Conversation Guide: Faith in Politics

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 60-90 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?

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Round Two: Exploring the Topic -- Faith in Politics (~40 min)

One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.

How do we respect the rights of individuals in their pursuit of happiness and maintain a cohesive culture in our country? Religion and faith are part of the human experience. This conversation allows us the opportunity to hear how others incorporate their faith into a lived experience and where we each believe the boundaries of faith exist.

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 type of influence would you like faith to have in our political system?
- Do you see religion as generally speaking a positive or negative influence in our political system? What in your experience leads you to this understanding?
- What does separation of church and state mean to you when it comes to the role of religion in government and of government in religion?
- What role should faith/religion play in our political system? Are there appropriate limits?
- If you have ever experienced the government encroaching on your or your family’s expression of religion, what happened?
- If you have ever experienced a situation where you felt the government needed to become involved in someone else’s religious freedom, what brought you to that belief?

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/ 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/

Thank you!

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