

## HOW SMALL GROUP CAN BE A SAFE PLACE FOR POLITICS

Believe it or not, church can be a safe place to have political conversations. And leaders play an important role in creating safe small group environments where group members have the freedom to share their political views while seeking to understand the positions of those sitting across from them.

### ROLE OF THE LEADER IN POLITICAL CONVERSATIONS

A leader seeks to create an environment where group members can experience authentic community and spiritual growth. The foundation for all authentic community is trust. It is natural for group members to initially be suspicious of others and their political views. But suspicion gives way to trust as group members learn more about one another.

#### NAME THE “GROUND RULES” FOR GROUP DISCUSSIONS.

One of the ways that a group leader creates a safe, predictable environment for their group members is by regularly stating how members are to engage with one another in discussions.

“Ground Rules” for group discussions include:

- Believe the best in one another.
- Participate by seeking to understand, rather than change the view of another group member.
- Look for common ground.

#### HELP MEMBERS SEE A PERSON AND NOT A POLITICAL PARTY.

One of two commandments Jesus gave before leaving this earth was for every person to love their neighbors as themselves. A leader should guide political-natured group discussions by putting the focus on a group member’s personal experience instead of their political views.

A leader creates a safe group environment by focusing a political discussion on why members hold their views, not on what views they hold. A group could endlessly debate what political views a person holds, but they cannot debate why that person holds them. Every person has a unique way they see the world. This filter is

shaped by their family, upbringing, culture, and life experiences.

Listening to why a member holds their views rightly puts the person, their story, and their personal experiences before their politics. And it builds understanding and trust between group members. These conversations serve as the foundation for future conversations where the group can feel safe to explore how Jesus shapes and transforms their individual views and beliefs.

## **MONITOR THE TEMPERATURE IN THE ROOM.**

Because political views are personal, group members can become defensive and react emotionally to comments made in group. Crossed arms, an aggressive tone of voice, and disengagement are all signs that the discussion has become too “hot” and potentially unsafe for group members.

A leader will need to stop the discussion when they observe these signs. In some cases, they may find it best to interrupt a group member and ask the group to take a break for five minutes. This break not only provides time for the environment to cool down, but it also provides the leader some time to collect their thoughts and decide whether the discussion can continue or if it needs to end.

## **ROLE OF THE GROUP MEMBER IN POLITICAL CONVERSATIONS**

Group members can help maintain a safe environment with their words, actions, and postures. Below are a few ways members can help carry political conversations.

### **ASK QUESTIONS.**

Every group member should challenge themselves to engage in the discussion. Good questions that build understanding include: What led you to that view? How did you come to believe that?

We all have good reasons for what we believe based on what we’ve been through and how we are wired. Our beliefs serve as filters for our actions.

### **EMBRACE DISCOMFORT.**

Political conversations can be uncomfortable in a group setting. But we know that discomfort is often associated with growth—like the stress of starting a new job or the challenge of solving a





problem. Members should be encouraged to embrace the discomfort, knowing they will learn and the group will grow from the experience.

## SHARE AND AFFIRM PERSONAL EXPERIENCES.

One of the ways trust is built in a group is through vulnerability. Brené Brown defines vulnerability as the act of risking emotional exposure. Some group members will risk emotional exposure by sharing about an important person or life event that has shaped their views. Others will risk exposure by simply saying, “I don’t know how I came to believe that.” It’s important for the leader and group members to acknowledge when someone has been vulnerable. By sharing and affirming personal experiences, group members build trust and cultivate deeper relationships.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ["Talking Points"](#) (Andy Stanley)
- [Building Trust in Group](#)
- [Asking Good Questions](#)
- TED Talk | [“The Power of Vulnerability”](#) (Brené Brown)