

GROUP PROCESS

The goal is to bring people together to discuss political ideas in light of the values and principles of Catholic Social Thought. The process is to bring people together; to listen, to ask questions, to think, and to discover what one may want to gather more information about. It is NOT a debate nor is it a battle of minds to win someone over to your point of view. A group process conversation is more like a "Hacky-Sack" game than a Tennis Match. The object is to keep the conversation going (keep the ball in the air in Hacky-Sack) not slam a serve.

Conversation agreements:

- Listen to and respect everyone and all points of view.
- Be accepting, try to suspend judgment.
- Seek to understand rather than persuade.
- Question old assumptions and look for new insights be brief, be honest, not long winded (give others an opportunity to talk).

The Process:

A facilitator introduces the group and the process. The facilitator is not an expert, nor is she/he expected to know all the answers. Their role is to keep the discussion rolling, giving everyone a chance to speak, and to keep track of time. It should be stated when the discussion will end and keep to that no matter how well the conversation is going. Church groups may want to begin with a prayer asking God's Spirit to be upon them all and to open their hearts and minds.

- 1) If people have not read any materials prior to meeting, pass out the briefing paper and/or educational materials and give them time to read it.
- 2) Ask for people's responses to the reading material and/or questions. This initial response is short, just a couple of sentences. Sometimes it is helpful to start with one person and move around the circle so everyone has a chance to speak. *People are just stating initial reactions, positive, negative, confusion; no feedback is given at this point.*
- 3) Second round: People deepen their comments or speak to what has new meaning now. *People are free to pass if they so desire. Active listening is participating!*

- 4) Dialogue, respectful conversation. People speak one at a time and may respond to what others have said or ask questions. It is important to remember the guidelines listed above. Some groups find it helpful to have a talking stick (an object that is designated as the symbol of who gets to talk. Only the person with the talking object is allowed to speak. This helps to prevent people speaking out of turn or at the same time).
- 5) Final round: Each person states briefly what was meaningful to them.

Facilitator suggestions:

- Speak to share or inform, raise questions or insights.
- Listen for similarities and insights, repeat them to the group.
- Share speaking time, invite non-speakers to talk; interrupt someone who is dominating the conversation. "Pat, thank you for sharing. Let us hear what some of the other people have to say on the topic."
- Look for deeper needs or values underlying people's feelings. Encourage others to do so as well.
- If conversation becomes heated, use the talking object, take a moment of silence to reflect, or respectfully acknowledge your differences and change course.

Conversation Helps:

- "Can you say that in another way?"
- "I heard you say this ... is that what you meant?"
- "I'm wondering what you are thinking or what your thoughts on this are?"
- "Would you be willing to tell me what you heard me say?"
- "Can you rephrase that in a nonjudgmental or threatening way?"
- "I'm not sure what you mean by that ... please explain."
- "If what you are proposing came to pass, how would things be different?"
- "I'm hearing a lot of emotion behind what you just said. What is the need/belief/value that you feel is threatened?"