

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops are promoting Civilize It campaign. The campaign is being promoted to counter the growing negativity being heard in our society especially surrounding political speeches, commercials and debates. The campaign is about making room in your heart for those with whom you disagree. We are called to recognize that each one of us is a beloved child of God and to respond in love to that reality. Civilize It is a non-partisan call to focus on the dignity of all people, even when we disagree, and to put faith in action by bearing witness to a better way forward.

As Catholics, our strong tradition of social teaching compels us to be actively engaged in the building up of our communities. This is achieved by being involved in the political process –and yet today, many shy away from such involvement because our national and local conversations are filled with cruel and harsh language, often directed at people themselves. When personal attacks replace honest debate, no one wins. This kind of attack, no matter the reason, only serves to further divide our communities.

What is needed is good, honest, civil dialogue. This means that we must treat everyone as worthy of being at the table, worthy of our respect, and worthy of being heard. In short, it means treating everyone as our neighbor.

We undermine our commitment to human life and dignity when we fail to see the dignity of those who have a different viewpoint. We must detach from the bitterness that surrounds us and seek a better path. A commitment to civil dialogue can help us make real and authentic human connections, which breaks down the barriers that divide us.

Engaging in civil dialogue can help our faith communities create a new space to model love for our neighbors and respect for the dignity of all.

Civil dialogue can best be defined as the ability to enter meaningful conversation with people whose viewpoints may be different from our own, who have a different background or experience, or who come to a different conclusion about the best way to promote the common good. We enter into civil dialogue because we want to build a community that is rooted in understanding one another. God's love for each person requires us to remember that someone who disagrees with us is still a beloved child of God who deserves our love, respect, care.

An important ingredients to civil dialogue is commitment to the truth. While respecting the dignity of all, we acknowledge that not all viewpoints are equally valid. We have the responsibility to speak truth with love. In addition, all who exercise their freedom of speech have an obligation to ensure that they come to conclusions based on data from credible and reputable sources, and that care is taken to avoid seeking the truth selectively, that is, only when it is convenient to us.

Tips for Engaging in Civil Dialogue: Listen first and seek to understand the whole picture. Ask questions for clarification. Use 'I' statements; pay attention to body language. Listen to what feelings are pre-sent and pay attention to how you respond. Summarize what you've heard and ask for feedback.

Civil dialogue is different than remaining silent in the face of disagreement. Listening to opposing views is a part of seeking clarity and can be a creative process. In civil dialogue, all are invited to bring and share their values, beliefs, and questions. We seek first to understand how our views on a topic are different and why. We ask questions to be sure we understand one another. In thinking critically about how we arrived at our own view points and listening to the experiences of others, we can sometimes arrive at new understanding and even find common ground.

Pope Francis has remarked, "Dialogue allows people to know and understand one another's needs. Above all, it is a sign of great respect, because it puts the person into a stance of listening, and into a condition of being receptive to the speaker's best viewpoints. Secondly, dialogue is an expression of charity because, while not ignoring differences, it can help us investigate and share the common good. Moreover, dialogue invites us to place ourselves before the other, seeing him or her as a gift of God, and as someone who calls upon us and asks to be acknowledged.

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