

Notes from 1-15-17 FUSH Social Action Gathering

Report: Group 1 - “Dialogue to Build Relationships and Consensus Across the Divide”

Facilitated by Gary Shapiro

At this challenging time, in addition to political advocacy and action around various issues, there is also a great need to find ways to bridge the divide and lessen the polarization between those with very different perspectives on the issues, whether liberal or conservative, Republican or Democrat, Trump supporter or opponent. As opposed to debate or monologue - where agreement, winning and being right are the aims - dialogue focuses on learning, understanding, curiosity, personal experience, asking questions, respecting differences, multiple truths, genuine concern for the other, and finding common ground. For dialogue, having diversity of views is essential. There are many dialogue models and processes. A very simple, informal but effective model in a community setting is the “Conversations Café”, a hosted format with three rounds, for up to 8 people, for a maximum of 90 minutes.

Two main concerns/challenges were raised about a dialogue activity:

1. How to find a diversity of views in the community, where many of us have similar views, and those who don't are very reluctant to talk openly with those of different views, for fear of negative interaction. Possible solutions include: 1. each of us to find one person of a different perspective, with whom there is a good relationship, and 2. Finding a respected community umbrella under which to have the dialogue, perhaps the Hartland Community Connection.
2. Given the pressing political concerns with the coming of the Trump administration and the need for urgent action, do we have time for a long-term process like dialogue? How relevant is dialogue in the current context? Is there value in doing both short and long-term activities?

The general consensus in the group was that dialogue across the divide is valuable, but the timing might not be quite right. More discussion and feedback on the advantages and concern/challenges is needed.

Group 2 - Local and Community Level – Becca White

- Local issues have big impacts!
- Reading local news, email, listservs, talking to neighbors!
- Reach out to your elected officials
- Local govt = experience for state and national politics

Group 3 - State and National Level - Alison Clarke

1. Communicate w/ your Congressional and Vermont Legislators, both if you agree or disagree with proposed policy. We all count
2. Build local leadership for FUTURE leadership in VT and USA
3. 2018 – how to be effective? Identify candidates to support

Divide the large group into small groups around certain topics, including a strategy group

Have small group meetings between large group meeting, around certain topics

Show films

Get speakers

Educate people on different issues. What areas are people most interested in getting information about?

Prepare for town hall meetings

Go to rallies as a group

Book: “Strangers in their Own Land” – Arlie Russell Hochschild

Hartland Community Connection - Jackson Morgan

Group 4

Those participating in Group 4 were: Sue Taylor, Greta Schuck, Michael Weinburger, Melinda Meyerhoff, Betty Munro, and moderator, Don Foster.

We agreed that our goal in the long term is to change our country from a republic to a democracy - to abolish the Electoral College and have one person one vote count equally. In the short term, we need to get involved and should start working now to elect state legislators and governors who can change the current gerrymandering which unfairly gives the power to the minority political party. The Democratic Party should spend some money on hiring good advertisers to get our message and accomplishments across simply. For example, with the tearing down of the health system, we should say the Republicans want to make America sick again.

We then discussed how we can educate ourselves better on issues of importance to us, especially ones in which Trump supporters are in favor of, for example, deporting undocumented immigrants or keeping out Muslims,

Central Americans, or Syrians (some of whom are actually Christian). I talked about our lay-led services as a place to start and mentioned that we have had speakers on the environment and on gun control and the next few months we will have speakers on Islam, on Immigration (from our neighbors at the Hanover Lutheran Church and Society of Friends).

I handed out an editorial written by Nicholas Kristof in the New York Times (November 17, 2016) entitled "A 12-Step Program for Responding to President-Elect Trump" and asked each participant to find something they can do that could make a difference. Most of us have been in denial and depression. The best thing to fight these feelings is to do something, which is exactly what Gary and Chuck have started by forming this social action circle. To summarize Kristof's 12 Steps, I will:

1. Accept my side lost but I won't acquiesce in injustice
2. Do small things, such as volunteering to fight Islamophobia
3. Avoid demonizing others
4. Support the society I'd like to see
5. Support groups like the A.C.L.U., Southern Poverty Law Center, or Planned Parenthood
6. Support Refugees
7. Counter demonizing comments against women or minorities
8. Not be an echo chamber but enlarge my social circle to include people with different views than my own
9. Do what I can in my own life to make sure the needy aren't forgotten in the next four years
10. Work at state and local levels
11. Confront sexism
12. Not lose hope.

A special thank you to Mr. Weinburger for washing dishes, taking notes of our discussion, and reporting back to the whole group.

Respectfully submitted,

Don Foster