



Peaceful Practices conversation guide

A follow-up resource from the [Peaceful Practices curriculum](#) to help congregations dialogue on sensitive topics.¹



#BlackLivesMatter

Can we have a conversation?

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

God of our lives,
We come together in your name, across spaces of difference.
Our stories and experiences often take us to different outcomes
of how to best represent your love in the world.
And yet, you love us each fiercely, and call us together.
Following Jesus' example, we seek a posture of openness and dialogue,
willing to listen deeply and learn from one another.
Bless us with the gifts of patience, kindness, humility and understanding.
May the power of your Holy Spirit draw us together,
moving us toward the humanity of one another,
rather than away from the opinions of the other.
We pray together in the name of
God our creator, Christ our reconciler and the Holy Spirit our comforter,
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.

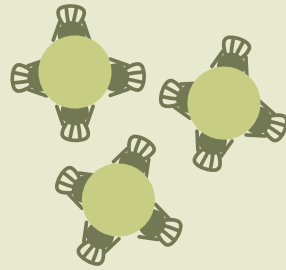
Dignity. Consider power dynamics.

Transformation. Welcome creativity.

Introduction

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) hashtag was first seen on social media in response to George Zimmerman's acquittal following the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager. The Facebook post, made by Alicia Garza, contained the phrase "Black Lives Matter," to which her friend and community organizer, Patrisse Cullors, responded in support with the first #BlackLivesMatter reference via Twitter in 2013.² This began a movement centered around Black life, racism and police brutality that grew exponentially in the past decade, with protests also emerging in the wake of George Floyd's murder on May 25, 2020. While the original BLM organization (now Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation) came to be known nationally and abroad, #BlackLivesMatter and the broader movement for Black lives is made up of a diverse number of organizations, initiatives and collectives worldwide, decentralized and unaffiliated with the foundation that first coined the hashtag.

The phrase "Black Lives Matter" and the movement that supports it mean different things to different people. For some, #BlackLivesMatter communicates a concern about racial bias in U.S. law enforcement and the criminal legal system. Proponents of BLM argue that it is important to highlight racism and discrimination that is disproportionately experienced by Black people and to call attention to the systems that perpetuate it. Others say that Black lives should not take center stage and that upholding the work of police departments is central to American identity. Some have responded with the slogans "all lives matter" and "blue lives matter," believing that the BLM movement gives faulty and unnecessary attention to the Black experience.



Conversation café instructions³

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

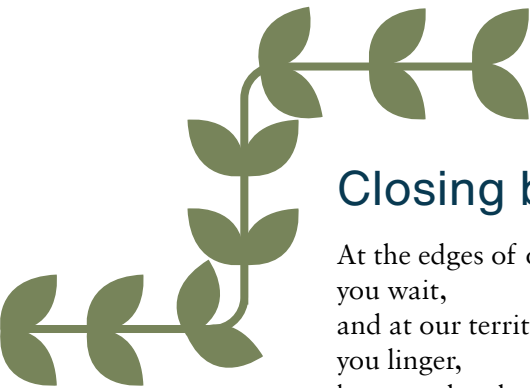
- What experiences have you had with law enforcement and the criminal legal system and how have they shaped your perception of them?
- Share about an experience or story that influenced your understanding of race or helped you see an issue of race in a new way.

Exploring the topic

- What Anabaptist or other Christian values underline your foundational beliefs about law enforcement and the criminal legal system? In what ways do you feel called to engage or respond to #BlackLivesMatter based on these values?
- As you reflect on the BLM movement, where do you see harm being perpetrated?
- If you identify as an advocate of BLM, what critique do you have of the movement and what would you like to see change? If you identify as a critic of BLM, what can you identify as being positive about the movement and how can you imagine that it is helpful at some level?

Reflecting on the conversation

- How has hearing other people's stories and perspectives shaped your understanding of the topic?
- What did you hear that was new today?
- As you listened together, where did you see overlap in underlying beliefs, values, feelings and needs?



Closing blessing: At the Edges of Our Borders⁴

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.
- Contact us at npjm@mcc.org if you would like to join the MCC U.S. National Peace & Justice Ministries mailing list or invite staff to engage your congregation.
- [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. "The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter first appears, sparking a movement," History, [history.com/this-day-in-history/blacklivesmatter-hashtag-first-appears-facebook-sparking-a-movement](https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/blacklivesmatter-hashtag-first-appears-facebook-sparking-a-movement), July 13, 2013, accessed Feb. 11, 2022.
3. For more reading on the World Café method, see <http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/>.
4. "At the Edges of Our Borders" © Jan Richardson from *Night Visions: Searching the Shadows of Advent and Christmas*. Used by permission. janrichardson.com.