

Guidelines Explanation

Try on

This is an invitation to be open to trying on new ideas, behaviors and feelings.

Willingness and openness to moving into someone else's world.

Think about your favorite music. Is it the same as your children, grandchildren or your parents?

If your church has more than one style of music, multiple services with different music, have you ever attended the one you don't usually attend?

If you sit in the same spot when you go to worship on Sunday, have you ever tried sitting in a different spot?

Do you have a favorite feeling? A feeling you tell yourself - I need to be this way. Is there a feeling that is uncomfortable for you? What would it be like to sit with that uncomfortable feeling and notice what it has to say to you?

Theologically: The incarnation of God is an example of "try on." The apostle Paul said, "Love does not insist on its own way." In other words, love is willing to "try on" someone else's ideas and experience. When Jesus says, "Come and see" and "come follow me" he is inviting people to try on another way.

It is ok to disagree. Not ok to attack, shame, blame yourself or others.

It is ok to say no, to set boundaries. And to remain in a human connection to those you disagree with.

This is not the same as "cancel culture" which calls out harm, injustice, disagreement and then seeks to harm.

As a white man born and raised in the southern United States, I have ancestors who both enslaved African people and fought for the Confederacy. I can disagree with that behavior and the ideas that supported those policies and systems. I can even advocate for the removal of Confederate symbols on the public land of my city, AND at the same time not disowning, or canceling my ancestors or myself for having been born and raised in this culture. I think about this guideline as "permission to tell my story truthfully, and to evolve in God's grace."

Theologically: Jesus' proximity with people was not the same as agreement with all they were doing. Jesus modeled setting boundaries without dehumanizing people. The church is invited to confess our sin with the confidence of deeply loved children of God, not with an attitude of hopeless self hatred. Confession is an act of disagreement with the effects of sin and a process through which our humanity is restored.

Practice Self Focus

This is an invitation to self examination not self centeredness. This is the recognition that "my greatest power for change in the world is my decision to be the change I want to see in the world." It is a recognition that I have 100% responsibility to ask for and make personal changes to get what I need and want.

This is an invitation to use "I" instead of you and we when I am talking.

This is an invitation to notice what is going on in my body - what am I feeling - and taking care to attend to the messages those feelings are sending me. (Spend time with the feelings wheel)

This is about self care. The work of resisting evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves is not easy work. AND God has promised freedom and power for you to do this work. Practicing self focus is asking the question: "What do I need to keep on keeping on in this liberating, healing work of building inclusive fellowship?"

Theologically: (Matthew 7) This is attending to the log in my own eye before being concerned with the speck in someone else's eye. It is also a way to step into your power by telling your experience/story instead of assuming everyone shares your experience/story.

Practice Both/And thinking

This is an invitation to try on using the word "And" instead of "But." Just notice when you are saying "but" and try on using "and" to see what that feels like.

This is a helpful guideline to practice when people are at an impasse.

Theologically: The saving work of God through Jesus is both deeply personal and communal (personal and social holiness). Disciples of Jesus also recognize that the realities of heaven are both already on earth and yet to come in fullness. The Church is both beloved and broken in need of healing.

Notice Process and Content

Noticing process will illuminate how we arrived at our content (i.e. who is in the room and who is not. Who we say are welcome and who actually feels welcome.). When we become aware of this, we can make new choices about how to move forward. It is an invitation to notice, address and transform power differences that leave groups of people excluded, silenced, oppressed.

Example - Rev. Wilma Davis artwork "Let the children come to me" at Grace UMC in St Augustine was the focus of conversation at a Church Council meeting. The church historian, a retired white man, brought up that Wilma Davis had grown up at Grace, she was one of the first women to serve as a local pastor in the St John's River Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. This large painting of Jesus surrounded by children with the words "Let the Children come to me" was in need of restoration to remember Rev. Davis' story.

Something I noticed about the painting was that everyone was white. Is the message "let the white children come to me?"

Another example - July 2024 marked 60 years since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In St Augustine, FL during the spring and summer of 1964 there were marches, wade ins, sit ins, kneel ins and worship ins to bring attention to the unjust laws of segregation in our country. Local young black Christian people were leading this movement. Dr. King, Andrew Young, Fred Shuttlesworth, CT Vivian, Hosea Williams, 16 white Rabbis and a number of other volunteers came to support them. A group of black youth and a white man came to worship at Grace Methodist Church in April 1964. The pastor at the time did not have them arrested as some other churches did. And afterward, the Grace Church Official Board wrote a letter of policy to the congregation.

GRACE METHODIST CHURCH
St. Augustine, Florida

April 9, 1964.

Dear People of Grace Methodist:

At the regular meeting of the Official Board, Wednesday, April 8th, in the Church Parlor, the following policy was unanimously adopted by the Board.

Statement of Policy

Grace Methodist Church, founded in 1888, has traditionally, historically and by precedent administered to the religious requirements of those Caucasian Methodists who chose to be affiliated with said Church. The official body of Grace Church does not choose to integrate its members with those of the Negro race, nor to admit racial demonstrators within any facility of said Church.

Let us look to the future now and exert our full efforts to work together, with confidence that we can solve all of our problems if we trust in God and love one another.

Sincerely,



R. C. Neat, Chairman
of the Official Board

Theologically: There are many gifts and the same Spirit at work in us all. In 1 Corinthians 12 the Apostle Paul encourages the recognition of cultural differences that carry a "less than"

message and notice the way God values those things we might think are less valuable. Jesus makes space for historically excluded groups like children, women, Gentiles and those with leprosy to be seen and heard - valued voices in the community.

Notice Intent and Impact

This is helpful for healing and releasing resentments, hurt . . .

Intent is usually what I'm aware of. Impact happens outside of my awareness. I cannot control the impact. I have an intent. I have an impact. They are often not the same.

Invitation is to ask about the impact (or share about the impact with self focus).

Invitation is to account for the impact (unacknowledged hurt never heals. Can do this without attack, shame, blame for myself)

Resist being quick to explain my intent - first understand and account for impact (seek first to understand before being understood).

Ask about intent from the person/organization that negatively impacted you. Does it help to know intent was not intentional/malicious/conscious? I recognize that something can be done with well meaning intent AND have a negative impact. Noticing both can lead to understanding, healing and new options for moving forward.

Example - "Hey Pastor David, you forgot to mention the prayer circle group when you were acknowledging different groups where people can be connect, find support, follow Jesus together." I did. I am so sorry about that. "Yes, that's the second time you forgot. And it really hurts when you do that."

I could say, "I didn't mean to do that! (Would that help?)

I could also acknowledge the impact and consider different options for moving forward together.

Theologically: Jesus names the impact of mistaking the law of God for the life of God. (John 8) The woman caught in adultery by law could be killed by stoning. Jesus, realizing that no one is without sin said, "Whoever is without sin, let them throw the first stone." Naming the impact of rigid legalism allowed for a deeper reflection upon the intent of the law . . . the law is meant to point us to the life of God which cannot be contained by a list of laws. In Acts 10 Peter has a moment in which he recognizes the impact of rigid adherence to Jewish laws. Gentiles who are filled with the Spirit continue to be thought of, treated as and offered less opportunity and access to the community of God's people. Peter's intent was to obey the law of God and the impact was that he missed out on experiencing the life of God breaking out in the lives of Gentiles.

Confidentiality

Build trust in community by honoring one another's stories. Ask permission to share someone's story before sharing. Someone else's story does not belong to you.

Theologically: This is a way that we honor one another. "Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor." Romans 12:11