Respectful Communication

R – take **RESPONSIBILITY** for what you say and feel without blaming others. Use “I” statements – such as “I believe” or “I feel” – it is important to claim your experience and respect your own thoughts and ideas. It is also important because we are less likely to come across as judgmental – instead of saying “I think you’re wrong,” it is more helpful to say “I have a different perspective on that issue and this is why.” Sentences that begin with YOU have a judgemental feel – and may cause that person to feel defensive and he or she may stop listening. “I” statements keep communication lines open.

E – use **EMPATHETIC** listening. Listen to the whole person – try to feel and see the world as the person who is speaking might see and feel it – now this is a challenging task but it might open us up to ask questions to help clarify someone’s position. Empathic listening also calls us to be patient with each other – not only in listening, but in taking time to explain something a different way. It is actually walking in the other person’s sandals!

S – be **SENSITIVE** to differences in communication styles. Don’t interpret another person’s behavior based on your own assumptions. – When someone is not speaking, it could mean several things – they are in agreement with what is being said, or they are in disagreement and are tired, or they are confused or maybe they just don’t care. Sensitivity calls us to openness – and not draw conclusions.

P – **PONDER** what you hear and feel before you speak. When we attend to what is going on within ourselves, we communicate with more authenticity.

E – **EXAMINE** your own assumptions and perceptions. This means asking yourself, “What caused me to think or feel a certain way just now? Are there personal experiences that I need to explore further before I speak? Was something said that triggers some anger that I still carry over from a past issue?” When we take time to examine our perceptions, we can then communicate more honestly.

C – keep **CONFIDENTIALITY**. This upholds the well-being of the community. Information shared in the group stays in the group. Again, this helps us communicate more freely.

T – **TRUST** ambiguity because we are NOT here to debate who is right or wrong. In holy conversation we are not seeking to convince others of our position – again, we are seeking holy truth – and sometimes that darn truth isn’t always immediately clear! We have to trust the process – and give it time. We need to sit with the ambiguity and process it. We can rejoice in all the different ideas that come forth from all those different people in our community and know that these differences will bring us, again, to a collective truth and eventually to the real Truth – the Truth of Christ himself.
Summary

One example of Mutual Invitation

In order to ensure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak, the process could go like this:

(1) The leader or a designated person shares first.

(2) After that person has spoken, he or she invites another to share. The person invited does not need to be the person next to you.

(3) After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share. If you have something to say but are not ready yet, say “pass for now” and then invite another to share. You will be invited again later.

(4) If you don’t want to say anything, simply say, “pass” and proceed to invite another to share.

(5) This process is complete when everyone has been invited and has the opportunity to speak.

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[Adapted from NAFRA website by Deacon Dave & Thérèse Ream, O.F.S., Revised July 2017]