Your Congregational Statement of Identity

- Expand the experience we have shared together by sponsoring 2-3 listening sessions at different times and on different days of the week. Share the identity statement created at this session and invite dialogue. The goal is to have as many members/constituents of the church as possible participate in a session.
- For persons or groups who cannot attend one of the listening sessions and yet would like to offer comments, request a visit with the pastor or with a member of the leadership team. All members of the church leadership team will speak to 2-3 people in the community who are not church members and whom you do not know very well and ask the following question. “What does this community need that a community of faith might be able to provide?”
- All members will report back to the leadership group. Conversation should follow to articulate differences and similarities in the congregation’s own perception of their identity and what they discover in these conversations. Any differences in self-perception and community perception should receive due consideration for what the congregation might learn about their presence in the life of the greater community.
- The ultimate goal is to adopt a statement of identity for this congregation. If we know our identity, we will be able to make any decision we need to make in the future. Clarity will allow us to move forward in ministry and mission in the name of Jesus. Clarity and agreement about who we are will serve as a calming response to the anxiety any change in the structure of our denomination might raise.
- The statement should be presented to a church wide meeting open to all persons. Congregations may choose a hand count, a written ballot to be counted in everyone’s presence, or another manner agreed upon by the leadership team.

Closing Worship

The Spreading of the Light

Closing Prayer:

O God, whose mercy is ever faithful and ever sure, you who are our refuge and our strength in time of trouble, visit us, we pray—for we are a people in trouble. We need a hope that is made wise by experience and is undaunted by disappointment. We need an anxiety about the future that shows us new ways to look at new things but does not unnerve us. As a people, we need to remember that our influence is greatest when our power was weakest. Most of all, we need to turn to you, O God, and our crucified Lord, for only Christ’s humility and strength can heal and free us.

O God be our sole strength in time of trouble. In the middle of anxiety, grant us the grace to count our blessings—the simple ones: health, food, sleep, one another, a spring that is bursting out all over, a nation which, despite all, has so much to offer so many.

And, grant us to count our more complicated blessings: our failures, which teach us so much more than success; our lack of money, which points to the only truly renewable resources, the resources of your spirit; our lack of health, even the knowledge of death, for until we learn that life is limited, we are surely as formless and as shallow as a stream without its banks.

Send us into a new week with a glad mind, free and joyful in the spirit of Jesus Christ. Amen.

William Sloan Coffin, Riverside Church (modified)

Benediction