

Convening – This I Believe

Thursday, March 11, 2021

2:00 – 4:00 PM

Standing Invitation

The Friday Fellowship practices convening skills grounded in commitments to curious inquiry, courageous dialogue, and creative responses to systemic challenges and injustices. Modeling and leading conversations that invite rest, reflection, reckoning, and relationship, Friday Fellows listen in as they learn forward together. This convening tool moves those gathered through an intentional process that remembers, first, the work of building relationships ready to hear, hold, and honor the work at hand.

Thank you for stepping into this convening with one another. Please read this full guide in advance and note adaptations made since Seminar One. As you find your way together, spend time exploring how you plan to move through these invitations. The floor is yours! *Practice makes possible.*

Session-Specific Invitations

Step One: *Calling In*

As we return, let's go back for another: *Who are you continuing to be today? Who is joining you still? Consider naming what it means to hold this particular conversation. How much time do you have? For what purpose?* By way of return, consider lifting up your answers to one or more of the following. Before you begin, consider whether you will move around the circle or invite Fellows to speak into the conversation when and as they are ready. Please hold space until everyone has called themselves in. Welcome, Fellows!

*Who are you continuing to be today? Who will you be in this circle?
What is something you carry with you from this morning's convening?*

Step Two: *Centering*

When groups come together, especially those convened intentionally across lines of difference, hearing a shared invitation and holding space for quiet reverence sets a tone that carries. I encourage you to read the following aloud. Perhaps someone will volunteer. Perhaps you devise another way to hear these words together. After the reading, pause. Can you manage two or even three minutes of silence? *What might you hear in the spaces between each word?*

[Is mac n'cheese yellow better than pink flamingo?](#)

(Eileen, Under 18, Holly Springs, North Carolina)

I believe in coloring outside the lines. Remember the days when you were five and you picked up a handful of crayons and just started to color? It didn't matter that you didn't color inside the lines, or that the sun was purple instead of orange. You didn't know that the sun wasn't supposed to be that color, or have stripes, you just colored until the crayons were flat. Then when you proudly presented this picture to your mom, she didn't tell you that it was wrong, she just hung it on the fridge and told you what a good job you did. When you're five, you don't know right from wrong (at least that's what the adults all think), so you can't be expected to recognize that the sun isn't allowed to be that color.

But, since we are no longer five the rules change, the sun has to be yellow, you must color inside the lines and the sun most definitely does not have any stripes. The rules of the grown-up coloring book are different, everything has to be the color that it is in real life, no stripes, tie-dye or polka-dots, and everything has to fit within the lines. This is our lives now, structured and planned, down to every detail. I believe that it's ok for someone older than five to color outside of the lines, in fact it's not only ok, it's necessary to have that simple joy in life. For just a couple minutes we can return to the life of juice boxes and Goldfish for a snack without having to worry about how many hours we need to spend in the gym later to work off the calories. That was a simpler life, we didn't have a care in the world, we didn't worry about the economy, rising gas prices, or the conflicts in the Middle East. All that we were concerned about was if there was enough room on the fridge for all our pictures, and if mac n'cheese yellow was better than pink flamingo.

The grown-up world that we inhabit no longer contains all the colors that come in a box of Crayola crayons, but maybe it should. The world would be a better place if maybe once in a while all the adults sat down with a coloring book and in the true five year old spirit just randomly grabbed a crayon, and started coloring with it. Not worrying if they colored inside the lines, or if the grass was the right shade of green. Who said that the grass had to be green? If our five year old selves decided that we wanted a hot pink barn with teal and orange stripes, we colored it exactly like that. I believe in coloring outside the lines because it's a simple joy, that's easy to come by, and that has no rules. Besides, what else are you supposed to do with all the empty space on your fridge?

Step Three: Core Values

As you find your way back into conversation, will you meet this silence with the fullness of your own voice? It is time to call in the values you both bring to and anticipate from this convening. The list of P words has grown since we last met. It will keep growing, and you are always welcome to call in values not yet listed. As you call in a value that matters to you, consider its meaning. What does this value mean to you? How is it present in your life and community? Please share how you hope this value will be present in this circle. (Note: This is a modified

combination of Steps 3 & 4 from last seminar.) If someone claims your chosen word or value, consider calling in the unexpected. *What needs to be named and claimed in order to proceed?*

Pacing matters	Perspective matters.	Practice matters.
Pain matters.	Personhood matters.	Pranayama matters.
Palpitation matters.	People matter.	Praxis matters.
Pandemic(s) matter(s)	Place matters.	Prayer matters.
Passion matters.	Play matters.	Presence matters.
Patience matters.	Pleasure matters.	Pretext matters.
Patterns matter.	Poets matter.	Process matters.
Participation matters.	Politics matters.	Promise matters.
Patriotism matters.	Pondering matters.	Prophets matter.
Pause matters.	Position matters.	Protest matters.
Peace matters.	Positionality matters.	Purpose matters.
Performance matters.	Possibility matters.	Pushing matters.
Permission matters.	Postage matters.	Remembrance matters.
	Potential matters.	Palpitation matters
	Power matters.	

Step Four: *Conversing – This I Believe*

With fellows called in, stillness centered, and values named and claimed, a conversation can proceed. Before you continue, take a look at the clock and balance the remaining time with the invitations that follow. *What will you take up together? What will hold to a later conversation?*

Belief, too, can be both building or stumbling block. Some beliefs are both. Many are inherited, others considered and chosen. Some we claim readily, others take lifetimes to excavate from places that, also, shape the “here” and “there” of our lives. Many of our beliefs show up—unawares and unspoken, but also loud and proud—in our affiliations and actions. Take turns sharing your “This I Believe” stories with one another. Before or after you share, would you lift up that which you collected in your pinch pots? Should you feel comfortable doing so, you are welcome to give and take of these offerings together. There will likely not be time for anything other than a gracious and generous listening—to one another and to these found things. And that’s more than enough for today.

Executive producer Dan Gediman of the revived “This I Believe” program reminds that the goal of this public oral history project “is not to persuade Americans to agree on the same beliefs. Rather, the hope is to encourage people to begin the much more difficult task of developing

respect for beliefs different from their own.” That is today’s invitation, as well: to listen, together, to the beliefs that matter to each of you. We’ll use these stories and beliefs—and storied beliefs, too—as building blocks of our listening and learning as this journey continues.

Step Five: *Clearness Check*

Convenings can deepen our awareness, challenge our knowing, and invite both individual and collective reckoning. As you begin wrapping up your conversations, pause. Can you quiet hearts and minds to reflect on what has been said and offered? Once you’ve held two or three minutes of silence, invite someone in your group to raise the following question. This is not a rhetorical flourish. Please hear, together, this cornerstone of our convening process.

Are we clear to close?

Being clear to close does *not* require consensus or completion. Instead, it signals a personal engagement with the fullness of a conversation. Often, convenings can bring up work we each have to do in our own lives. These learning and teachings are not reason to hold up a closing. Instead, if there are lingering questions that need to be asked or learning that needs to be named and deepened *with this group*, please take the time to honor unfinished business. If your group is not clear to close, sit with one another to name and honor what needs saying, hearing, and doing. You will not be able to step into substantive work at this time, but you might note if and when and how the conversation needs to continue.

Please hold space for everyone to find their way to clearness before you pivot to closing.

Step Six: *Closing*

Much like a beginning or a return, a closing is its own work. *How will you exit this conversation together?* You might choose to end by speaking a gift or a learning into the circle. You might choose to lift up a question you will take with you. However you close, be sure to name and honor gratitude for time spent with courage and curiosity, and with intention and integrity.