

Affirm your unity

Reflect on the fundamental unity of all Christians. Your unity comes not from your agreement on everything, but from your common loyalty to Christ.

Explore issues without needing to solve them

Complex problems are not likely to be solved during the course of your group meeting(s). Instead, you are beginning a conversation together; this includes bringing to light your many judgment calls, the various expert judgments that are out there, and the way these are coalesced to arrive at a position. Exploring issues typically involves making a number of judgment calls that are far from clear-cut. Taking time to identify and name your own judgment calls (and not your neighbor's) can be humbling and can allow you to speak from a place of vulnerability instead of superiority.

Listen, especially when you're right

Listening to others is critical for engaging with issues well, especially when you recognize that they might have something to teach you. Remember that the goal of a forum isn't simply to get the right answer, but to pursue the truth in love. The fullness of truth comes not only from pursuing the right answer, but from the way in which it is pursued. Pursing truth in love means valuing others more highly than yourself.

With this priority in place, realize that listening doesn't aim mainly for winning the argument. It isn't a way to gather more ammunition against the speaker. Listening honors the journey other people have traveled to reach their position on an issue. You may be quite surprised at the beautiful things others hold dear in their pursuit of the truth, even when you're still sure they're wrong. You may even find that their love for God and their neighbors outshines your own.

To help you listen more actively:

- Force yourself to wait 30 seconds after a speaker stops before you respond; try to repeat back the other person's position.
- Experiment with finding ways to make other people's positions even stronger—help them make their argument as clear as it can possibly be.
- Try asking the speaker why the issue matters to him or her; ask him or her to tell you a story about how he or she arrived at his or her position.

Remember that as you help to foster a culture of listening, when you get your turn to speak, others will actively listen to you as well.

Hold your position courageously

Just as it's important to listen to others' positions on complex issues, it is important to voice your own. Don't be afraid to hold firmly and courageously to an unpopular position on an issue. It's a loss for everyone if you hide yourself and your views. Help one another speak each person's positions clearly and courageously. This is not about winning a debate (you can win a debate and still be wrong), but about working together to find a way forward on divisive issues.

Unwind the violence: fears and loves

When we're afraid, it's usually because something we love is threatened. Can you name your threatened loves? When we move from responding in fear, to naming shared loves, we often find we have much in common. As you discuss difficult issues, try to pinpoint the fears fueling controversies around those issues. Then think about what loves your fears are defending. Then consider: What loves do you have in common? How can you work together to protect those loves without resorting to fear and violence?

Two additional tips

1. Walk to the edge of your comfort zone in your sharing, and try to take at least one step into your discomfort.
2. Allow each person to tell his or her own story (meaning: don't tell another person's story inside or outside of the group).