



Resources for Faith Communities: Themed Discussion Guide

Below, you will find five conversations or “dialogues” to be had by communities of faith. For increased growth and effectiveness these themed dialogues are intended to be held in sequence; however, they can also be held separately. If a church or school is to hold just one dialogue, they are to hold Dialogue 5, as it is the most comprehensive discussion.

Why dialogues?

Dialogues are open, guided conversations where topics of great emotional, spiritual, and practical importance can be discussed in a safe setting. Dialogues are different from debates because the goal of a dialogue is not to win. Rather, the goal is to learn, grow, and discover new possibilities for this world in which we live.

General rules

It can be helpful for the discussion leader to set some ground rules before the dialogue begins. A typical list of ground rules looks like this:

- Speak from your personal experience and knowledge
- Avoid stereotypes and sweeping generalizations
- No name calling
- All electronic devices should be turned off or on silent
- No interrupting

Post Dialogue

At the end of a dialogue, the discussion leader should ask participants if there are any lasting questions or comments. Then, the leader should “de-brief,” meaning that he or she will re-cap the main themes of the dialogue and the notable points that were made. This process is helpful so that people leave feeling like they are on the same page.



God, Humans, and the Environment

Questions to ask:

1. What is the relationship between God, humans, and the environment?
 - a. Are humans on the same level as nature? Above it? How do we know?
2. What informs this relationship?
 - a. Scripture
 - b. Experience? What are some experiences you have had when you have felt in communion with nature? Or in opposition to nature?
3. Have you ever had a mentor, pastor, or teacher who has helped instill in you the importance of nature?
4. What is the value of connecting with nature?
 - a. Does it bring us closer to God?
 - b. What does it teach us about God's beauty?
5. What are practices that can put us in better relationship with both God and nature?

Scripture to consider:

1. Psalm 24:1 *The Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it; the world and all that dwell therein.*
2. Gen. 2:15 *The Lord God took the human creature and placed him in the garden to till it and tend it.*
3. Gen. 1:27 *So God created mankind in his own image; in his own image God created them; he created them male and female.*
4. Ecclesiastes 3:18-22 *I said in my heart with regard to human beings that God is testing them to show that they are but animals. For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity...*

Notes:



Commands and Duties

Questions to ask:

1. What duties do we have as God's children?
 - a. What are our duties to the environment?
2. Where did we learn these?
 - a. Scripture?
 - b. Sunday school?
 - c. Our parents and grandparents?
3. Is there a difference between a responsibility, a commandment, an obligation, or a suggested practice?
4. How can we live out these duties?
 - a. Gardening?
 - b. Outdoor activities?
 - c. Recycling?
5. We might all agree with God's commandments, but why is it important to match our actions with our hearts?
6. What do we gain from fulfilling our duties to God and the environment?

Scripture to consider:

1. Lev. 25:23-24 *The land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants. Throughout the country that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land.*
2. Deuteronomy 11:13-17 *So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul—then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.*
3. Gen. 1:28 *God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*

Notes:



Fiscal Responsibility

Questions to ask?

1. Do you think about your beliefs when you spend your money?
 - a. What kinds of purchases or financial decisions make you consider your Christian faith?
 - i. On small purchases or big ones?
2. How does the money you spend affect other people positively or negatively?
3. Let's think, now, about how big institutions spend their money. What decisions might a church or college have to make about how they spend or raise their money?
 - a. Is it ethical for a church to invest in ethically questionable enterprises?
 - i. Pornography?
 - ii. Alcohol?
 - b. How does the money a church spends affect people positively or negatively?
 - i. Raise your hand if you've donated money to your church in the past 6 months?
4. What guidelines can help us decide whether we are purchasing or investing in good faith?

Scripture to consider:

1. Psalm 112:5 *It is well with the man who deals generously and lends, who conducts his affairs with justice.*
2. Luke 12:15,23,34. *And He said to them, "Beware and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does life consist of his possessions. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*
3. Proverbs 13:11 *Wealth obtained by fraud dwindles, but the one who gathers by labor increases it.*
4. 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 *Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.*

Notes:



Living Out Faith in Community

Questions to ask:

1. As students, you picked this school. What does it mean to choose a college/church that will educate you, nurture you, and serve as your home and community for four years?
2. What kinds of things did you consider when picking a school? A church?
 - a. Did you consider its location? What it looks like?
 - b. What about the things it professes to believe? How it conducts its affairs within the community?
3. Are there things your school/church does that you find objectionable?
 - a. What are they?
 - b. How do you reconcile this behavior with your beliefs?
4. What are things your school/church could change about the way it functions that would make it more in line with your beliefs?
 - a. How might it be more sustainable?
 - b. How might it better witness to God's creation?
5. Final question?

Scripture to consider:

1. Acts 2:42 *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*
2. 1 Cor 12:25-27 *... there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*
3. Rom 1:11-12 *I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith*
4. 1 Pet 4:10 *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*

Notes:



Faithful Investment

Questions to ask:

1. What does it mean to 'invest' in something?
2. What things should a church or school consider when deciding how to invest its money?
3. What is divestment?
 - a. When is it appropriate for a church or school to divest its money from a fund or cause?
4. What are our faith values that might influence this decision?
5. How does fossil fuel divestment align or conflict with our faith values?
6. What do we gain from divesting from fossil fuels and reinvesting in renewable resources?

Scripture to consider:

1. Psalm 112:5 *It is well with the man who deals generously and lends, who conducts his affairs with justice.*
2. Corinthians 5:17-19 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.*
3. Proverbs 13:16 *A wise man thinks ahead; a fool doesn't, and even brags about it!*

Biblical and Church teachings:

God wants us to prosper responsibly. God does not want his children to be poor and suffering, nor does God want them to live opulent lives. We are accountable for how we use our financial resources. They should be earned, managed, and spent in ways that align with our Christian values of humility, stewardship, and love for our neighbors all over the world.

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