Catholic Nonviolent Communication: Election Engagements

I. What is NVC?

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) emerged from the founders work with civil rights activists in the 1960’s and is now active in over 65 countries. NVC or Compassionate Communication, is a powerful tool for transforming and mediating interpersonal, intra-personal, organizational, and inter-group conflicts. It is used worldwide by activists, teachers, conflict specialists, doctors, diplomats, social workers, managers and others to improve their work and home life. The practice of NVC can help us understand ourselves more fully, provide us with a sense of power and choice in our lives, and open our hearts to compassionately connect and collaborate with others.

Intro. to NVC Video
Maria Engels: 11 min.’s

NVC Components (handout intro.)
Centering
Observations
Feelings: chart of feelings
Needs: chart of human needs
Requests

Self-Empathy: Identify one’s own feelings and needs regarding an interpersonal conflict

Video: How to avoid annoying people with NVC (11 min.)

II. Examples of political positions with unmet needs
*Once we get more clarity on the needs, we can propose strategies or even policies that actually help us meet everyone’s needs.

Immigration
1. I want a wall to stop these illegals from violating our laws.
   a. Possible needs: security, integrity, etc.
2. These people are fleeing violence and we should be helping them.
   a. Possible needs: compassion, consideration, etc.

Abortion
1. It is a women’s body and the government should lay off.
   a. Possible needs: bodily integrity, support, respect, privacy, consideration, autonomy, etc.
2. A new child is the most vulnerable and we should protect it.
   a. Possible needs: security, respect, compassion, tenderness, support, interdependence, consideration, etc.
Climate

1. God created the earth, so we need to care for it and stop using fossil fuels.
   a. Possible needs: integrity, consistency, justice, etc.
2. God gave us the earth to use for our well-being, and the oil industry provides jobs for my family members.
   a. Possible needs: sustenance, consistency, stability, etc.

Militarism

1. We must have the strongest military to defend our national interests and win wars.
   a. Possible needs: security, reliability, etc.
2. We are Christians who must witness to Jesus’ way of nonviolent love and resistance to injustice.
   a. Possible needs: integrity, faith, etc.

III. Sample Facilitated Processes

#1: Suggested for 4-6 people, 1.5 hrs., get people with a mix of positions on the theme

Facilitator Instructions: study the nonviolent communication handout and links ahead of time; perhaps share this with participants ahead of time as well; set up space in a circle; create a welcoming space with an artistic centerpiece. Explain to participants the purpose of the circle, the topic, and the guidelines for interaction. For example, the purpose might be to deepen understanding, empathy, and creative ways to transform the conflict. The topic might be immigration.

The guidelines might be:
1) My role as facilitator is to create a fruitful space for dialogue. The wisdom will arise from each of you and through your interactions.
2) I will provide a question for each round.
3) We will pass around this talking piece. Whoever has it will be the one to speak and the rest of us will listen attentively and with empathy. You have the option to pass and after the round I will check to see if anyone who passed would like to share.

Centering: offer a ritual of centering such as a brief prayer, mediation, moment of silent breathing, etc.

Round 1: What experiences or stories have shaped your present thinking about our topic?

Round 2: Self-Empathy: what are the prominent feelings you have related to this topic?

Round 3: Self-Empathy: in silence, identify your own needs that you are trying to meet by the political position you have on this topic.

Round 4: Break up into pairs with someone who has a divergent approach to this topic. a) make guesses about the needs of the other person in relation to their political position on this topic; b)
once these needs are clarified then discuss possible social and policy strategies to actually get these needs met

Round 5: Each pair will share with the large group what needs were identified and what strategies were suggested and perhaps agreed on to actually meet those needs. After a pair shares, open the discussion to the larger group for additional input: questions, suggestions.

Round 6: With the full circle, what are your personal next steps in light of our dialogue today?

Round 7: What is something you are grateful for about today’s dialogue?

Closing Ritual or prayer

Sample Process #2
Suggested for a larger group of 10+, 1.5 hrs.

Opening ritual

Brief introduction to Nonviolent Communication and/or share material before the session.

Pass out the needs chart above to each person.

Break participants into 8 groups or pairs

Each group gets one issue and one position written out on a piece of paper as described in section #2 above.

Each group then reads their issue and position. Then they work together as a small group to imagine the primary needs underneath the political position and write them on their paper.

In a large group, start with one issue (ex. immigration) and have both groups share their political position with the needs identified. Notice any overlap. Ask for anyone to name other needs that may have been left off the list. Then shift to another issue, following the same process until all four issues are addressed.

Debrief the overall experience and discussion. What did they notice?

If time permits, have the groups focused on the same issue (ex. the two groups on immigration) work together to identify strategies or policies that get us closer to meeting the needs identified by those two groups.

Closing ritual
Courageous Encounters: Create a courageous-space for honest engagement

Intersectionality: Example Process for facilitators
Suggested group of 4-6 people, 1-1.5 hrs.

What issues matter to you?

What does that issue intersect with?

How do these issues impact and exacerbate each other?

What kind of strategies or policies do we need to address these in light of this intersectionality?

What kind of voting and political advocacy makes sense in light of this?

Other Resources:
Small Group Discussion on Civility
Ten Tips from Pope Francis

Questions:
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