

FAQ Best Practices for Informational Forums

September 24, 2009 – Built with input from the Deans of the Southwestern Minnesota Synod

This is a working document. If you have additional thoughts or discoveries to share, please let us know. We will consider including them in the document. Bishop Jon Anderson

- Leadership –
 - Some pastors and congregations have led this sharing responsibility between the congregational president and pastor. Modeling shared leadership is helpful.
 - Other congregations have invited a neighboring pastor or the Conference Dean to be present to help facilitate the conversations. This freed the council chair and the pastor to be present in the conversation instead of responsible for maintaining it.
- Set ground rules. Some shared by the Deans were...
 - When people speak they will have three minutes maximum. Making a decision if all get to speak before a person gets to speak a second time might also be helpful. Assigning a neutral respected leader to function as time keeper is helpful.
 - For example, tonight is not a Bible study. It is not a congregational meeting. It is an information meeting. We need to both listen and share our thoughts. We want to talk in a way that builds up our witness instead of tears apart our congregation.
 - Defining an end time before people are worn out emotionally is helpful. An hour and a half for example might serve best. If people have more to talk about it might be better to call a second meeting, than have people get emotionally tired and have something unhelpful happen.
 - Having all people address the chair or meeting leader instead of each other individually is a means of avoiding personalizing the debate.
- Opening Devotions –
 - Pat Keifert and Pat Ellison’s work proposes a reading of Phil. 1:27 and Phil. 2:5-11.
 - People are invited to listen and notice where they are caught or hooked by the text. The biblical passage might be printed and available or simply read.
 - Then people are invited to find a “reasonably friendly stranger” and share what has been heard and the Living Word speaks. If people are around tables, then folks would be invited to share what they heard their partner report was the point where the scripture grabbed them in a convicting or comforting way.

- Others have had a council person at each table and then conversation has been directed to the table with questions for discussion and a set period of time.
- Explaining Churchwide Process and Decisions
 - Some pastors and congregations have been able to line up a voting member or two to come and share the journey, experience and reflections.
 - Other pastors and congregations have printed off the actual resolutions that passed and the section on the social statement relating to homosexuality (and some copies of the whole social statement for motivated people to take home and read). Looking at actual language is helpful.
 - A simple PowerPoint is available from the synod office or you might construct your own.
 - Getting the facts straight is part of the forum's work.
- Who is in the room?
 - It might be important at the beginning to acknowledge that there are a variety of people in the room. If there is not a gay or lesbian person present, you may want to invite someone to come. If that is not possible, it is almost certain that people who have friends or family members who are Gay or Lesbian persons might be in the room. It may be helpful to simply remind people of this fact as you begin the conversation.
 - Lutheran Church of the Epiphany in St. Cloud has offered to help identify potential participants.
- Moving forward in Mission
 - You may want to have some conversation about how you can move forward the ministry and mission of Jesus in the midst of this time of discussion of this topic.
 - Inviting people to ...
 - Regularly read scripture, pray daily, invite people into Christ and the community, encourage one another, serve in Christ's name, studying the faith together, share generously. Our congregations exist to grow and nurture Christ followers.
 - These faith practices are gifts at all times but especially if people are struggling in this time. Let us use this time's energy to move deeper into Christ.