

## Sacred Space for Debate

***Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*** 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

Our country, and indeed the world, needs our participation in addressing the challenges before us today and the unknown challenges yet to come. Civil discourse, the pursuit of enhanced understanding, is a means of sharpening our minds, advancing our ideas, and selecting the best route forward.

For elected officials, civil discourse is the bedrock of bipartisan debate, helping them to work, often slowly and with great difficulty, toward the best option they can muster. For every individual, exposure to ideas and perspectives and motivations different from our own can help us to modify and improve our own understanding of the world and each other. When we apply our learning to civic engagement, particularly in the act of voting, we make more informed decisions when choosing among candidates for office.

This space for civil discourse and debate is a sacred space. It brings us together, opens up opportunities to discuss difficult topics, and helps us recognize the humanity in each other. We must be informed by ideas beyond our own, at least to be aware of other possible perspectives and learn what flaws we have in our own thinking.

With our engagement online through social media and selective sources, often curated for us without our awareness or input, we must be diligent even in passive participation in civil discourse. Taking time to read opinion writers and news sources different from what we typically read, may present opinions different from our own and can help us become more familiar with opposing ideas and learn more about our own.

The preparation for civil discourse takes discipline and work, especially given the growing divisions in our society along political and other lines. Repairing these divides and preserving this sacred space for debate takes effort, resolve, patience, and faith. It does not come without discouragement, frustration, or even anger on occasion.

Yet, if we recognize our shared values before entering into conversation, remembering the tenets of civil discourse and acknowledging that the solutions before us are not always so clearly right or wrong, we can better understand the significant role that civil discourse plays in promoting peace and justice in the world, and we can overcome that discomfort.

We must have courageous conversations, even with people who are strongly opposed to our views. We must also put ourselves out there, in face-to-face situations, not just hiding behind keyboards and cell phones, to engage with those with whom we disagree. While civil discourse

sharpens our minds, builds trust, and expands our capacity for change, it also dulls the violence and potential for unrest in our world.

People see and experience the world differently; that diversity is an asset if explored, examined, and exposed openly, or it can be a wedge to drive us apart, to drive us into a space of anger and contempt for one another.

So, when, and where can you engage in civil discourse? You can engage in it now—begin by taking what you have learned here and studying it with a friend, family member, or with various groups of people. You can engage in civil discourse in your own community. Hold an event on a particular topic, even just discussing this series in order to build up understanding on civil discourse before entering into discussion on a particular issue.