



A Guide for Public Engagement

OPENING SUMMARY for LEADERS

*God has given us the ministry of reconciliation. The old has gone, the new is here.
(2 Corinthians 5:17-18)*

The people of God are on the journey towards restoration with God. This is made visible in wholeness in our lives and relationships. As God's love compelled Him to act in our behalf, we are likewise moved by love to engage the world with the mission of reconciliation and restoration.

We engage not only with ideas and propositions, but principally through dialogue with people in the context of relationships. As those who participate in the ministry of reconciliation, we are always speaking *with* someone whom God loves, not *at* them.

Christian leaders wonder how they might engage in reconciling conversations around social and public concerns. They desire a humble, humanizing, and respectful approach that opens the door to reconciliation. Many are looking for a way that transcends human nature and allows the Holy Spirit to work.

The following Framework and Guide is intended to facilitate a helpful path toward reconciling dialogue that brings the restoration of God's ideals.. It represents a journey of the heart towards God and towards one another. It is not meant as a guide for drafting a public statement or creating a set of answers for your organization. To do so can shortcut the dialogical journey with the Holy Spirit and others, inadvertently violating relationships. It is meant to assist churches and organizations in being responsibly engaged with their community issues. It is intended to be *experienced* with the people you serve and relate to.

We offer this for use by pastors and churches, educators and schools, denominations, and ministry leaders as an outline for the journey of dialogue and discourse around difficult subjects. The order and intent of each step is significant and based on robust cognitive research into facilitating transformation. We hope this helps you have the kinds of conversations you already sense might be possible, but perhaps you just need some tools to guide the process. .

A FRAMEWORK for SOCIAL DISCOURSE & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

God, who is the author of wholeness, understanding, and love has imbued humankind with diversity, curiosity and the capacity to learn and grow. Our complex and diverse society is in part a reflection of that nature created by God. However, that same diversity and complexity may devolve into tension and competing agendas as the selfish nature of people asserts dominance and control.

When confronting issues, whether spiritual, social, or political we may easily become either lost in the complexity or seek to oversimplify such that the heart of God for restoration, healing, and wholeness is missed. Rather than intellectually negotiating among the variety of opinions on issues before us, we urge our people to begin their discourse and engagement with a deep and thoughtful commitment to God's active interest in both the issue and love of all the people involved.

We invite our people, churches, and institutions to engage in public discourse as a means to bring the Kingdom of God into relationship with relevant issues of our day.

Because we understand truth to be centered on a person more than a proposition...

our engagement is relational in tone, seeking a dialogue that is honoring and humanizing. The nature of public engagement, therefore, will involve testimonials and stories that bring to light the complexity and breadth of the issue while bringing to the fore the underlying motive of God's call to wholeness. We approach answers to challenging questions with open-handed humility, acknowledging that God's ways are higher than our ways. We seek to avoid dogmatic conclusions in the face of our limited understanding while seeking to reflect Christ with centered Kingdom values in the places we are set.

Because we understand salvation to be the story of God restoring the image in us...

our engagement begins with God's vision of wholeness, mutuality, and integration, and God's redemptive purposes. In approaching complex issues we seek to ask before we declare. How may we participate in God's redemption in this situation? What might be God's heart toward those who are most affected by this situation? What is God's deep ideal for people involved? As we humbly acknowledge that God is the initiator of redemption and we position ourselves in His story, we may more easily see solutions that reflect Christ and bring the healing of God's wholeness and holiness.

Because we understand that the image of God is within every person and all live in brokenness as the effect of the fall...

we seek in any engagement to identify with the hurt and struggle in those most affected through describing the stories of those who face it. By this we seek to dignify God's image in others and personalize the issue, placing it within the real-life context. We are reminded that people's lives are affected, and we humanize the effects of our discourse and share in the complexity of their story.

Because we understand what we can reflect the nature of God and the depths of God's holiness...

we listen to the real circumstances confronting us in the reality of those we know and love. In pursuing God, we allow resulting tension to produce probing, wonder and curiosity through questions that further clarify and cause deep reflection. In this discovery and reflection, we specifically invite the Holy Spirit into transforming dialogue, submitting to the nuances and insights that come. In reflective dialogue with one another and the Holy Spirit, we ponder the broader questions that concern the nature of God's will. What are the ramifications of this path? How have Scriptural principles informed our motive and action? How may we better reflect the heart of God toward people while reflecting the ideal of God for the same?

Because we understand that God's work in the world proceeds from God's incarnational love...

we bring the issue being engaged into close connection with our lives. By placing our very selves into the circumstance, we bring the reality of our lives into personal engagement, thereby encouraging healthy identification with the impact our response has on others. We seek to truly walk in the others' place while remaining uncompromisingly rooted in an identity formed by and entirely in Christ.

Because we understand the way of salvation to be an ongoing journey...

we invite our people to continue to wrestle with the issue in light of God's story and redemptive restoration. The dynamic tension between the complexity and divisiveness of the issue, and the simplicity and wholeness of God's ideal for us will create constant stretching. We therefore offer encouragement to ongoing search for understanding, compassion, and grace. By this we find fuller confidence in the nature of God's intention for the full healing of our condition as we relentlessly remain committed to and pursue God's vision for us.

A Guide to Using this Framework for Public Engagement^[1]

The following document is a guide to using this framework. It consists of an overview of each section, an outline meant to guide you in building your own dialog and an example paper.

Tone

The tone of the paper and discourse should be honoring and humanizing. By this we mean that it should be based in a conviction of solidarity with all people and seek to avoid further marginalization of people. It should contain real stories and testimonials. These stories should be chosen for their ability to depict the breadth and complexity of the issues. They should be more common than unique, and more challenging than simple. The tone of the paper should also approach biblically-informed answers with an open-handed humility, acknowledging that God's ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. We also acknowledge the tension between our limited understanding and the call to live as ambassadors for the Kingdom in the places we are set.

Grounding and framing

The paper or discourse should be grounded in the story of God. It should seek to ask and point people toward God's heart for the world and for His children. It should also strongly endeavor to bring to light the redemptive nature and character of God expressed for this issue. This means that in light of our Wesleyan Holiness heritage, what do we believe is revealed as God's heart towards those who are faced with the challenges of this issue? What is God's ideal for us in this situation? This section should be as high-level as possible and apply to all humanity – believer and non-believer alike. It should be written from God's point of view and describes humanity's redeemed state regarding this topic chosen. As we humbly acknowledge that God is the initiator of redemption and we position ourselves in God's story, we can begin to see potential solutions that carry the power of the redemption of Jesus Christ.

Illustrative story

After situating the issue in the story of God, the second part is to create context for the situation through the testimony of those who face it. The goal is to both contextualize the issue in its natural circumstances, as well as remind us that these are real people's lives we are considering. We must remember that the image of God lives in all people, which means God's face is on the issue. We humanize the people facing the situation and share their story in its complexity. The story should be about someone known and cared about by the authors. It should be about someone known over time and be illustrative of the complexities and realities of the topic. Finally, it should not have a resolution, but leave a person in the tensions felt by those living in the midst of the issue addressed.

Review of questions raised

After the testimonies of those living in the situation, we stop and review what issues their story raises. In that review of the major points in the testimonies, we allow their stories to move us. We also review the consequences of the circumstances at large.

Reflective question

This third part, is a pause, where we stop and consider the issue in light of the story of God cast at the beginning. This section should consist of one or two reflective questions that cause us to stop, ponder, and pray. It is here that we intentionally invite the Holy Spirit into the conversation. What does it mean for us to continue down the path created? What sins of the heart are being committed? What are the consequences in scripture of the trajectory? These questions should connect us to the heart of God in this matter.

Possible implications and revealed truths

The fifth part of this framework is a second engagement with the issues and their consequences. Rather than only a large scale, we also think about them at the local, personal level. We discuss the questions raised and how they might affect those we know, love, and are called to love. What nuggets of truth do we want people to consider in answer to the questions raised in the previous section? What is the Holy Spirit pointing us to remember and consider? We think about the impact of the issues raise on our communities and neighborhoods. We consider what we would express faces-to-face with those we love who are dealing with this situation.

Moving forward in Christ by bringing it back to the beginning

We conclude the framework and the discourse with an exhortation towards the story of God in which we originally grounded the conversation. We want to close with a contextualization and application that points towards God's story. We also encourage people to continue to wrestle with the complexity of the situation, held in tension with God's ideal for us. We can then suggest ways the readers might find application for their desire to bring God's heart into their communities and neighborhoods in light of the testimonies read and the questions raised. Our goal is conscientious engagement with the social issue in a manner that intentionally seeks the heart of God for all people.

Crafting Outline for the Framework for Public Engagement

Part 1: Grounded in the story of God - *What has God revealed as His heart towards those who are faced with the challenges of this issue? What is His ideal for us in this situation?*

Part 2: Illustrative Story - *Who do you love and have walked with that illustrates the complexities of this issue and remains without resolution? You can have more than one.*

Part 3: Review of Issues Raised - *What do you want to highlight in the story given? What are the key points to remember.*

Part 4: Reflection Questions - *Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in what one or two deep questions this story brings up for your heart.*

Part 5: Possible Implications and Revealed Truths - *What nuggets of truth do we want people to consider in answer to the questions raised?*

Part 6: Moving Forward in Christ by Bringing it Back to the Beginning - *In light of the story of God, God's vision and word for us, what practical steps, as the Holy Spirit guides and empowers, can we take to be in greater alignment with the vision of God in Christ for us?**

**We highly recommend that people discuss the questions with others to further explore how to live into God's ideal for mankind. For example: What may be a step framed or guided by our knowledge of Scripture? If you are in a group, ask someone to give testimony, including some practical, Scriptural steps. What steps from other similar challenges can we apply that have resulted in greater alignment with God's story, vision for us in Christ? How can we help each other, or where can we find the help we need to live in harmony with God's vision for us?*

[1] This framework is adaptation by Jessie Cruickshank of the Co-Constructed Developmental Teaching Theory originally published in *Evolving Kolb: Experiential Education in the Age of Neuroscience*, published in Journal of Experiential Education, co-authored with Jeb Schenck.

Helpful Terms

Here are some of the key concepts referenced in *The Wesleyan Way of Social Discourse and Public Engagement* that may help Wesleyan Holiness leaders guide a team through this journey.

Wesleyan Holiness - The church traditions and movements springing from the Wesleyan revivals in Great Britain and the United States, finding expression in holiness camp meetings, charismatic revivals, public witness on social concerns, and Wesleyan-Arminian theology.

Social concerns - Matters in the public square which have an impact on the Church or which the Church feels compelled to address because of prophetic scriptural conviction.

Reconciliation - The process by which God is re-establishing connection in every way a relationship of wholeness is broken between creator and creation, and within creation itself.

Restoration of the image of God - All humanity was created whole, and the Church participates in the grand story of how Christ's resurrection from the dead empowers the full restoration of wholeness to all image-bearers if we are willing.

Humanizing & respectful approach - A tone and posture toward those we have disagreement with that enters into constructive dialog without de-humanizing or disrespecting them in the process. Instead of questioning motives, or presuming inherent evil we hope to honor the image-bearers we dialog with.

Dialogical - As opposed to monological, where only one speaks, we aim for an exchange of experiences and ideas in conversation, where a dialog is opened up between contrary perspectives, and where areas of possible synthesis, even if minor, can be built upon.

Holy Spirit's work - A uniquely Wesleyan-Holiness emphasis on the Holy Spirit's work has great confidence and optimism about the grace of God through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer in this life.

Diversity - A multi-faceted value that reflects the many *ethnos* who will, in the end of all things, worship Christ. Wesleyan-Holiness people seek to usher in the kingdom of God as it is in heaven here on earth in many ways, including the many ethnicities of the world and our neighborhoods.

Identity in Christ - While we each have different qualities and perspectives and relationships that contributed to our identities, these are not as core to who we are as believers as our identity in Christ. This has the potential to help us build bridges of community across otherwise large gaps in experience.

Person of Jesus Christ vs. propositional truth - Truth may be stated in hypotheses and suppositions, but the fundamental nature of truth for Wesleyan-Holiness people is found in a person, not words... in the Word of God, Jesus Christ, not statements we might make to argue a point.

Incarnational love - The truth of Jesus Christ as son of God and savior of all is best expressed the way he expressed it, through incarnating (in the flesh) the love God has for people through relationship.