

NAMING THE PRESENT—ACTIVITY

This *circle conversation* activity is designed to help a group recognize and name the real emotions that accompany a time of tension (the present). Most changes or transitions have two sides. Change can bring newness, freshness, nervousness, hope, and creativity. It can also bring loss—leaving behind things that you treasure, things you'll miss, routines that provide stability and comfort, and even a few things you may be glad to unload. This involves a complex mix of emotions, and naming them together can be a helpful exercise for understanding each other more fully and strengthening our relationships.

Time needed for activity

60 - 90 minutes

Group size

Any number of current members and regular visitors; invite people to gather into small groups of six to eight persons each

Steps for Activity

1. The facilitator reviews the following basic rules and expectations with participants:
 - This activity works best when there's no discussion or debate among the participants but only the gift of listening, given as a matter of respect.
 - Each participant has a voice.
 - Every point of view is received as the real perspective/experience of the person speaking.
 - These conversations provide opportunities to hear a range of perspectives broader than one's own, and often broader than the circle of people with whom one might ordinarily speak.
2. Provide an object (such as a book, ball, or mug) for each small group. This object will function as a *talking stick* so that whoever holds it has the privilege of the floor, and the gift of listening ears from every other participant.

Three questions will serve to guide the group. Have group members answer the first question first. Ask one person to record the comments that are made.

- When you compare the church at its peak, and the church that is now, what have you lost?
- When you think of your church as it is now, what do you fear?
- When you think of your church now, what do you hope?

Once each participant has had a chance to speak to the first question, give the opportunity for anyone to add something they wished they would have said, and then move to the second question, and then the third.

3. When the groups have finished answering the questions, gather the whole group together and share the results. Invite reflection and observations.
4. Close the sharing time by asking each participant one last question. "Having listened to everyone share their losses, fears and hopes, what do you think God wants us to keep in mind as we discern what to do next?"
5. Conclude with a song and a prayer.

Facilitator's Questions

After the activity, allow time for discussion around some questions like these:

1. How would you describe the overall tone of the exercise?
2. How have you given weight to both the feelings and the facts expressed?
3. Did anything come up that may require further processing or exploration? Explain.