



SASKATCHEWAN  
CONFERENCE **OF**  
MENNONITE  
BRETHREN  
CHURCHES

**SIGNIFICANT CONVERSATIONS  
RESOURCE  
IN A  
PHYSICAL DISTANCING  
SEASON**

Philip A. Gunther  
Leanne Schellenberg

## I. COVID19 – REVITALIZING YOUR CONVERSATIONS THROUGH VIDEO OR PHONE

One of the major impacts of COVID19 is the government’s restrictions pertaining to physical distancing and large gatherings. This has resulted in the need for leaders to find creative ways to provide care and accountability to those under their oversight. Whether you do this through Zoom, emails, Facetime, Skype, texts, or phone calls there is still the opportunity to make these connections substantive and meaningful. Two ways to continue to foster healthy and maturing disciples during this time of non face-to-face encounters is by using significant and thought-provoking *questions* as you connect with people, as well as by offering helpful *resources* to empower them to take initiative in their journey toward spiritual growth and maturity. Good questions and good resources, offered with great attention, grace, and compassion, can lead to good outcomes.

Most importantly, keep in mind that it is the Holy Spirit who works in and through us as we offer our loving attention and care to others. He does the work, not us (Philippians 2:13; Galatians 5:22-23).

## II. PREPARING YOURSELF FOR THE CONVERSATION

It is vital, for any healthy and impactful conversation to take place, that one prepares their heart and mind for the interaction. Each of us approaches a conversation with unique and specific perspectives, biases and attitudes. It is significant that time be taken ahead of any conversation to become self-aware and tuned to the Holy Spirit. The following may assist you in this process:

- REFLECT on the following counsel of Scripture
  - “...the wise listen to others.” Proverbs 12:15b
  - “Be quick to listen, slow to speak.” James 1:19
  - “...the words of the wise bring healing.” Proverbs 12:18b
  - “Let everything you say be good and helpful so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.” Ephesians 4:29b
- INVITE the Holy Spirit to guard your lips from hurtful words, to be your guide into all truth and to provide you with wisdom (Proverbs 13:3; John 16:13; James 1:5)
- EXAMINE your motives and attitude. Do you possess any motives or attitudes that will not be helpful in genuinely listening or caring? If yes, acknowledge them, if needed, confess them to the Lord and then seek the Holy Spirit’s help in setting them aside.
- REMIND yourself to be an active listener – patient, flexible, non-judgmental, positive, fully present, open-minded, Christlike and attentive to the Holy Spirit.
- EMPLOY active listening techniques such as expressing concern, paraphrasing what was shared and stating things like “I hear you”, “tell me more”, “I appreciate your feelings on this”, etc. When possible, maintain eye contact. Finally, avoid any distractions.

### III. SIGNIFICANT CONVERSATIONS: BEST PRACTICES

While in conversation remind yourself that more important than saying the “right things” or having the “right advice” is offering the following:

- **PRESENCE GROUNDED IN RESPECT.** Do not make it your mission to “fix” or “rescue” but to listen well, be open-minded, acknowledge their experiences and feelings and treat them with respect as those created and loved by God.
- **CARE ARISING OUT OF YOUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST.** You are the beloved of God, His workmanship, indwelt and gifted by His Spirit to be a channel for His grace, peace and hope, empowered and compelled by His love to serve others. Ultimately, it is God’s presence and power that transforms lives.
- **HUMILITY AND VULNERABILITY.** We all acknowledge that we are fallible in our approach to caring for others and limited in our understanding of their personal challenges and how to respond in genuinely healthy and encouraging ways. Also, others always have something to teach us. Professional basketball player and coach John Wooden once said, “*I never met a person from whom I did not learn something.*” It is wise to enter into every conversation with this self-awareness.

### IV. SIGNIFICANT CONVERSATIONS: MEASURING SUCCESS

If we pay attention to the healing ministry of Jesus, we can see that He did not cure others by applying proven ministry techniques. Henry Nouwen wrote, “*He spoke from his heart, acted out of compassion, and left the results to God.*” Christ’s example sets us free to not have to concern ourselves with whether or not we were “successful” at fixing someone’s problem or convincing someone to believe in Jesus. We cannot solve the world’s problems, but we can be Christ’s presence with people in their problems and questions. As Mother Teresa was fond of saying, “*Jesus does not call you to be successful, but to be faithful.*” We are invited to faithfully serve as the channel for Jesus to work in and through us. We have faith that the Holy Spirit will pour forth peace, hope, joy and transformation as we are present with another.

---

Listed below are a compilation of questions that connect to a variety of themes. Please add to this list and make it useful for your context. The idea is that you will use a selection of these questions as is needed. It is not the quantity of questions asked that is of primary importance, but actively listening and responding well to what is shared with you.

---

## V. EMPLOYING CARE & ACCOUNTABILITY INQUIRIES

- **General Well-Being**

### *Conversation Prompts*

How are you feeling today?

Tell me about your day/week.

Tell me about the things that are consuming a lot of your time and energy.

How has the 'new normal' because of COVID 19 affected you?

### *Challenges and Highlights*

Tell me about the difficult things you faced this week.

How are you responding to those challenges?

What is God revealing as you respond to these challenges?

Tell me about the highlights of your day/week.

How are you responding to these blessings?

How do you see God's hand in these events/experiences?

- **Spiritual Formation: Jesus**

Tell me about your walk with Jesus

What has Jesus been showing/telling you lately?

Where are your joys in this walk with Jesus? Struggles?

- **Spiritual Formation: The Disciplines**

Tell me about your prayer life / devotional life.

What ways of connecting with God have been most regular and life giving for you?

Are you sensing any invitations from God for new ways of being with him?

Are you finding quiet times where you are listening for God's voice?

Overall, as you seek to commune with God, where are your joys? Struggles?

What is confusing, frustrating, helpful?

What are you learning? What is Jesus teaching you?

- **Spiritual Formation: Bible**

Tell me about your engagement with the Bible.

What specifically are you reading in the Bible?

Is there a specific verse that has been meaningful to you lately?

As you read the Bible, tell me about any questions or confusion.

As you read the Bible, tell me about doubts you are having.

- **Personal Growth and Maturity Questions**

Tell me about areas of life where you are sensing a need for maturity and growth. Other than the Bible, tell me about what Christian resources you are reading, viewing or listening to.

Who is walking with you on your way to Christ-likeness?

With whom are you walking on their journey to Christ-likeness?

Would you like some suggestions of good resources for growing as a disciple?

- **Life with the Church Family**

Tell me about how you are connecting with others in the church?

What aspects/programs/ministries of the church are you engaging with?

Have these interactions been meaningful?

Are you finding ways to offer your gifts to your church body?

How has COVID19 impacted your church connections?

What does adapting to virtual church services look like for you?

- **Outreach**

Tell me how COVID19 has provided you with opportunities to be salt & light.

Tell me about how you are reaching out to people who don't know Jesus.

Tell me about how you are feeling called to disciple others.

Tell me about how you are feeling called to serve others.

- **Experiences of Failure**

Tell me about a failure you experienced this week.

How did you respond to it?

What did you learn from it?

How do you see Jesus working through this failure?

Can you see the love and grace Jesus has for you?

- **Personal Habits**

Tell me about personal habits that you would like to change.

Are you experiencing struggles with setting boundaries over personal habits?

Have any of these personal habits compromised your integrity?

How are you responding to these struggles?

- **Temptations**

Tell me about any temptations you are experiencing.  
What are you doing to counter these temptations?  
Is there a sin in your life that you are not dealing with?  
What are the road blocks to dealing with them?  
What would Jesus have you do?  
What has Jesus been saying to you already?

- **Human Health and Wholeness**

*Physical Health*

How are you feeling today?  
Are you physically healthy?  
Are you eating and sleeping well?  
How significant is stress or anxiety in your life today?  
Is there anything you constantly think about?

*Mental Health*

Tell me about any experiences of depression you may have encountered.  
Tell me about any experiences of anxiety you are having.  
Have you shared this with significant others?  
Have you seen your doctor or a counselor?

*Self-Care*

In what ways do you feel you neglect your own needs?  
Where are you lonely?  
How might you use this time to offer attention and care to yourself?  
How might Jesus want to meet you by allowing you in this season?

*Relationships*

Tell me about your relationships (parents, spouse, children, co-workers, friends, etc.).  
How have your relationships changed in light of Covid19?  
For those relationships that are strained, how are you responding?  
How would Jesus want you to respond?  
Is there some reconciliation/forgiveness/encouragement that you must offer another?

- **Finances**

Tell me about how you are doing financially.

Tell me about your personal relationship to money.

Do you feel you are spending money wisely?

Are you struggling with debt?

Are you giving generously to the church and others?

How are the consequences of COVID 19 impacting your finances?

- **Work**

Tell me about how things are at work.

Tell me about stresses or challenges at your work.

Are you finding joy and fulfilment at work?

How are the consequences of COVID 19 impacting life at your place of work?

What opportunities for being a gospel presence and witness do you see?

If unemployed, what does your life look like?

- **Support Questions**

How can I support you during this time?

Tell me what you have learned from this conversation?

How can I pray for you today?

Would you like to re-connect?

What would you like to talk about the next time we connect?

Would you like me to simply touch base with you in a day or so?

Would you be interested in any resources on \_\_\_\_\_ (the pertaining topic)?

## ***VI. PROVIDING RESOURCES***

Life-long learning, whether through formal courses, engagement with the Scriptures, reading, listening or watching materials that motivate you in your walk with Jesus or service in the church or community are genuinely important for a person desiring to facilitate significant conversations. Furthermore, it is truly helpful to be able to share what God is teaching you as a Christ follower. Lastly, if asked, it is helpful to have one or two resources ready to recommend in each of the following areas (books, podcasts, websites, etc.):

- Spiritual formation / Spiritual Disciples / Devotions
- Discipleship / Making Disciples / The Gospel
- Theology / Understanding God, the Holy Spirit or Jesus / Bible Study Helps
- Selfcare / Relationships / Finances / Leadership

**VII. KEEPING TRACK OF YOUR CONVERSATIONS**

DATE	NAME	NOTES	PRAYER / FOLLOW-UP