



## A Call to Community Dialogue Guide



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## Introduction

**Hope in the Cities** six session community dialogue program has been exported to cities across the nation and serves as a model for dialogue programs in the UK and Europe. Its emphasis on personal responsibility and self-awareness has enabled participants to engage safely with others in honest conversation.

**Hope in the Cities**, based in Richmond, Virginia, at its core has three guiding principles:

- Honest conversation – that all are willing to risk by committing to honesty and candor in all dialogues.
- Personal responsibility – that each of us takes personal responsibility for the challenges of race and racial division within our communities and nation. That instead of pointing at others as the problems, we recognize our own participation in a system of access for some and exclusion for others. And we will take responsibility for being a part of ending that and creating communities of inclusion.
- Acts of reconciliation – most often these acts of reconciliation are public events around the acknowledgement of history.

**Hope in the Cities** community dialogue program and curriculum are available for use in many different settings, from pairing churches or places of worship, school groups and civic groups, or for a group of individuals. It is for anyone who wants to engage with others and dialogue on the most pressing issues of our nation.

The dialogue curriculum is the sole property of Hope in the Cities. If the curriculum is used in non-Hope in the Cities settings, we request that credit be given for the curriculum to Hope in the Cities.

For more information:  
**Hope in the Cities**  
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**Hope in the Cities is a program of Initiatives of Change, an international network of people of all faiths and backgrounds working for reconciliation, justice, and the healing of history starting with change in their own lives.**

## A Call to Community

America is at a crossroads. One road leads to community; the other to the chaos of competing identities and interests. We have all hurt one another, often unconsciously, in ways we would never intend. We need each other. We need to eradicate the scourge of racial division. We must demonstrate that our diversity is our greatest strength and that out of this diversity is rising a new American community. We can offer hope to a world torn by divisions of every kind.

We invite everyone to join us in a renewed commitment to an American community based on justice, reconciliation and excellence. The original promise of this country, that out of a rich diversity of peoples a great nation would rise, has only partially been fulfilled. This unique experiment remains incomplete because the promise of equal opportunity and dignity for all has not been fully realized. Much of the distrust, resentment and fear in America today is rooted in our unacknowledged and unhealed racial history.

For many of us, race determines where we live, where we send our children to school and where we worship. Because racism is deeply embedded in the institutions of our society, white individuals are often insulated from making personal decisions based on conscious racial feelings and do not experience the daily burden that their brothers and sisters of color have to carry. We must change the structures, which perpetuate economic and racial separation. But no unseen hand can wipe prejudice away. The ultimate answer to the racial problem lies in our willingness to obey the unenforceable.

The new American community will flow from a spirit of giving freely without demanding anything in return. In the new American community, when any one individual is injured, exploited or demeaned, all of us will feel the pain and be diminished. It will be a place where hearts can put down roots and where each feels accepted and at home. Some painful memories cannot be erased. But forgiving is not forgetting; it is letting go of the hurt.

To build this new American community, we must empower individuals to take charge of their lives and take care of their communities. In cities across America, bold experiments are taking place. Citizens have initiated honest conversations - between people of all backgrounds - on matters of race, reconciliation and responsibility. They have chosen to move beyond blame and guilt, beyond hatred and fear, deciding to face the past with courage and honesty. They are demonstrating that through honesty, a willingness to embrace each other's painful experiences, and with God's power to change us, the wounds of the past can be healed and our nation become one community.

This approach calls us to a new concept of partnership and responsibility. It means:

- ❖ Listening carefully and respectfully to each other and to the whole community.
- ❖ Bringing people together, not in confrontation but in trust, to tackle the most urgent needs of the community.
- ❖ Searching for solutions, focusing on what is right rather than who is right.
- ❖ Building lasting relationships outside our comfort zone.
- ❖ Honoring each person, appealing to the best qualities in everyone, and refusing to stereotype the other group.
- ❖ Holding ourselves, communities and institutions accountable in areas where change is needed.
- ❖ Recognizing that the energy for fundamental change requires a moral and spiritual transformation in the human spirit.

Together we will share our lives and the resources God has given us to make America a community of hope, security and opportunity for all.

## SESSION ONE

### Beginning the Conversation: WHY ARE WE HERE?

It is important to create a safe, comfortable space in which the conversations take place. All participants share the responsibility of creating that atmosphere.

1. Introductions. Take time to mention why you were interested in participating in this dialogue. Be sure to include one or two brief vignettes about the way you first became aware of racial differences and separation.
2. THERE ARE NO ENEMIES HERE. It is important to remember that everyone has come to the table to learn, grow and share.
3. Create ground rules for the sessions. It is an important part of creating a safe environment that all participants agree to a set of ground rules that will guide the way we talk to each other. Your facilitator will lead this part of the dialogue.
4. What are your highest hopes for the outcome of this dialogue? What are your most realistic expectations?

#### **If there is time during the first session:**

Watch the video, ***Healing the Heart of America: A Unity Walk***. (28 minutes)

- a. What were your reactions to the video?
- b. Do you relate to any of the things said in the video?
- c. What was significant for you?

#### **Homework**

Reflect on the following section from "**A Call to Community**":

*America is at a crossroads. One road leads to community; the other to the chaos of competing identities and interests. We have all hurt one another, often unconsciously, in ways we would never intend. We need each other. We need to eradicate the scourge of racial division. We must demonstrate that our diversity is our greatest strength and that out of this diversity is rising a new American community. We can offer hope to a world torn by divisions of every kind.*

*“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses  
yearning to breathe free.”*

Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus,”  
Inscription on the Statue of Liberty

**Be prepared to discuss the questions for session two.**

## SESSION TWO

### Our Experience of Race & Community: WHO ARE WE?

Opening and review by facilitator

#### Our past experience of race & community

1. What kinds of neighborhoods did your grandparents and parents live in? Were they racially or ethnically mixed? What is your family's racial and/or ethnic heritage?
2. How did your grandparents and parents feel about people from other racial or ethnic backgrounds? How did that influence you?
3. Describe your current neighborhood, community and/or place of worship. Is it racially or ethnically diverse? What are the attitudes of your peers toward people from other racial and/or ethnic backgrounds?

#### Our current experience of race and community

1. Describe one negative experience that you have had with people from other racial and/or ethnic groups.
2. Describe one positive experience that you have had with people from other racial and/or ethnic groups.

Closing reflection/ritual led by facilitator

#### Homework

Reflect on the following section from "**A Call to Community**":

*We invite everyone to join us in a renewed commitment to an American community based on justice, reconciliation and excellence. **The original promise of this country, that out of a rich diversity of peoples a great nation would rise, has only been partially fulfilled.** This unique experiment remains incomplete because the promise of equal opportunity and dignity for all has not been fully realized. Much of the distrust, resentment, and fear in America today is rooted in our unacknowledged and unhealed racial history.*

**Be prepared to discuss the questions for session three.**

## SESSION THREE

### Our Experiences and History: CAN WE COME TOGETHER?

Opening and review by facilitator

#### Unity, Diversity, & Division

1. In what ways do you think the American experiment of uniting diverse peoples into one great nation is incomplete? Do you think that not enough, enough, or too much has been done to redress past injustices? What are the reasons for your conclusion?
2. Have you or any member of your family suffered or benefited from Affirmative Action?  
Have you or any member of your family suffered or benefitted from discrimination?  
Have you or any member suffered or benefited from privilege?

#### Our History of Racial Division

Is there some aspect of your personal or group history or current reality that you feel is not being heard or acknowledged?

Closing reflection/ritual led by facilitator

#### Homework

Reflect on the following section from "A Call to Community":

*The new American community will flow from a spirit of giving freely without demanding anything in return. In the new American community, when any one individual is injured, exploited, or demeaned, all of us will feel the pain and be diminished. It will be a place where hearts can put down roots and where each feels accepted and at home. Some painful memories cannot be erased. **But forgiving is not forgetting; it is letting go of the hurt.***

**Be prepared to discuss the questions for session four.**

## SESSION FOUR

### Forgiveness and Atonement: HOW DO WE FORGIVE? REPENT?

Opening and review by facilitator

#### Our Experiences of Forgiveness

1. What is forgiveness? What is repentance? Are either or both an important part of the racial reconciliation process?
2. Could you share one personal experience of giving or receiving forgiveness? Repentance? What was difficult about your experience? What was good about it?
3. It has been said that, in a broken relationship, it is often the injured party who has to take the first step towards reconciliation. What in your personal experience leads you to believe this is true or not true? Why or why not?

Closing reflection/ritual led by facilitator

#### Homework

Reflect on the following section from "A Call to Community":

*For many of us, race determines where we live, where we send our children to school, and where we worship. Because racism is deeply imbedded in the institutions of our society, individuals are often insulated from making personal decisions based on conscious racial feelings and do not experience the daily burden that their brothers and sisters of color have to carry. We must change the structures that perpetuate economic and racial separation. But no unseen hand can wipe prejudice away. The ultimate answer to the racial problem lies in our willingness to obey the unenforceable.*

*"The way we were thinking when we created the problem is not the way we can think to solve it."*

Albert Einstein

**Be prepared to discuss the questions for session five.**

## SESSION FIVE

### Building Hope for the Future: WHAT SHOULD OUR CITY LOOK LIKE?

Opening and review by facilitator

#### A Vision of the Future

1. What political, economic, social, or cultural structures strengthen or perpetuate racial separation and injustice in our metropolitan area? In what way do you benefit or suffer from the status quo?
2. What role, if any, did race play in your choices in education for your children, housing, social club and/or place of worship?
3. If the people of this metropolitan area were able to achieve genuine racial reconciliation and justice, what would our metropolitan area be like? How would it be different from our current reality?
4. What specific steps or actions would be needed to move toward this vision? What are the obstacles to building this vision? Identify the groups/individuals who are already building positively with whom we might partner.

Reflection/ritual led by facilitator

#### Homework

Reflect on the following section from "A Call to Community":

*This approach calls us to a new concept of partnership and responsibility. It means:*

- *Listening carefully and respectfully to each other and to the whole community.*
- *Bringing people together, not in confrontation but in trust, to tackle the most urgent needs of the community.*
- *Searching for solutions, focusing on what is right rather than who is right.*
- *Building lasting relationships outside of our comfort zone.*
- *Honoring each person, appealing to the best qualities in everyone, and refusing to stereotype the other group.*
- *Holding ourselves, communities, and institutions accountable in areas where change is needed.*
- *Recognizing that the energy for fundamental change requires a moral and spiritual transformation in the human spirit.*

*Together we will share our lives and the resources God has given us to make America a community of hope, security and opportunity for all.*

**Be prepared to discuss the questions for session six.**



## SESSION SIX

### Looking Within: WHO ARE WE NOW?

Opening and review by facilitator

#### Building a Future of Hope

*You will be using the 'Planning for Action' worksheet to answer question 1. Please be prepared to share your plan with the group.*

1. What specific action(s) can this dialogue group take to further racial reconciliation in this metropolitan area? What is the next step?
2. What will I do to further racial reconciliation in this community? Take time now to complete "My Personal Commitment to Racial Reconciliation" on the next page.
3. If you are comfortable doing so, share with your group what you decided to do in your three steps.
4. What is the final 'I' statement you want to share with the group about your feelings and growth?

Things to think about when answering this question:

What did you learn about yourself?

What did you learn about another race?

In what way(s) do you think your attitudes and behavior have been affected by the dialogues?

What would you like to see changed in your life as a result of this conversation?

You may want to take some final time to exchange addresses and phone numbers.

# My Personal Commitment to Racial Reconciliation

What have I learned in the last five weeks?

Some steps that I might take to personally foster racial reconciliation might include the following:

- Build lasting relationships with persons of another race who are beyond my usual circle of friends, neighbors, and co-workers.
- Help my own neighborhood or community to celebrate the contributions of those from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.
- Work to create racial reconciliation and justice in the groups and institutions to which I belong.

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'A Personal Commitment' means that I am willing to take several small steps to continue the process of positive change.

1<sup>st</sup> Step \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Due date: \_\_\_\_\_

2<sup>nd</sup> Step \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Due date: \_\_\_\_\_

3<sup>rd</sup> Step \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Due date: \_\_\_\_\_

Your signature \_\_\_\_\_

Today's date \_\_\_\_\_

Put this in a prominent place in your home.