

## Conversation Guide

### The UMC Rift: Faithfulness in Divided Times

*Living Room Conversations offers a simple, sociable and structured way to practice communicating across differences while building understanding and relationships. Typically, 4-6 people meet in person or by video call for about 90 minutes to listen to and be heard by others on one of our nearly 100 [topics](#). Rather than debating or convincing others, we take turns talking to share, learn, and be curious. No preparation is required, though background links with balanced views are available on some topic pages online. Anyone can host using these italicized instructions. [Hosts also participate](#).*

#### I. Introductions: Why We're Here (~10 minutes)

*Each participant has 1 minute to introduce themselves.*

- Share your name, where you live, what drew you here, and if this is your first conversation.

#### II. Conversation Agreements: How We'll Engage (~5 minutes)

*These will set the tone of our conversation; participants may volunteer to take turns reading them aloud.*

- **Be curious and listen to understand.** Conversation is as much about listening as it is about talking. You might enjoy exploring how others' experiences have shaped their values and perspectives.
- **Show respect and suspend judgment.** People tend to judge one another. Setting judgement aside opens you up to learning from others and makes them feel respected and appreciated. Try to truly listen, without interruption or crosstalk.
- **Note any common ground as well as any differences.** Look for areas of agreement or shared values that may arise and take an interest in the differing beliefs and opinions of others.
- **Be authentic and welcome that from others.** Share what's important to you. Speak from your experience. Be considerate of others who are doing the same.
- **Be purposeful and to the point.** Do your best to keep your comments concise and relevant to the question you are answering. Be conscious of sharing airtime with other participants.
- **Own and guide the conversation.** Take responsibility for the quality of your participation and the conversation as a whole. Be proactive in getting yourself and others back on track if needed. Use an agreed upon signal like the "time out" sign if you feel the agreements are not being honored.

#### III. Question Rounds: What We'll Talk About

*Optional: a participant can keep track of time and gently let people know when their time has elapsed.*

##### Round One: Getting to Know Each Other (~10 min)

*Each participant can take 1-2 minutes to answer one of these questions:*

- What are your hopes and concerns for your family, community and/or the country?
- What would your best friend say about who you are?
- What sense of purpose / mission / duty guides you in your life?

## **Round Two: Exploring the Topic -- The UMC Rift: Faithfulness in Divided Times (~40 min)**

*One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.*

A Special Session of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church took place February 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri. The purpose was to act on a report from the Commission on a Way Forward, authorized to examine paragraphs in The Book of Discipline concerning human sexuality and to explore options to strengthen church unity. The vote surprised many people. The Conference rejected the One Church Plan proposed by the bishops and voted 55/45 for the Traditional Plan. This decision retains the current language prohibiting same sex marriage and the ordination of LGBTQ persons. Further action may occur in January 2020, although that is not certain. Meanwhile, as various groups despair or rejoice, there is a feeling of uncertainty and anxiety across congregations.

*Take ~2 minutes each to answer a question below without interruption or crosstalk. After everyone has answered, the group may take a few minutes for clarifying or follow up questions/responses. Continue exploring additional questions as time allows.*

- What concerns or hopes did you have leading up to General Conference? What feelings and emotions were associated with those concerns and hopes?
- What life experiences brought you to your opinion on this topic (recognizing the way we read and interpret scripture is a unique and personal experience)?
- What is this time of uncertainty like for you?
- What is your prayer for The United Methodist Church and for our congregation and community?
- If you were creating an agenda to unite our faith community, what would be on it?
- How do we maintain dignity and loving kindness in our relationships and connections to each other if we have varying beliefs and opinions about this situation? How can we resist the temptation to “otherize” and judge each other harshly?

## **Round Three: Reflecting on the Conversation (~15 min)**

*Take 2 minutes to answer one of the following questions:*

- What was most meaningful / valuable to you in this Living Room Conversation?
- What learning, new understanding or common ground was found on the topic?
- How has this conversation changed your perception of anyone in this group, including yourself?
- Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the conversation you just had?

## **Closing (~5 min)**

- *Give us feedback!* Use [livingroomconversations.org/feedback-form/](https://livingroomconversations.org/feedback-form/) or QR code
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- *Join or host more conversations!* With a) this group by exchanging your emails; b) others in person and/or by video call online. Get more involved or learn how to host at [livingroomconversations.org/get-involved/](https://livingroomconversations.org/get-involved/)



*Thank you!*