



Peaceful Practices conversation guide

To be used in conjunction with the *Peaceful Practices* curriculum at mcc.org/peaceful-practices for congregations to dialogue on sensitive topics.¹



The U.S. in international conflict: Korean peninsula

Overview

This guide is intended to help facilitate healthy conversation while addressing the delicate aspects of this topic. Facilitators should keep in mind the following steps as they set up the conversation.

- Begin in **prayer**, together as a group.
- Go over the **Peaceful Practices**, which will help set the tone for the conversation. Make sure everyone can agree to engaging in the conversation while embodying these Peaceful Practices.
- Read through the content **Introduction** with everyone. This will help center the group around a shared language.
- Dive into the **Conversation café** in three rounds of sharing for 20 minutes each with small groups. See café set up instructions at the bottom of this conversation guide. When finished, open a brief plenary session for anyone to share highlights of their conversations with the larger group.
- End with the **Closing blessing**.



Gathering prayer

Dear Lord, send your Spirit to establish peace between nations.

We bring before you the deep wounds of the Korean Peninsula.
More than 70 years of division create fear and uncertainty.
So many have suffered, and continue to suffer, in this decades-long conflict.

May the heart of your church open with love and compassion,
and reach out to the region with a desire for peace.
Strengthen the will of those who work for reconciliation and harmony.
Renew your church,
and give us the peace that the world cannot give. Amen.



Peaceful Practices

Curiosity. Be curious, inviting diversity of ideas and opinions.

Discovery. Focus on what matters.

Engagement. Invite the best in yourself and others.

Dialogue. Listen together for insights and deeper questions.

Empathy. Seek to understand rather than persuade.

Authenticity. Speak from the heart, contributing your own thinking and experience.

Dignity. Consider power dynamics.

Transformation. Welcome creativity.



Introduction

At the end of World War II, Japan's surrender liberated Japan-occupied Korea. The U.S. and the Soviet Union agreed to temporarily split the peninsula at the 38th parallel with the U.S. occupying the South and the North to be occupied by the Soviet Union. After talks for establishing a unified trusteeship over the peninsula broke down in 1948, two separate governments were established: the Republic of Korea in the South and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the North. Soon after, North Korea invaded South Korea and the Korean War began on June 25, 1950. On July 27, 1953, an armistice agreement was signed between the U.S. (representing the United Nations Command), the Korean People's Army (North Korea) and the Chinese People's Volunteer Army². Significantly, South Korea's President Syngman Rhee refused to sign the agreement because it did not unify the peninsula. The ceasefire never led to a final peace agreement, so the war has never ended.

Under the armistice agreement, a buffer zone between the two countries was created. This Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating the North and South crossed the original 38th parallel diagonally and extended for about 2 kilometers (1.25 miles) on either side. As a result, a country that had been united for more than a thousand years under a shared culture and kingdom was split in two.

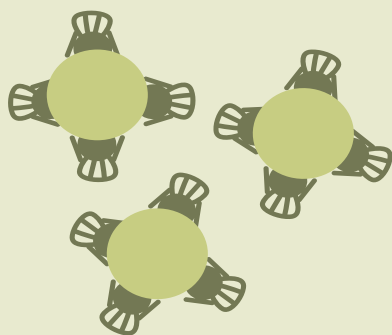
The sudden division separated more than 100,000 Korean families and countless friends. Children lost parents and had nowhere to go. Most of these families remain in a state of separation today. For more than 70 years, South Korea and North Korea have been two different nations on one Korean Peninsula. The lack of a formal peace agreement has prevented families from traveling across the border to visit one another. Now these separated families are aging. Furthermore, over the past several decades, South and North Koreans have changed perceptions of one another, due to their separation and different governments. In some cases, people who used to be part of one unified country now perceive one another as foreign or even enemy.

While the current division most intimately affects the two nations and families that were divided years ago, the U.S. has been heavily involved from the start, a practice common to the country's politics³. The Korean War is one of many international conflicts where the U.S. has played a significant role. A few other notable examples include:

- Vietnam War: The U.S. involvement in Vietnam escalated in the early 1960s, with the goal of preventing the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. Despite significant military efforts, after 13 years the U.S. withdrew in 1973 and South Vietnam surrendered to North Vietnam in 1975⁴.
- Afghanistan War: Following the Sept. 11 attacks, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan to dismantle al-Qaeda and remove the Taliban from power. This conflict became the U.S.' longest war, involving counterinsurgency operations against various militant groups⁵. The U.S. military presence officially ended in August 2021⁶.
- Iraq War: The U.S. and coalition forces invaded Iraq in 2003 based on claims that the regime possessed weapons of mass destruction and posed a threat to U.S. national security. The initial phase toppled Saddam Hussein's regime, but the U.S. military faced a prolonged insurgency. The U.S. officially ended combat operations in 2011⁷.

As in other places and conflicts around the world, U.S. foreign policy has influenced (and still influences) the realities on the ground in Korea. Particularly, since South Korea did not participate in nor sign the armistice agreement, but U.S. leaders did, U.S. policymakers today have an important role in officially ending the war.

For more information, see this [DPRK/ROK Fact Sheet](#).



Conversation café instructions⁸

Arrange small tables around the room, with four chairs to a table. Include snacks and doodling materials to help create a relaxed and invitational atmosphere. Place *Peaceful Practices* table tents ([found here](#)) at each table to use as guidelines for engaging with one another. Invite participants to start at any table. Each small group should identify a person (called a table host) who will remain at the table for the duration of the dialogue. Initiate the first round of conversation with the “Personal experience” questions. Table hosts should invite everyone at the table to go around and respond to the question(s) as they wish, passing if they prefer. Questions are

meant to spark conversation and do not all need to be addressed; use them as general guides. After everyone at the table has had a chance to speak, table hosts may open the conversation for impromptu dialogue. Invite participants to find new table groups for round 2, follow the same process and reflect on the “Exploring the topic” questions. Do this again for round 3 and use the “Reflecting on the conversation” questions. When the three rounds of table conversations are finished, open to the large group and ask for any reflections.

This resource is designed for in person conversation. Dialogue across significant difference of opinion and belief is hard. Creating an invitational space is important and pieces such as doodling materials, food and body language are challenging to replicate online. For groups that are unable to gather in person for dialogue, we recommend thinking creatively and intentionally to set up the best virtual conversation possible.

Conversation café

Personal experience

- What image do you have of North Korea? Or South Korea?
- What do you see on the news about North and South Korea?
- Do you have any stories or personal experiences with Korean culture?

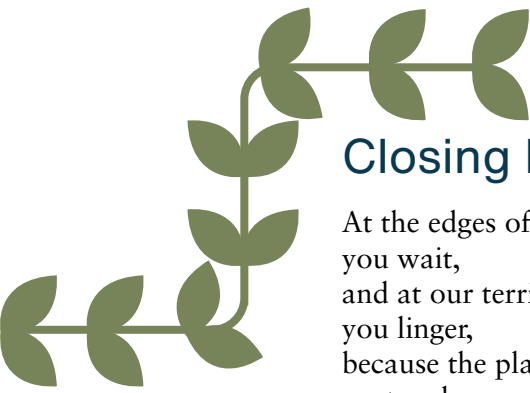
Exploring the topic

- What do you think would be the best response from the U.S. to the current situation in Korea? Does the U.S. have a responsibility to care for families that have been separated by the 38th parallel line? In your opinion, why does U.S. intervention in the Korean conflict make sense or not make sense?
- What role should the U.S. take in conflicts in other countries? How does the Korean conflict influence your opinion?
- What do you believe are the appropriate conditions for the U.S. to intervene in military conflicts?

Reflecting on the conversation

- After hearing from others, has anything made you think differently?
- As you listened today, what beliefs and values were underlying the conversation and different perspectives? What values and beliefs underly your own perspective?
- What takeaways did you gain by exploring this conversation?





Closing blessing: At the Edges of Our Borders⁹

At the edges of our borders
you wait,
and at our territorial lines
you linger,
because the place where
we touch
beyond our boundaries
is where you take
your delight.

And when we learn to read
the landscape of our fears,
and when we come to know
the terrain of every sorrow,
then will we turn
our fences into bridges
and our borders
into paths of peace.

Follow-up

- Give us feedback! Please fill out [this survey](#) after you have engaged this conversation guide.
- Join our mailing list and learn more by signing up to our [Peace & Justice Journal](#).
- [Donate](#).



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Endnotes

1. MCC's conversation guides do not reflect a specific theological or ideological stance of the organization, but rather provide guidance for how groups of different perspectives might have a healthy conversation together.
2. Donnie Kieth, "Korean Armistice Agreement," Korean Armistice Agreement (worldwars.com), May 27, 2022, accessed June 4, 2024.
3. Sarah A. Son, "Unity, division and ideational security on the Korean Peninsula: Challenges to overcoming the Korean conflict," North Korean Review, 2015: 45-62.
4. History.com Editors, "Vietnam War: Causes, Facts & Impacts," <https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-history><https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-history>, May 16, 2024, accessed June 4, 2024.
5. Griff Witte, "Afghanistan War," <https://www.britannica.com/event/Afghanistan-War>, April 22, 2024, accessed June 4, 2024.
6. The White House, "Remarks by President Biden on the End of the War in Afghanistan," <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/08/31/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-end-of-the-war-in-afghanistan/>, August 31, 2021, accessed June 4, 2024.
7. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Iraq War, 2003 – 2011," <https://www.britannica.com/event/Iraq-War>, June 3, 2024, accessed June 4, 2024.
8. For more reading on the World Café method, see <http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/>.
9. "At the Edges of Our Borders" © Jan Richardson from Night Visions: Searching the Shadows of Advent and Christmas. Used by permission.