

AWKWARD CONVERSATIONS

Pastor Libby Howe, Wisconsin Council of Churches

3 I's

Identity - Who are you? What are your values?

Integrity - Integration of Values, Words, Actions

Intention - You can control only YOU

A Bridge: Interpersonal Connection & 3 Biblical texts

Micah 6:8

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?*

Matthew 22:34-40

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' He said to him, ' "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

1 Corinthians 13:1

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

3 C's

Curiosity - ask one more question

Compassion - consider the wound/pain/story that's present before judgment

Courage - don't shrink because it's uncomfortable

VIDEO

Loretta J. Ross: Don't call people out -- call them in | TED

https://youtu.be/xw_720iQDss

3 SITUATIONS

1 - Mom & Adult Daughter (Racism)

My mom and I were watching Oprah one afternoon. Out of the blue she said, "I really don't want you to date interracial because I want to have beautiful grandchildren."

At Thanksgiving my family was talking about current events and my mom said, "I'm so tired of this racism crap." She was referring to Black Lives Matter news and protests and meant she was tired of hearing about it. I said, "Gee, so are all the black and brown people living it every day."

2 - Staff Gathering (Partisan Polarization)

It's a holiday gathering of staff members - a small, close knit, church staff - and their families around a table in someone's home. They broadly know each other's political leanings. Mostly they are more left than right, but there are at least 2 who are more right than left. The boss, hoping to make substantive but still easy conversation, asks if others saw the tweet from a local republican politician that day—a tweet that reflects the best of the holiday season, urging people to generosity and kindness.

Left-er employee says:

“Wow!! That doesn't sound like a republican. That guy sounds like he has a heart!” (Others at the table go silent.)

Right-er employee says:

“I'm a republican, and I have a heart.”

Left-er employee, taken aback by the response, replies:

“Of course YOU have a heart. We all KNOW you do. But c'mon, you can't deny that the republican party as a whole right now has morphed into something pretty heartless in the last few years. Just listen to how they talk about immigrants. It's all fear mongering and dehumanization. I mean...you can hear that, right?”

Right-er employee says, starting to cry, says:

“I'm not talking about the republican party. I'm talking about you saying I don't have a heart when you know that's not true about me. It really hurts when you say things like that. I'm a republican and I try really hard to be loving to everyone.” She gets up and leaves the table. Her husband follows her to the living room, trying to comfort her.

3 - Complex familial relationships - multiple issues (guns, policing, racism, immigration, poverty)

My family (husband and 2 year old son) was camping with my cousin and his family. At one point in the conversation, he joked about taking out an annoying dog in the campground with the gun he keeps in his camper. To myself I thanked God that my kid was too young to want to play with his kids in the camper. But I mentally bookmarked the conversation because he may want to play in the future and won't be allowed to. When it's necessary, I have thought about saying something like "I'm not comfortable with my kids playing in a space near guns." This is really just drawing a boundary...and I would imagine saying something to my children like, “Sorry kiddos...you have to stay outside.” How do I tell my cousin that his guns do not make me feel safer?

They're MAGA republicans and cops....and I want them to realize their beliefs harm members of their family. I'm married to a dark black man (from Africa) who has experienced discrimination. I have heard my cousin express genuine fear of criminals, and use words like “illegals” to refer to immigrants. They have expressed disdain for folks not like them and for poor people, saying things like they don't work and are lazy, which objectively isn't true of most poor people at all. They value independence and self-sufficiency. They work hard for what they have, and they have every right to be protective of it.

I should say that his dad is a little less extreme and we have had some conversations where he will push back and we will get to some common ground. I've liked that a couple of times this has happened within earshot of my cousin, his son.