



# JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION



## FRANCISCAN MINDFUL DIALOGUES

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*“Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon.”*

*(OFS Rule, Art. 19a)*

During these difficult times of political turmoil and racial upheaval, one question keeps coming up over and over again: “What can I do?” I have only one answer: Dialogue with one another. Listen to the stories. Validate the stories. Then you will be able to share your stories.

It doesn’t mean you have to agree with those stories, because after all, they are someone else’s truth—not yours. As Franciscans, we are called to listen, to understand, then to speak from that understanding. Especially when you are engaged in difficult dialogues—about racial tensions or political differences—you want to remain grounded in the Gospel. Jesus had difficult dialogues, but he knew to speak the truth in love, with empathy, compassion, and peace.

When we attempt to have dialogues, or two parallel monologues, there is a winner and a loser. We go on the attack, we spot a weakness in someone’s argument. We tend to take every comment or opinion that is expressed as a personal affront to our own values and beliefs.

What if we change the way we think about these dialogues? What if, in those heated moments, we choose dialogue over debate? What if we choose to have mindful dialogues? When we engage in mindful dialogues, we flip the script. We replace our ego and desire to win with a sense of curiosity, empathy, and a desire to learn. Instead of coming from a place of judgment, we are genuinely interested in the other person: their experiences, values and concerns. They become other, and not object, to gain the upper hand.

Nazi Concentration Camp survivor and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl once wrote: **“Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”** We have that space. In our dialogues, how are we filling that space?

We must engage in mindful and meaningful dialogues that move us forward—not backward, or worse, not at all. Something happens when both speaking and listening are revered—it creates a sacred and transformational moment. It is the beginning of being in right relationship with one another. We are called to build connections through mindful dialogue—in relationships, communities, and fraternities. It is taking that space and filling it with curiosity and empathy and reverencing the outcome.

Getting to that place of dialogue can be difficult. We tend to get fired up about what we are passionate about—especially when discussing politics or social justice issues. We can let our ego get in the way of truly hearing the other person’s perspective. In the current climate, those heated debates morph into conflicts where people are even willing to walk away from their relationships, friendships, and fraternities.

After having mindful dialogues, you will discover that your assumptions and biases can be wrong or totally off base. If those conversations don’t happen, the parties remain annoyed and frustrated, causing an undercurrent of disrespect in the relationship.

First, be curious about the other person; their ideas, concerns, perspectives. Then, be willing to listen to them, even when you disagree. By putting aside your own ego and preconceived ideas, you become open to limitless learning. Also be curious and ask questions. Questions allow mindful dialogue to get to a place of true understanding. They allow you to disagree agreeably.

In our conversations and dialogues, the goal is not to win or convert the other to your way of thinking and believing. The goal is to be open to learn, to be curious about the other person, allowing them a safe space to be heard and to voice their opinion. The goal is a true speaking and listening experience, offering empathy rooted in friendship.