

Communication Guidelines for Grace Church in the Mountains Vestry
(Based on work by Visions, Inc. and the Rev. Dr. William Kondrath)

1 – Try on new ideas, new feelings, new behaviors.

I don't know about you, but judging situations comes quickly and naturally for me. This guideline challenges me to a) become conscious of my ideas, feelings and behavior in a given situation and b) consider experimenting with another approach.

2 – It's okay to disagree. It's not okay to shame, blame or attack oneself or others.

Growing up as a woman in South, I learned disagreement was something to be avoided at all costs! Much better to be polite than to "make waves." But as I've matured, I've realized there is a real cost to always "keeping the peace," beginning with a cost to my integrity. The trick for me has been practicing the ability to disagree and maintain healthy relationships. More and more, I understand that healthy, respectful conflict is a sign of relational strength, not failure.

3 – Practice self-focus.

So much of this guideline resonates with mindfulness practice and Jesus' teachings about staying alert and awake. The more I can be in touch with my emotional reactions to a situation, the more consciously and grace-fully I can respond.

4 – Practice "both/and" thinking.

This one is so challenging because we live in an "either/or" culture in which we yearn to quantify and qualify everything. "What is the "right" thing to do?" "What is the "best" way forward?" These types of questions imply either/or thinking. But I am hopeful as Anglicans we might have some intuition to ask, "What is the middle way?" What if there are at least two "right ways"? What if there is no "best"?

5 – Be aware of intent and impact.

This language provides a way forward in many interpersonal conflicts. I was in a meeting where a man used a derogatory term in describing a specific woman. His intent was to describe his strong negative feelings about this particular woman. However, the impact of his using that term was hurtful to me and to several other women. By using terms like "intent" and "impact," we can own our feelings about situations without assigning blame.

6 – Take 100% responsibility for one's own learning.

As a white person it is easy for me to surround myself with other white people, predominantly white media, and white culture. Yet I also want to grow in my understanding and appreciation of multiculturalism. This guideline invites me to go out of my comfort zone and spend time in places and situations where I am the minority.

7- Maintain confidentiality.

Nothing violates trust more quickly not being able to honor another person's story as theirs, not mine. It can take practice to say "I hope to talk to so-and-so directly about

that,” but once you get into the habit, you’ll enjoy not being drawn in to unnecessary gossip or contributing to unnecessary drama.

8 – It’s okay to be messy.

Like guideline # 2 about disagreement, for some reason growing up I got the cultural message that relationships needed to always be polite and if conflict emerged to snuff it out as soon as possible. Permission to be messy recognizes that conflict and difference can take time to truly understand and eventually celebrate. The key is everyone being committed to working through the mess, instead of running away.

9 – Say ouch.

I have a fear of being perceived as “weak” or “too emotional,” and at times that fear prohibits me from honestly communicating when I’ve been hurt. This guideline establishes the norm that genuine relational work will sometimes result in hurt feelings. We don’t do anyone favors if we consistently keep hurt feelings to ourselves.

10 – Notice Process and Content

Notice who tends to speak and who tends to hold back. If you are someone who always speaks first, practice waiting a few moments before speaking. If you tend to hold back, take the risk of sharing your perspective even if it isn’t fully formed. Also notice whether folks are allowing space between comments or are interrupting one another in order to be heard.